



Jim Slade

Army

North Salt Lake, Utah

"Escalation"

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Jim Slade

It's James E. Slade.

Interviewer

And where were you born?

Jim Slade

I was actually born in Stuart, Iowa. Grew up in southwest part of Colorado, Durango, Colorado. And then my folks sold the farm and moved up here to Utah in 1964.

Interviewer

And when did you graduate from high school?

Jim Slade

I graduated in 1965, I attended Granger High School for one year and then I went back and finished up and graduated with my friends down there in Durango. 1965.

Interviewer

How did you get into the military?

Jim Slade

Well, I served a LDS Church mission. And I got home from my church mission and I was home three months and got drafted.

Interviewer

Where did you serve?

Jim Slade

I served in England, southwest part of England... the pretty part. But when I got home, I'd been gone for two years; I didn't even know where Vietnam was. And they told us when we got home that we needed to go down and register with the draft or tell 'em that we were home because I'd already registered. And so I went down and this lady says,

"Mr. Slade," she says, "Do you know you're being drafted in two weeks? Your letter is coming out in two weeks."

And I said,

"No, I did not." And she says,

"I'll do you a favor, if you want to sign up today for the draft I'll give you an RA number instead of a US number," meaning Regular Army versus a draftee. Because she says they treat you a lot better if you're an RA than a US.

But she says the times the same, you're a draft, a draftee. And so I said,

"Do you have a choice?" And she says, "Well, not really much. You want a RA or a US?" And I say,

"Okay. I'll go RA," so I did. And three days later I was in Fort Ord, California starting basic training.

Interviewer

Did you want any kind of specialty, did they give you that option?

Jim Slade

Well I took the battery of tests and my skills were actually in communication, my highest scores. But being a two-year guy, draftee, then they said, "No, you're going to be in the infantry." So I knew I was going to be in the infantry right off the start, they basically told me that in the induction center down at Fort Ord. They were needing of people at that time and that was 1968 and they were needing people and they needed them, ground pounders. So that's where I was gonna be.

Interviewer

When did you decide to go into Rangers, Special Forces, LRRPs?

Jim Slade

Well, as soon as I got through basic training they asked for guys that wanted to go to jump school. And I said,

"Well, yeah, I think I would like to go to jump school." And I had a fellow tell me, he says,

"If you go to jump school that's just putting your time off to go to Vietnam," because he says, "You're gonna go. But that puts your time off. Maybe the war will be over by then." And I said,

"Well, okay."

So I signed up, or volunteered for that. And then I didn't actually get into the LRRPs until I got in country and then they told me it was time to fill some of the units and asked if I would be willing to be an LRRP, a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol guy.

Interviewer

Had you had any of this specialty training stateside to be a Ranger?

Jim Slade

I went through in advanced infantry training because I knew I was going to Vietnam, and then jump school and basically that was it. But when we went over in country they gave us a two-week course, cram course. It was a mini Ranger school taught by the Special Forces. And they taught us all about quick things on weapons and explosives and what to do with the pill kit that we took for our medical stuff and how to administer an albumin thing if you got shot, replace the blood, you know, a few things like that. And then they said okay, now you're gonna start running

missions. So two weeks, the cram course and that was in An Khe and then I went to Bong Son at a base camp and attached to November Company, 75th Infantry Rangers. It wasn't Rangers then by the way, let me back up, because it was the LRRP's for the first couple of months I was there and then they actually transferred into Ranger companies and so that's what I ended up with was the November Company.

Interviewer

So tell us about your first patrol.

Jim Slade

You know, I'll tell ya somethin' and I know this might be a little hard to understand, but I can remember the first one like it was yesterday and I can remember the last one like it was yesterday but all the ones in between I have to really concentrate to think about. But my first one, we went out, the mission was to find a base camp. There were five of us on the team. We waded through a river most of the day and we got down to where they thought was a close location. We got out of the river and started to make our night camp and just barely started drying out from getting out of the stream and we heard the Vietnamese talking. And they were just feet away from us. There was a high-speed trail that we didn't realize that we'd got out of the river and the trail ran right along the river and we were right next to it. And they were coming down to fill their water buckets and they had guards. And all of the sudden the team leader starts motioning for us what to do and everything and I'm a new guy. And he just says, "You come with me." And so we ran out, started to cross this trail. Well they had filled their buckets faster than we thought and they started coming back. There were three that had filled buckets and then they had two--well they were actual Chinese, the two that were guarding them.

Interviewer

Chinese?

Jim Slade

They were Chinese Special Forces. I'll finish telling you, but what happened is we came out of the river and because I didn't really know what to do, he says, "You stay here, I'll go across the thing, and we're going to ambush 'em coming back." And so I'm lying in this thing, it's an old bomb crater, right along the side of the trail and it hadn't been bombed that far before so there wasn't much foliage there. And I was lying on the side of it. And this guard comes over, this big Chinese guy, he was over six-feet tall, big guy. And he had his rifle at sling arms, he took his rifle off, turned it around and started to shoot me. And I thought, "Buddy, I don't know you, I don't hate ya, I don't have any animosity towards ya, but today it's you or me and it's not gonna be me." And... I took him out. And he had a lot of intelligence stuff on him. He had it sewn in his clothing and stuff like that and he was carrying a transistor radio and the back of the transistor radio had all kinds of designations where units were and so he was a very good intel thing. But what happened, the guy looked right at me, what, fifteen feet away from me and... it just took me months to get out of my--that look, where he was looking at me. And his eyes staring at me and it took a little while to get that out. I'd try to go to sleep at night and I'd just sit there and think, "Oh, quit lookin' at me." And then his

body was dead but his brain didn't know it yet so he fell over and fell forward and it just--it was a pretty horrifying thing for me the first time.

Interviewer

So what happened to the rest of the mission?

Jim Slade

Well, we had hit the base camp. That's what had happened is they were just up this little canyon and so they heard us shooting and they sent a patrol down, probably about 50 or 60 of 'em and we took off to get out of there to break contact they called it. And called in the helicopters and they met us two miles down the river and picked us up. But we ran for about two miles and got away. Outran 'em. But we did take all the intel of this soldier and he had a lot of stuff on him.

Interviewer

Was combat different than what you'd expected?

Jim Slade

Well I think it always is. You know, I think we're spoiled in this country by the motion picture business. We hear the bullets and they zing, zing. I never heard a bullet like that. The first time I was sittin' there and a guy was shootin' at us, all I heard was a "thump, thump, thump." What the heck was that? And it was the bullets going through the trees and through the limbs and stuff like that, and the trees. And so it was a lot different. And then the fear or maybe it's not fear even, it's the disorganization, the chaos, immediate chaos. It's kind of a shocking thing. And I always could function really good at the time of the battle. Where I got was when I'd go back and say, "Wow, we could've got killed today." And that's when I'd start getting a little nervous, but it was after it was all over.

Interviewer

How many missions did you do?

Jim Slade

I ran 46 missions and most of the LRRP teams on average were about 27, 28. I made contact with 36 of 'em where I actually had firefights. And twice I was the only guy that wasn't hurt on the five-man team. That happened to me twice.

Interviewer

Tell us about one of those times. How did you get everybody out?

Jim Slade

Well there was one time, they put these punji sticks--well, there were landing zones and out in the jungle there's just very few places and these Vietnamese knew where the helicopters could come in. And so they'd go put the punji sticks and they'd stick them straight up in the grass, that big tall jungle grass. And that jungle grass would be, oh, it would be 15 feet tall sometimes. And so the helicopter comes down, it can't lay all the grass over, just kind of swirls it. And our orders were, when the team leader went, you went. And two out one door and three out the other.

Well he jumped out and as the helicopter took off I ran to the rendezvous point where we were supposed to meet and nobody was there. And I waited and nobody showed up. I waited. Finally I heard a guy kind of moaning back in the grass and I thought, "Oh, my gads, they must have cut their throats or something back in the grass." So I started sneaking back through the grass and the one guy was laying there and he was in shock but the punji stick had gone right through the bottom of his foot and was sticking out the top of his leg and he was looking at it in shock and then he looked up and saw me and he said,

"Slade, I got skewered by this stick." I say,

"Yeah, you sure did."

And then I went and found the other guys and all of them had got punji sticks. And I'd come so close but didn't realize it. It cut the toe of my boot and tore the knee in my pants. I'd come that close but it didn't get me. But one had it through the fleshy part of his body here and one had gone right through his wrist. And anyway, I was the only one that wasn't hurt. So the helicopters weren't that far away by that time and I called 'em and got 'em on the radio and says, "You gotta come back and get us, this mission's over."

Interviewer

So how long would you be out on typical missions?

Jim Slade

A typical mission was supposed to be five to six days but if you made contact, sometimes--I mean I ran missions like that one right there, it was only a three-hour mission. But then there were other missions that they'd drop us off and we'd get hit almost immediately and we'd have to abandon the mission. So sometimes it would be two hours, three hours, but most typically it was a five to six day mission. And we had to carry all our food and stuff for that time period because we didn't have resupplies or anything like that. But we were in the central highlands up in the II Corps area, covered all of the II Corps area from Bong Son clear over to Pleiku. And we would have--well the five days you just were almost a nonentity for those five, six days so we had to carry everything with us. But we were in the highland so a lot of the times we could resupply our own water from the streams, the streams were good enough, the drinking water wouldn't make us sick.

Interviewer

Sometimes you had to go to villages and eliminate people or things like that? Do you mind talking about that?

Jim Slade

Well... I think... you have to make a commitment. And I thought the country's told me to come here, the country's told me to do this, whether I like what I'm doing or not, that's what I'm told to do, that's what I'm gonna do. And yes, we had assassination missions. One time we went into a village and the whole thing was we were supposed to kill the village chief who had now gone over to the VC side and was helping them, was supplying them, and it was causing us a real problem on a supply route. They would come into these villages and then they'd terrorize the villages and so it would make the people vacillate whether they were going to be VC or whether they were gonna

be pro-American. And so the mission was to go in and assassinate this village chief and that was one we had to do. It was a scary movie. I mean it was a time--I mean it was like on a movie, I said that, a scary movie because it was just like that. We went into the village and we had black pajamas on, we had these little Ho Chi Minh sandals that they make out of tires and we had the cooli hats on and we had our faces blacked and we were carrying AK-47s. And we went into the village. Supposedly nobody was there but just us and we were going to go in and take care of the mission. And we got there and about five minutes after we got there this mama-san was cooking out in this open fire. And all of the sudden we look up and here's a company of NVA coming in the other end of the village. And we're sittin' there and this mama-san, we didn't know what to do, and this one guy spoke fluent Vietnamese and he went up and told her that he needed something to eat so she brought these little teakwood bowls over to give us some stew. And so while we were eating we figured out what to do and waited for these guys to come in. And they actually stacked arms because they came to eat and she was gonna feed 'em. And they came over and started getting their food and then the team leader turned to us and he said, "It's now or never guys." And so we brought in these two bamboo poles and in the bamboo poles he had these LAWs, grenade launchers. And we dropped the poles, pulled those out and we tossed 'em and took 'em out. And then we got the news the next day, and then ran like crazy. Ran through 'em, through grenades and stuff to confuse 'em all and ran out of the village. By the time they realized what had happened we were a mile or so away. And then the helicopters came and picked us up.

Interviewer

Tell us what it was like to be in the jungle that long.

Jim Slade

Well, you know, I got to where I actually felt safer in the jungle than I did in the base camps because I could hide, we could move, we could run, we could evade, you know, all that kind of stuff. Whereas in a base camp they knew where you were at and they could mortar ya, they could snipe at ya, they could do all kinds of stuff. And being five-- and we had what we called a heavy team would be six guys; on some missions we would run a six man on a team. But each guy had his own specific assignment and we would cover a 360 perimeter and if you were the first guy you had the front and then the side, and then the side. And then the RTO, he didn't carry, didn't have a perimeter thing and then the rear would cover 180 degrees. And so when we got in a firefight we felt safe, we felt like we could pretty well protect ourselves. And I don't know if that makes sense, what I just said but...

Interviewer

Were you in a circle?

Jim Slade

No, we'd be in a single line.

Interviewer

And each one of you would have a portion...?

Jim Slade

Yeah, one guy points this way with his rifle, one guy points that way with his rifle and one in front is in the front and the one in the rear is the rear. And so anyway, I think we always felt very safe. And then we didn't move on trails very often, we moved through the jungle. Because the trails, they would booby trap and we didn't want to get caught in the booby traps so we would actually move through the jungle. And sometimes it would take us hours to go a quarter of a mile, it would be so thick and maybe even less than that in that time, but very thick. And we were always camouflaged real well and a lot of times at night we would just crawl back under the leaves and cover up and go to sleep. We didn't even pull guard duty a lot of times. But we did sometimes, depending on the mission. But I think that, as I came back I felt like I was blessed to be in that unit because I felt I was trained better than probably anybody that served in that war because we had to survive. There were only five guys. And sometimes we'd hit elements--we went into a base camp one time that had probably 1500 in it and we were able to get out. That mission we didn't even get anybody hurt, didn't get anybody wounded. But it's the surprise element that you can hit quick and leave quick and confusion and all that kind of stuff that works. And then there's just things that they teach you how to move through the jungle quiet. We could sneak right up on people and have them not even know we were there. And you could lie in the bushes and observe for hours and they wouldn't even know we were there. And stuff like that which I thought the training is what probably saved my life.

Interviewer

So I guess you get really attuned to the jungle, you see things, hear things.

Jim Slade

Yeah, and smell things. You know, one time we were coming down a ridge and I just saw a glint of something that the sun caught reflecting off of it. And I said,

"Guys, there's gooks right down there." Vietnamese. And they said,

"We didn't see anything."

So the team leader sat there with binoculars and looked at it for about an hour and he said,

"Slade, I don't see anybody." I said,

"I know I saw somethin'." He says,

"Okay, if you saw it we'll take it for reals."

So we went down around the back side of this mountain into this saddle, got there and there was ten of 'em, was settin' up an ambush; had seen us the day before and knew that we were probably moving in a certain direction and they had set up an ambush and we came up on behind 'em, saw them. Got them before they got us. And things like that. You're right. I mean you got to where you could smell. They smoke marijuana quite heavily over there, and the North Vietnamese used it quite a bit. And if they'd smoked marijuana, heck, you could smell it for a mile away out in that jungle, it just kind of holds it in the jungle. You could hear things; twigs snap, things that weren't normal. You'd hear metal to metal. That's not an animal sound, that's a human sound. And footprints, broken twigs, mangled leaves. They used to make little trail signs we called it, but they'd stack three rocks and

they'd be just little rocks off the side of the trail and that meant that there was a booby trap comin' up or somethin'; all of 'em had different designations but they would put it three rocks high and one to the left and that meant that's the way you gotta go because the explosive is on the right, you gotta go to the left. Different things like that that we got to where, yeah, we could read their signs. They'd take grass, tie it in a knot and twist it one way. Things like that that normal people you wouldn't observe that... you know?

Interviewer

Tell us about the weather. Rainy season? Would you move?

Jim Slade

Oh... terrible. Rainy season was awful. I mean you could be out there and it would start raining and you could be knee deep in water in an hour. I gotta tell you one time though, it was kind of fun. During the rainy season we had this one kid, his girlfriend felt sorry for him having to sleep on the ground all the time so she sent him an air mattress. And so because his girlfriend sent it he thought he had to use it. But he didn't want to put it out on the jungle floor because of sticks and stuff like that, it would poke holes in it. So this one night he gets it and he lays it out on this little trail where there was just dirt. Well it rained in the night and it really rained. Well he was laying in this trail. We got up the next morning and couldn't find him. And this team leader says, "I told him not to get out there, he probably went to sleep and the patrol came down there, saw 'em, and he's probably dead." And so we started moving out, we reported him as missing. We get down into this little bottom area where there was nothin' the day before but there's this lake and here he is still floating out on his air mattress out in this lake. It had just run him right down the trail and out onto the lake. So anyway, but when it rains it rains and it really, really comes down.

Interviewer

So you learned to sleep when it was wet?

Jim Slade

Yeah, and I hate that. I worked with the Scouts for quite a few years after that I said, "I will not do one thing and that is I won't sleep in the rain, okay?" Because I just--oh, you hypothermiate--is that the word I want? Anyway, you get cold even though the temperature isn't cold. I mean it can be 75 degrees but you're freezing to death in the rain. And it just drops your body temperature when you're wet like that. I remember one time we were so wet and cold and we knew, we were right in an area where it was a heavy concentration of North Vietnamese--regulars, not just VC, these were regular soldiers and we knew they were in that area. But we were all so cold and so miserable we said we're gonna go up on that ridge and we're gonna build a fire and we're gonna dry out. And we did. We said they're gonna see our fire, they're gonna come and hit us but we're gonna dry out. And we did. And they hit us the next day.

Interviewer

Were you ready for them?

Jim Slade

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer

So you used it as kind of bait almost?

Jim Slade

Yeah, we knew they would come. They had a thing up there where they used to have these wood cutters and they would go out under the guise of cutting wood for their village for firewood. And what they really were was trail watchers and they would warn the VC and the NVA when we were in the area. But they had to cut wood to make it real so a lot of times we'd hear 'em cuttin' wood and we knew that we were in a bad area.

Interviewer

What did you think of the Vietnamese people?

Jim Slade

Well, you know, I never felt animosity towards them, I didn't. Some guys got to where they'd, you know, had quite a hate for 'em and stuff like that and I never did. I thought we're there in their country, we're fighting a war and some of them, all they're doin' is just tryin' to get enough rice and stuff to feed their family. The only thing that I really did get upset with a few times was the torture that the North Vietnamese sometimes used. I mean cutting heads off and all kinds of other stuff.

Interviewer

You said they terrorized villages.

Jim Slade

They did. A lot. They would go in it for two reasons. They would go in and make them turn so that they would supply them with food and arms and then that they would also warn the North Vietnamese when we were in the area. And if they didn't do that they would—I remember one time we had this one where we went into the village and the woman actually worked for an American base. And they told her what she had to do, she was supposed to go in and she had C4 that she had packed in her brassiere. And she was supposed to go in and blow up the mess hall when there was a lot of people there. And they caught her and she says, "Please, I've got to do this. They've got my husband and my two boys and they're gonna kill 'em if I don't do somethin'." And so they told us where she was in this village or where she lived and we went in there and by the time we got there the dad was dead but the two boys were not. But they'd taken the dad and to make an example for the village they had drug him behind a motorcycle. Tied his legs and hands together and then drug him behind this motorcycle on a paved street. And he was just—you know, it just completely skinned him. Yeah, but he had died. But that's what they do. They would come in and make the villagers take care of 'em, make the villagers look after 'em and supply 'em and do all that kind of stuff. Even do medical stuff for 'em. The people that worked on the bases a lot of the times would steal medical supplies to go and take care of the VC in their villages.

Interviewer

So you rescued those two boys?

Jim Slade

Yeah. They were safe. What they did is they set the explosion off but it was outside the base to kind of buy some time and that's how we went in and got 'em.

Interviewer

So tell us about your buddies. You must have been really close to go out in the jungle.

Jim Slade

You know that's the thing that amazes me about any kind of combat, and that is that I don't care what your ethnic affiliations, your... religious, if you came from a big city, you came from a farm. When you get into a combat situation you become very, very tight with those guys. Your life depends on it. And theirs depends on you. And so because of that you do, you become--you would put your life on the line for those guys at any time. Would they be my friends back here? My associates? Probably not... a lot of 'em 'cause their lifestyle would be a lot different than mine. But there, we were tight, very tight. And when one of 'em got killed or if a team got in contact, the teams that were back in the rear getting ready to go back out on missions, immediately would volunteer to go out and save these guys as a reaction force. And we did it many times. But they were your buddies, they were your guys. And then I don't know, it's just like when one time we went to an Air Force base and some of the guys were trying to give our guys a hard time. We looked pretty ragged, we were jungle guys, you know? And so these Air Force guys they were kind of giving us a hard time and this one guy said, "Okay, if you guys say one more thing our team is gonna whip you guys. Just flippin' whip ya." They said one more thing and the team whipped 'em. And after that they said okay, these guys come on base, leave 'em alone, let 'em have their space. But we stuck together, that's what I'm sayin', you were together.

Interviewer

I've heard stories of LRRP's coming in from patrols and what they did look like. Tell us again. You must have looked pretty frightening.

Jim Slade

Well imagine, five days in the jungle? Sweatin', beards growin'. I mean yeah. Camouflage. I mean it all kind of melts together, you know, and yeah you look pretty ragged, pretty gross. And I imagine we smelled pretty gross. We were all together so I don't know if we smelled each other but it wasn't a pleasant sight. And I know, we would go on some of these posts where the guys were pretty strack and they all thought we were a little crazy, they really did.

We had an MP tell us one time we couldn't carry our weapons on post and we said,

"No, we carry our weapons everywhere." And another guy came up and he said,

"No, don't tell 'em that, they're a little crazy, let 'em have their weapons," and so we did.

Carried them in the mess hall and everything where you weren't supposed to carry 'em and all that kind of stuff.

One time we got hit real early in the morning, about sunup and one of our guys got shot up pretty bad and so

helicopters came in and the closest base was this small Air Force base that had a little hospital. So they flew us in there. And so as soon as we land it's about six o'clock in the morning and they just barely opened up the mess hall. And we were LRRP's and you know, these LRP rations that they have. And this guy says, "Well, we're gonna take him over to the hospital, you guys can go over and have breakfast." And so we walked in this mess hall, we were the first guys in, looking terrible. And these guys looked at us like we were all crazy and finally the one cook came up to us and said,

"So, how would you like your eggs cooked?" And I was just shocked; I hadn't had eggs for months. And I said, "Wow, you got eggs?" So I said, "I don't care how you cook 'em, yeah, eggs is good." So they fed us.

Interviewer

You said LRP rations. Tell us about that.

Jim Slade

That was the first time I think in any kind of a combat situation where they used this freeze-dried ration and they all called them LRP rations but it was the forerunner of our MRE's that we use today. But they would come in a big plastic envelope and inside that would be a complete meal. You had a main meal; the ones that the guys used to almost fist-fight over was spaghetti and meatballs. But it was freeze-dried, you just put the water in it and then a lot of times what we'd do is set it out in the sun in that plastic bag and we had a nice hot meal. And they weren't bad, they weren't bad. The dehydrated pork patties weren't good but you know, there were some that you didn't want but most of 'em were pretty good. But they were light, because they were freeze-dried we could carry five days' worth of rations pretty easy.

Interviewer

Were you cross-trained with what everybody else could do on the team?

Jim Slade

Yes. Yeah, they were. There was a team leader and an assistant team leader and an RTO, a radio guy. And all of us knew how to use the radio. All of us knew how to do explosives, all of us knew how to do the weapons and to take care of the Chinese, Russian, you know, all the different weapons that we might encounter. And then we were trained in explosives and yeah, we were all cross-trained. All of us knew enough medical stuff to take care of each other in case we got shot up pretty bad. And one time we got in a firefight and this kid looks at me and he says, "Slade, I'm shot, I'm shot! I feel it running down my back!" And we used to carry these little tubes of albumin they called it. And we'd tape them across the top of our web gear. Well a bullet had gone right through that albumin and it was running down his back and he thought he'd been hit and it wasn't, it was just the albumin. But that was a blood replacer if you got hit and were bleeding real bad then they'd put that albumin in and a lot of times that would save your life.

Interviewer

Tell us about your last mission. You said you remember that really well.

Jim Slade

Yeah, that was a bad mission. What had happened is they pulled me into the headquarters--we were attached to the 173rd Airborne Brigade November Company. They had a company attached to different units and our company was attached to the 173rd. And they were getting mortared on a regular basis at the headquarters of the 173rd. So they asked me to take a team down and get these guys that were mortaring them because what they'd do is they'd hit 'em from one side, they'd try to go out and get 'em, hit 'em from another side. And these were all clerks and paid people and supply people and motor pool people, they weren't combat soldiers, I mean it wasn't a real combat unit there, it was a headquarters unit. And so we went down and for three weeks they would evade us. They had these watchers, you know, and they'd say okay, they went out north, they'd mortar from the south. And so every time we'd go out we couldn't catch 'em.

Well one afternoon, about two o'clock in the afternoon I'd given the team passes--I was the team leader and I said I'll give you day passes to go to the PX 'cause there was a convoy that they would ride down and back on. And so two o'clock in the afternoon this major comes flying down in his jeep and he says,

"They've got 'em cornered! They've got 'em cornered!" And I said,

"What are you talkin' about?" And he says,

"The motor pool guys went down, took some deuce and a halves to park 'em along the river and wash 'em. And they heard these guys, they'd been smoking pot and playing cards up in a cave up on the mountain quite a ways up but it was loud enough that they could hear 'em. They were arguing, the Vietnamese were. And so this one guy from the motor pool, he walked up there, a kid from Idaho, he walked up there and poked his head in the cave and he saw the AK-47s lying along the side of the cave. And so he ran in and grabbed them, ran out and then ran down and they all got under the trucks and called and said you got to get Jim's team down here to take these guys out."

Well I'd sent my team to the PX, a day trip to go to the PX. And so this major he says,

"Well come on, come on, you can get 'em." I said,

"Okay."

So I jumped in the jeep, got all my stuff. We got there and all these motor pool guys were hiding behind the trucks and under the tires and everything like that. And as soon as we stopped, these AK-47s were laying there on the ground that this guy had brought down. And this major says,

"Oh, I forgot a rifle, I gotta have a rifle." He says, "You know how to use those, give me yours."

So I did and I gave him my M16 and took the AK-47 and the two guys from the motor pool said,

"I think they're comin' down tryin' to get into the river and get away. There's a trail down there, I think I heard 'em headed for that trail."

So I walked down by myself, down around this corner and I was all by myself and saw three of 'em come down.

Well I saw two come down and they jumped into these bushes. And as soon as I saw 'em, the one guy saw me.

And we threw a grenade, he threw a grenade, I got hit with some shrapnel. But I didn't realize how bad I was hit

and I charged 'em and they were dead in the bushes. And then I realize that what had happened is they were trying to get down the river and they had these papa-sans were brings boats down through the reeds to pick 'em up, or this one papa-san, anyway. And I went out there on a sandbar and I saw him and he was lookin' back where I'd just thrown these grenades and got these guys. And I told him to come to me, "La de." "Come to me." And he didn't think I saw him. And so I tried to make a point, told him again, he still didn't do it so I shot a hole in his boat and sunk his boat. And so then he decided, yeah, I better come to him, so he started coming towards me and he got about knee deep in water coming out of the water and charged me. And he had somethin' in his pocket and I thought he had a grenade, I thought he was gonna kill me and so I stepped to the side and just used that AK-47 like a baseball bat and knocked him down and he fell face first into the sand and that was the only help I had. This captain, pay captain, walked out and he said,

"Can I help you?" He was a bright redheaded guy with fair skin, freckles, had no combat experience. And I said, "Sir, this is the enemy, if he moves you shoot him."

And he starts shaking really bad and I thought whew, okay, but that was the last I saw of him. I don't know whatever happened to him after that. But anyway, I went back out on this sandbar and I saw the guy that this papa-san was coming to pick up and he'd gotten in the water and he'd taken a reed just like you see in the movies and he was breathing under the water using this reed. And he poked his head up and looked away from me where this papa-san was supposed to be coming from. And so I hollered at him and I shot right close to his head so that he would know that he'd been seen. Well he couldn't tell where the bullet had come from so he kind of looked in a different direction so I shot the other side. And then he thought, okay, I've been seen, they know who I am and so he acted like he was gonna kind of come out of the water. So he started walking up to the bank. Where he was it was deep but it was the bank there, and he came up to the bank and started to jump out of the water and all he had on was little black shorts. And as soon as he jumped out of the water he pulled something out and turned around. Well I'm chest deep in the water and there wasn't a thing I could do but to shoot him. And so he fell back over in the water and dropped the weapon in the water, his pistol. But it all happened so fast. Then this major comes up to me and he says,

"Is it over?" And I said,

"I think it's over." And he says,

"Where's the body?" And I said,

"Well, it's gone under, it's down in the water." And he told me, he says, "Well you better find the weapon, you might have shot an innocent civilian, that's charges." And I said,

"You gotta be kidding me?"

Well there was this old sergeant majors, brigade sergeant major that was there and he said, "Slade, I'll help ya, we'll find that weapon." And so everybody else packed up and left, went back to the base. I don't know what they did with the bodies, I don't know what they did with the papa-san. And remember, I'd been hit and I'd been in the

river. And my leg started aching really bad but the cold water had kind of numbed it a little. And so this sergeant major, he had one of the guys bring back a rake and we started raking. It was probably about eight feet of water and we started raking and all of the sudden we heard the "plunk" and brought it up and it was a Chinese 9 millimeter pistol. And so we had the weapon and then the sergeant major said,

"Get the body." And I said,

"Okay." So I dove down and got the body up and he says,

"Now let's take it back to the major."

So we did. We took the body back and rolled him off and said, "There's your enemy and there's his proof." And this major sat there and looked at 'em and he was not a combat guy and he sat there and threw up 'cause I'd shot him through the head. And then the guys brought in the stuff, I didn't go in with them, but they brought the stuff that they found in the cave. And the thing that made it bad that I had a hard time with is this guy had a picture, he was a major, that I'd shot. And he had a picture of him playing the accordion, had a copy of his graduation certificate from college and a picture of him and his wife and two kids. And I felt real bad about that and that was the last one.

Interviewer

What was that date, do you remember?

Jim Slade

Well, I do 'cause that was the date I got wounded, it was January 24th 1970.

Interviewer

So I imagine you went to the hospital?

Jim Slade

Oh, I was gonna tell ya, after I got out the sergeant major says, "We gotta get you to the hospital." By that time my leg had swelled up and it was bleeding really bad and he says,

"We gotta get you to the hospital." And I said,

"Well let's take the body up to the major first."

And so we did and then the sergeant major drove me over to the hospital. And the guy told me, he said,

"Don't let 'em send you out of country." Because he says, "If they do, your tour starts all over, you haven't completed a tour and they'll make you come back for another tour." And so I said,

"Okay."

So I limped around for a few weeks and then went back to work. I still have shrapnel today, they still didn't take it out.

Interviewer

So when you were in country like that on those patrols, are you getting any news from back home?

Jim Slade

Very little. You know they had the Armed Forces Radio and when we were in the rear we could use that but we

never took anything like that to field with us so there was nothing there. And the newspapers, I'm sure that they filtered what we read in the Army Times. And so I really didn't. Other than once in a while somebody would send a newspaper from home to one of the guys that would get through and I do remember one, it was when they were having the riots in Detroit. This newspaper made it look like the whole town was ablaze and that the whole place was rioting and all that. And this kid's parents had sent him a letter and they said, "Yeah, we sent you this article. We live here. We didn't even know what was going on." He said it takes in about two or three blocks of downtown but the media had pumped it up so much that it made it look like the whole place was protesting and that it was all on fire and how dare you GI's do that.

Interviewer

So you were in combat in country from what date?

Jim Slade

March of '69 to March of '70.

Interviewer

Did you miss the moonwalk? That was in July of '69 wasn't it?

Jim Slade

We heard about it. Yeah. I think the day that happened I was right in the middle of a firefight in the jungle, as far as I remember. I didn't know about it till later. We thought it was kind of cool. You got it on the Armed Forces Radio it was something else. If you could listen to it, if you had a place to listen to it, they had some pretty good news on that. But we didn't have radios, there was no place to get that kind of stuff. We were really out in kind of remote areas.

Interviewer

How did you arrive in Vietnam? How was that? Did you come on an airline?

Jim Slade

Well, yeah. We left Oakland, California, Travis Air Force Base and flew to Hawaii and refueled and then flew to Wake and refueled and then we flew to Guam and then to the Philippines and it was a long, long flight. And it was a civilian-type flight until we got to the Philippines, to Clark Air Force Base. As soon as we got there, the stewardesses got off, the stewards got on, they were military guys and they took off and they said,

"We're gonna darken the cabin." The pilot came on, he said,

"Don't get alarmed, those are ours,"

and you looked out the window and there was two F-4s off the side escorting us in. And they brought us into Bien Hoa Base and of course we were all just green guys, they called us cherries. All the cherry guys coming in and we all thought we were gonna have to get off this big plane and start running for bunkers and there'd be explosions and bullets and everything like that. And of course it wasn't that way, we landed and Bien Hoa was a great big base and it wasn't that way. But I remember lookin' at some of these guys who were getting ready, they were standing off to

the side getting ready to load back on a plane to come home and they looked at us like, "Oh, you guys, you're just stupid cherries, you don't even know what's going on." And I felt that way, I thought yeah, I really don't know what's going on. But then from there we went to An Khe and I stayed there for that two-week school that I told you about and then they just said, "Okay, there's a truck going north," and they took us on a deuce and a half and dropped us off in the middle of LZ English, just out of Bong Son. And a guy comes out just like Radar on "MASH." Comes out and says, "You and you, in here," walk in, says, "This, this, and this. And you're on this team and you're on that team," and that's where we go.

Interviewer

So what was it like when you left? Tell us about that day.

Jim Slade

When I came home? Well, I ran a mission 24 hours before I left and so I get back and they said, "Okay, you're on the next flight." And I left out of Cam Rahn Bay. But when I came back I was tired, hungry, I didn't want anybody to mess with me or mess with them or anything. I wanted to be left alone, I wanted to get on a plane and sleep or whatever. And we went over and landed in, I can't think where it was but it was in Japan. And when we landed there it was cold, it was March and we'd come right out of the jungle where it was fairly warm and I was freezing to death. And I said, "Guys, man, don't you have any coats or anything for us?" And they said, "No." So we just froze to death while they refueled and that's all we did there is refuel and then they flew us straight into Fort Lewis, Washington. You know, you're kind of numb, you don't really know what's going on, I guess. You're just kind of existing I think at that point. And so when I got there I was the guy that was in charge of our group that came back and so I had to get 'em in and the first thing, a C-7 comes up to me, this sergeant first-class and he says, "Okay, get 'em all over to the mess hall, you're home. They're gonna feed you the biggest steak you ever saw and a big 'ole potato and you can have anything on it you want."

And it was great. We were all so tired but it was a great dinner. And they got us back and then I was there 24 hours, muster out is all. And they said,

"Okay, we're gonna take you to the airport and here's your ticket home." But the C-7 came on and he said,

"But I'm gonna tell you guys something--"

and it's something that people ought to know because it really sat bad with me, he sat there and he says,

"Okay, you guys all think you're heroes, you're coming home, you're war heroes. You're not. People don't care. The best piece of advice I can give ya is take that uniform off, stuff it in a bag, put some civilian clothes on and take a taxi into the town in the back way and hope nobody ever missed ya."

And that's what he told me, told us all. Stood up there and told us that. And I thought that really can't be true, we did what we were supposed to do. We were asked to do. I didn't know where Vietnam was, remember? And I certainly didn't want to go fight in a war, I had lots of other things I wanted to do. But then I came home and found out he was pretty right. In Salt Lake here I was turned down three different times for jobs when I got back. Told it was because

I'd been to Vietnam, that I was a soldier from Vietnam. About that time, if you remember, they had that big deal where some guy went crazy down in Texas at Texas A and M or I don't know where it was, it was one of the colleges. Got up in the bell tower, shot a bunch of people. Yeah, he was a crazy Vietnam vet. And then you know it just seemed like the stereotype for Vietnam was we were all crazy, we were all on drugs and we were all baby killers. And you sit there and say that is so far from the truth but that was the stereotype that was promoted.

Interviewer

So when you see these movies that say that, how do you feel?

Jim Slade

It always upsets me. Always. To this day upsets me. It's not right. I don't care if a person, what their political beliefs are. Whether they're right-wing, left-wing, whatever, if they're pro-war or anti-war, I don't really care. What it is if they are Americans and our congress sends our guys to war, the people should back it, the soldiers. I don't care if they don't back the war, they just can't treat the soldiers that way. I think that the '60s, it was a turning point of this whole country's history and a lot of it was because of the way the Vietnam vets were treated when they came home. That whole drug issue, everything kind of came in those '60s and it was because of that war. So that upsets me a lot. Today our guys that are in Iraq and Afghanistan and those places, you can't blame them, they're doing their job, they're doing what they're told to do. And so that's what has to happen. I know there's been--and I can't quote you some, I'd like to know 'em by heart, but there are those that say if you don't take care of the soldiers, they're coming back, you're just one generation away from not having an army because who's gonna send 'em to war then if they come back treated that way? So it's still bad. Jane Fonda, I haven't seen a movie of hers since I got and I will not. She comes back as this great American but I don't believe it. Somebody that does the things that they do, some of those people did, to me, were treason.

Interviewer

So were really aware of what she was doing at the time, Jane Fonda?

Jim Slade

Well yeah, we knew that she did that thing over there with the POW camp and everything and it was news. I mean everybody knew about it.

Interviewer

Did you hear about any of the demonstrations back home?

Jim Slade

See I don't remember where I was at when she actually did that, I don't know if I was in country, I don't know what timeframe that she actually did it. But it had built and so when I got back it was just something that everybody knew about.

Interviewer

So you got back and the country was still crazy with demonstrations and anti-war. Can you tell us about that?

Jim Slade

Well see when I was there, I was there in '69 and that was the peak of the war, that's when most of the guys were killed, '69 and '70. But most of 'em were killed in '69. And so when I got back I was pretty emotional. They aren't gonna tell ya how many guys are being killed over there, the media started stopping that kind of information and I just thought that's not right. Families should know. And I went to visit, over in Colorado, a kid that I had known in the unit there that got killed. His mom--me and another guy, we went over and we went up to the front and we knocked on the door and she came to the door and I'll tell ya that was probably the most gratifying I felt after I came home from that war because she opened the door. She didn't even ask who we were, she knew. And she reached up and hugged us and she says, "Come on in, boys, I gotta a hot dinner. You're my boys." And she didn't know us but we were her son's friends. And then she took us over to visit his grave. And then one of my best friends that I grew up in Colorado with from the first grade was killed over there and I went to visit his mother and she cried for the whole time I was there because she said it just reminded her so much of her boy. But I think that's a part that people don't understand. For every one of those kids that come home, they aren't a radical. What they are is somebody that's giving us or allowing us to have our freedoms. Allowing our country to run the way it runs. And so they have mothers, they have wives, they have kids and boy, to dishonor them I think is bad. And when they came home from Vietnam there was just so many of 'em that were dishonored. I was home for quite a while and I just felt like that chapter of my life was closed, I wanted it closed, I didn't want any more to do with it. And a guy called me up and said,

"We'd like to have you come to this meeting. We're thinking of building a memorial to the Vietnam vets here in Utah." And I said,

"Naw, I'm not interested. That part of my life's gone." They called me three or four more times and so finally I said, "All right, I'll go to your meeting."

And I went to that meeting and that was the first time I'd really seen the statistics and it shocked me how many of 'em had been divorced--multiple times since they'd been home; how many were in jail, how many of 'em were drug addicts, how many of 'em couldn't keep jobs, couldn't find jobs and then couldn't keep 'em; the average job was maybe two years and they were changing jobs. Had the highest number of guys in prison of any veterans that had ever had. Highest number of course on drugs. Highest divorce rate. And I thought well, maybe they do need some help so I agreed to raise the money and we built that Vietnam memorial that's just west of the capitol here in the state of Utah and I was honored to be able to serve on that committee.

But I've always felt that that is a war we've never really gotten over in this country. You could go out and talk to people today that are our age and they'll have definite opinions. And they will still think a lot of what they were taught by the media. "Oh, you guys were crazy, you were baby killers, you were druggies, you were all that." Well I for one took no drugs. I didn't kill any babies and I did what I was supposed to do for combat reasons of saving

other troops or winning a battle. And I don't know, you asked a little bit about the demonstrations and stuff and I guess to me, I knew guys that came back to Vietnam, had come home and couldn't adjust. They called it "came to the world and couldn't adjust." And so they came back. And I knew one guy that served seven tours over there and the last tour was killed. And everybody said that was probably a blessing because he probably could never have come back and adjusted to civilian life. But these people that protested, a lot of 'em, they had no military background, they got their information basically from media people that were slanted in the way that they may want to twist it or some politicians who hadn't been over or didn't know and were uninformed. And so I kept thinking why are you guys protesting? You don't even know what it's all about. Why are you protesting? And I just think it was a lot of students that had too much time on their hands. So anyway.

Interviewer

Plus a lot of people didn't want to be drafted.

Jim Slade

True. Yeah, they wanted the draft stopped. But it was a very tumultuous time of our country and I don't know that we will ever get over it completely. I think it started us down some paths that we'll never recover from.

Interviewer

When you go into a village what do you do about the barking dogs?

Jim Slade

That's a good question. You know, people think they got dogs, all of them have dogs over there. They eat dogs. You know that? They do. One of the few people that would have a dog would be the village chief. A lot of the others they eat. Sometimes they'd have a few but no, we really didn't have problems with that because the village chief had the dog and it was in his hooch, in his hut. So we could sneak right up on him.

Interviewer

What about other things like insects and snakes?

Jim Slade

Well that's a good question 'cause there was a lot of them. And you know, you're psychologically in tuned to all of that stuff. Even though you're asleep your brain is saying, "Oh, something touched ya." And if you don't get it off of you quick it's probably gonna bite you or sting ya. And ants over there, they're not little ants, they're ants.

Everything's big. All of the snakes, big snakes. And I'm just trying to think of all the different things. Spiders, it's almost like a tarantula; it's big. But that's just it, everything over there is just oversized and you just got to where, I don't know, you peacefully coexist with the animals, I guess. I don't know. But I didn't sleep. The first two weeks I came home I did not sleep in a bed because I wasn't used to one. And I slept on the carpet in front of the fireplace in my house and my parents were real patient about it. But one thing I told 'em, I says, "I just can't have something touch me at night." Like a sheet or a blanket or something like that because immediately I thought it was some animal getting ready to bite me and so I'd have to flip that off. And then they have monkeys and they have big

monkeys. We got monkeys that were throwing rocks at us one time. Yeah, they were stoning us. We got close to their home there and they started throwing rocks at us, making the noise and everything. And a lot of the people over there in some of those villages, they will monkeys, these big monkeys and they put a collar around their neck and they keep them as their watch dogs because a monkey can hear things and see things and start squealing and makes a noise when something's around.

I was just trying to think, one night we were in a night logger, we had hunkered down for the night and we could hear this tiger and it was circling us, it was hungry but it didn't dare come in because we were humans, it didn't like that smell but it circled us most of the night. Never came in. We were all thinking, okay, this sucker's gonna charge us and come in. We did have one of the teams that did get attacked by one and they shot it and brought it back to camp. But I don't know. There was a lot of animals, a lot of birds. I tell ya though, you get out in the jungle, it's kind of peaceful in a way 'cause there's a lot of noises and a lot of smells, kind of a musty smell because things are always rotting, leaves falling and there's a lot of rotting humus and stuff on the soil. No, I liked the jungle. The flowers are beautiful, the big leaves, the trees. I'd love to go back. I haven't been back of course but I'd love to go back. I'd love to go back now that it's not a war zone and see the beauty of it.

Interviewer

What about mosquitoes? How did you guys handle that?

Jim Slade

Well mosquitoes, the only time you have the mosquitoes is down in the rice paddies and in the swampy areas and we were up in the highlands in the mountains. The mountains are almost like the Wasatch Front here, they were high mountains. And they had the clear running streams, stuff like that. So we were never bothered with the mosquitoes. Now when it got down to base camps there were a few guys that got bit by 'em and a few guys that got malaria from 'em. I never had any problem with 'em, I don't know. They weren't even somethin' I even worried about.

Interviewer

What about fungus and jungle rot and things like that?

Jim Slade

Yeah, you've got to fight it all the time. When we'd get out there and you're not where you could bathe every day and stuff like that, I got a jungle rot down here on my chest really bad and had to use this lye soap to kill it off. But I had it for about two weeks, maybe three weeks. And there's things like that. You get an infection. If you get a punji stick and you get cut on it, and a lot of times they would dip it in human feces and you'd get infected. And because of the heat and the humidity and all that stuff that it actually grows at an alarming rate, really fast. And so you get an infection you've got to get it taken care of really quick or it can kill ya.

Interviewer

I knew a kid that came home with fungus. He couldn't bathe for three years because it would start the fungus.

Jim Slade

Yeah, because it started up again. A lot of 'em would get it in their feet. I had a guy tell me, he says, "Take care of your feet. They're your most prized possession because you gotta move with 'em." And so what we would do is any time we'd get wet or get in a stream or anything like that, we'd always take one boot off and one sock and ring the sock out and hang it up and let it dry and let the boot dry out and then put it back on and then take the other one off in case we had to run. And so we always had one boot. But I always kept my feet--I'd take a little powder and put some foot powder on and kept my feet real dry for that very reason. But there were other things, you know, tight clothing. You just can't wear tight clothing in the jungle like that because anything that rubs, especially when you got strapped from your rucksacks and stuff like that, it rubs on you and it will rub a rash and the next thing you know you've got a terrible infection.

Interviewer

What are the sounds of the jungle?

Jim Slade

There's a lot of wild animals and all of 'em have a unique sound. So what you do is you learn the sounds of the jungle. I don't know. If you say well there's a lot of birds, there are a lot of birds and they all make different sounds. We used to use the birds a lot to know when the enemy was around 'cause they would start squawking and fly, stuff like that. But almost any animal over there, they're kind of territorial in a jungle and so anything comes into their private area, they tend to let you know. But the jungle's got a lot of sounds. I tell ya one thing is we used to move on streams, we called 'em Blue Lines because as we'd go down the stream all of the sound would be in the water and they wouldn't hear us and we could walk right up onto people. And animals the same thing. You could walk right up on a herd of something out in the jungle there that was coming down to drink water or something.

Interviewer

Did you ever have a chance to do anything like a USO show or anything like that when you were there?

Jim Slade

I wasn't that lucky. We always used to joke about it, we used to say, "All the guys in the rear get all the benefits and us guys go out and fight the war." There was a lot of that. One time they did bring a portable stage to the 2nd Battalion of the 173rd out in the toolies there, in the jungle, and set this thing up. It was all self-contained and they had these Filipino entertainers. And they did do that and we saw the last five minutes of that. That was about it. I didn't get a chance to see those shows much. When I got back in the rear they had a traveling--and I think that was USO--but what it was is she was like Miss North Carolina that was coming around just saying hi to all the GIs and stuff. And I think that was USO that sponsored it. But we didn't see a lot of that. Didn't get to see Bob Hope and Ann-Margret. That was big when they were over there but I never got a chance to see 'em.

Interviewer

We may have you come back and we may have more questions and maybe things you can fill in for us. This is great. Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you want to talk about?

Jim Slade

You know, I heard a guy one time in a congressional hearing and he said,

"I don't know why we think we have to take care of the vets so much. We spend millions and millions of dollars on veterans' care." And he said, "We're not at war."

This was the lull between Iraq and Vietnam. And I thought how naive that guy really is because for the amount of money that is spent on taking care of veterans--this is kind of my soap box 'cause I like veterans' issues, I like veterans to be taken care of because they really are--it's not the politicians, it's not anybody in this country except the veterans who have kept this country free. And I'd just like to make that as a sound statement because people sometimes don't understand that.

Interviewer

We're here to honor the veterans.

Jim Slade

And let me tell ya, I think this is wonderful, I think this is great. It's something that's way overdue. There's a new book out now and I don't know if you know about it, but there's a new book out and I think it's called Soldiers Remembered, I believe is the title. But anyway it's just come out before Christmas, and he's gone around and filmed and talked and got the story of all of the state's Vietnam memorials and he came and did one on us here. And Lou Ross and some of the other guys are in that but it's out now, I've gotta copy on its way, it's not here yet. But I think it's an interesting thing because he said the same thing, he said, "A story that people don't even know." And some of those memorials. I just tell ya if you've got another minute, on this memorial that we built, it's quite an amazing story just by itself.

Governor Bangerter was the governor at the time we built it. And we wanted to get him really involved and he had a couple other folks from up here at the capitol grounds that he put over it and they weren't really motivated. They really didn't want to build it or have anything to do with it. We suggested three different locations on the capitol grounds and they wouldn't let us build it. And finally we got into some real heated meetings I think and they finally gave us that west area to build it. And so we had it all designed and everything like that and had to change the design so it would fit the contour of the ground. But when we were building that, that was the toughest money--I've raised money in my life for different businesses and things and the toughest money I ever raised was that money. We raised \$480,000 to build that. And we had one guy that would send us \$10 every month. Every month he would send \$10. He said, "I'm not a rich guy, but I want to be a part of this thing." And he'd send us \$10 every month. And then the guys had tried to raise the money that thing for I think it was four years and they were in debt, they were in the hole and they said we don't know if this is ever gonna happen. And so when they asked me to come on and do this, I quit my job to be a full-time fund raiser for 'em for a year. And I had people that would say, "There is no way." I don't know if I ought to mention names but the ex-governor took me in his office and he said, "Jim, you'll never raise this money. People don't care about Vietnam." And I said, "Watch and see, governor, watch and see."

But the two that gave us the most money for it was Coors beer and the Church, they were the two biggest contributors. And they actually both turned us down to begin with and then saw the value of it and came back and gave us some pretty hefty contributions. But when we were building it, they at the governor's office would get threats--people were gonna blow it up. And so we pulled guard duty on that 24-hours a day for how long it took to build nine--, eight months to build? And so we traded off with the Highway Patrol, they'd come down and help us a little while and then we'd do it and we'd all pull guard duty, go down and pull our turn down there at night to build that memorial. And that's my medals that they carved on that, by the way. They took my medals as the example which I think is kind of neat.

Interviewer

What decorations did you get?

Jim Slade

Well I got the Purple Heart, of course. Got an Air Medal, Bronze Star and then all the standard medals, the Vietnam Campaign and Vietnam Medal. When I retired as a sergeant major I came back and got out of the service for about eight years, nine years, and then got back in with the Special Forces and then stayed on in the National Guard, retired a little over 30 years and then with all the ribbons that I got then... I got a few. To sit there and remember 'em all, but I got the Legion of Merit and Meritorious Service. And of course when they gave me the Air Medal I said, "I'm an infantryman, why am I getting an Air Medal?" And they said, "Well, you had at least 21 insertions by air so that gives you the Air Medal."

And then of course got the CIB, Combat Infantry Badge, which probably is the primo badge to get really, that's if you're going to be a soldier.

Interviewer

Does anybody treat you poorly to this day or has that ceased?

Jim Slade

Well, I guess the real answer to that is I really don't talk a lot about it and do much about it and so I don't try to bring that on. I just don't. It's just something that if somebody talks to me about it it's usually somebody who has an interest in Vietnam and so no they're not gonna treat you that way. But no, when I got back in the Guard I think they thought that was pretty neat, that I'd been to Vietnam and they didn't.

Interviewer

So they threatened to blow up the memorial. That kind of blows my mind.

Jim Slade

Yeah, you ought to call the governor's office and get a little information from them because there was, there was a number of threats and they'd call into the governor's office about it. The Governor told us in a meeting, he says, "Guys, I can't pull a guard duty on it, you're gonna have to do it." So we did. You asked me that question, I had another thought. I'll tell you another thing that probably ought to be a point that ought to be kind of brought into this

is that is the families of the Vietnam vets. You know, I think a lot of 'em have gone through a lot. I know my wife, I remember we'd come home from church and I said, "I'm gonna lie down and take a little rest." She was gonna get dinner. Well when dinner was ready I'd gone to sleep and she came in and grabbed by foot to shake me to wake me up. And I hadn't been home from Vietnam that long, about a year and a half I guess, and it just horrified me, I didn't know where I was, what was going on and I came at her and it scared her so bad. I said, "Hon, you cannot do that. Do not touch me. Just come in the room and call my name and I'll wake up." And to this day, we've been married 41 years now, and to this day that's the way she wakes me up.

But I think people don't understand. When somebody gone to combat--and I know there's a lot of people out there that think oh, that's silly. You know, you don't want to walk across grass because it might blow up or you don't want somebody to shake you or you hear a boom and you go down. But that's very real. It is very real because you get yourself so trained at such an edge that you've got to react. You can't think, you've got to react because that's what's going to save your life. Well you can't just automatically shut that off. And to this day there's still things that bother me. To this day. I go see a war movie and you can almost count on it, I'll have a bad dream. And there's nothin' I can do about it, it's just somethin' takes over and you have a bad dream about it. But the point I was trying to make here is what about my wife? Bless her heart, you know? She's been a trooper through this whole thing. She understands that and she says, "Okay, I can live with that." And that's just something that people end up having to have as part of their life that somebody who didn't go would never ever experience. So those families go through a lot too. Some of 'em don't make it, a lot of them end up divorcing and stuff like that. But a lot of 'em do. Anyway, that was just another point.

Interviewer

Thank you. We'll be in touch.