

John McManus Oral history

[00:00:00] John McManus: When we were on there, I think we got chow from Denae. It came out on a truck. But you had to wait for the mine sweepers to sweep the road, and then the truck would come out and deliver a hot meal. And you'd get this hot meal delivered I don't know, late in the day, because the roads were never open until like nine, ten o'clock in the day. By the time they got the mines swept out of them and stuff, you know. Overnight, those little fuckers come up there and plant mines in the road, dig booby traps and that shit. So anyway, so most of your meals over there you ate were sea rations or stuff you could plum off the village or, you know, buy and trade. So anyway,

Dean Wetzel: Well, I'm, I've got the stuff running right now cause you got, you were going into some really great stuff right there. I hadn't started yet, so we'll touch back on that. What I'm gonna start out with real quick here in your oral history, John, is just some biographical information from you. Some information about where you were born, who your parents were.

John McManus: Kalamazoo, born in Borges Hospital in 1946. And I was a middle child, kind of. We had eight. Eight siblings, and I had one, two, three, four, and then I was number five, and then I had a sister, and another sister, and my, another brother, so I had three more after me, so we had eight of us.

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Dean Wetzel: Okay. What, did your dad serve in the military?

John McManus: No didn't got, he didn't get called for World War II because I think he already had two kids, maybe. And he also, I think he worked at Sutherland Paper Company at the time, and I think he was, that was considered I don't know if he was a, he, when he died, he was working as a press operator in Sutherland, but it was considered a critical position, I guess. You have to keep the machinery running, the big paper for the war effort, you know. You know, people worked it UpJohn. A lot of them didn't go because they were, it was considered I don't know what they call it, critical.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, I think you're right. Critical importance for war effort.

John McManus: And my dad, when Vietnam hit, you know, he was, I don't know, 40, No, not Vietnam, World War II he hit. He must have been at least 30, you know, in his thirties sometimes. I don't know what he was exactly, but so anyway, he didn't go to war. So, he was he was deferred.

Dean Wetzel: Did you have any uncles that went or aunts you know of?

John McManus: I think his brother. Tim might have went. I don't know. Stanley, I don't know. They never talked about it. Stanley died, you know, after pretty young. Leon was in the military, but he, I think, was, he might have been

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I don't know. He served in the paratroopers in the army, I believe. But he, I think he was post World War II. He was the baby of the family, so to speak, or the youngest then, youngest boy. So, he served. I know for sure he served. I don't know if his brother, Tim, served. His brother, Tim, come down with MS, multiple sclerosis, later in life. And I don't know if he had already got that diagnosed or they were just in the process of doing that, so he might not have served. And he worked. He worked for Eaton's, I think, for years and built transmissions and that kind of stuff. So, he probably had a critical. World War II, he probably was building machinery. Everybody that built anything was building something for the war, I think. You know,

Dean Wetzel: Could you tell us a little bit of what, like, it was like to be a child maybe, during the 50s, in the early parts of the Cold War?

John McManus: Oh. Yeah. I don't know, mostly fun and games, I think. I, I We never had a lot. I don't remember my folks buying new bicycles for any of us. I think we had It seemed like I was always fixing on my bike. Learned how to tear the wheel apart, and grease the bearings and clean them, and you know, disassemble the gooseneck on it, and change the bearings, and clean them up and stuff, and make the wheels spin so they really would roll good, and weren't sloppy and the hardest part about fiddling with the bike was tightening the spokes and doing a good job on that. And but I always fixed all my own stuff. I

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didn't, we didn't have much. But we had, my dad worked, my mom didn't work. My dad worked at the paper mill and when he got done at the paper mill, a good many nights he would go paint or put up wallpaper, he did interior decorating, usually he had another buddy and they would take on a project, some office building or something, and paint the whole office for a couple of weeks, you know, whatever the guy could afford to shut his office down, you know. He worked a lot of hours. And about the only time we had free we did some family stuff, we went on a short trip you know, camping trip, we used to, my dad bought a trailer later in life and he would take put a trailer over at Holland State Park, I think. And they would spend a week at Holland State Park. I don't think all of us went over there, I think by then it was, kind of the middle ones. I think my two older ones that married off were moved out by then. But, yeah, we hunted fish and did that kind of stuff, you know. The guys did my sister went hunting once in a while, but she didn't do much hunting.

Dean Wetzel: Do you remember the Berlin Wall going up?

John McManus: I don't remember when it went up. It just was always there, it seems like, and I think Reagan talked Gorbachev into tearing it down, if I remember right.

Dean Wetzel: Correct, yes.

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John McManus: Yeah. Mr. Gorbachev, tear this wall down. Something I can't remember what the hell he did.

Dean Wetzel: What about the assassination of President Kennedy?

John McManus: That I remember. I remember that I was in high school, I think when it happened. I can't remember what grade I was in. Might have been 10th grade, something. And at that time the high school was just three years, 10, 11, 12. I went to Millwood for 9th grade. I went to all my elementary school at St. Joseph Elementary School on Lake Street in Kalamazoo. And that was a parochial. They were run by nuns and lay people. We lived on Division Street in Kalamazoo, which was right on, next to the railroad tracks. So, it was living by the railroad tracks was a great adventure, you know. Every time we went for a walk, it was, or went to go do something, we jumped on the tracks, and we headed down the tracks. Those tracks were straight lines, yeah, living on the, living at, in the railroad, you know, the shadow of the railroad trains was like a Huck Fin adventure, so there was always something to do. Yeah, we'd do a lot of crazy shit. We'd, of course, hop trains. We'd go down the tracks and the factories that backed up to all of those, you know, the lumber company, there was a....

Dean Wetzel: Probably a paper company.

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[00:10:00] John McManus: Yeah. There wasn't a paper company right at there was on the, on Lake Street, a paper company. Okay. And the railroad trains used to back down a little siding, a little switch siding off the railroad tracks the Pennsylvania tracks back down a little siding. And right next to the paper mill was a coffee shop called Atkins Coffee Shop. And they would stop the train there. They would. They drop off railroad cars with paper in it, or pick up stuff, anyway, they stop at the coffee shop, and one guy stay on the engine, the other guy run inside and get coffee and stuff, you know. And I must have guessed they took off from my house, and I go up to cross, cut through this guy's yard, go over there where the railroad engines are, and I holler up, Hey mister! Can I come up, see your track, you know, and they let me come up into the cab and play with the throttle, you know, pull that thing, you know, pull the throttle on engine. One time I got one of 'em to let me back it down the tracks, you know, it's just a little siding. No, no traffic on it. Pull on the brakes, you know, and I, it seemed like the brakes did nothing when you pulled them on. And then they just went. Locked up all the wheels, you know. So, it was weird. But yeah, it was an adventure. We'd go down the tracks, and there was, every time we'd I'd get home from school, I'd take the dogs for a walk. Well, I didn't walk them down the street. I'd let them off their leash, and we ran up to the railroad tracks and down the tracks. It seemed like I took a leash with me. But we just let them rip, you know. And they'd go across, there was a ball diamond across the track that

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belonged to the paper company. And huge ball diamond, grassy area, and stuff, and they'd run around over there. We'd hunt rabbits around that ball field that had brush piles and stuff around that, you know, where it's cleared and stuff. We'd go back there with We had a couple of the dogs stomping on the brush piles and the dogs were running around. They'd kick a rabbit out and they'd run down and go hop back in another pile. Well, every once in a while we'd sneak the shotgun out and take a, we'd break down a, we had a little 410 shotgun, it was small, and we'd break the, take the barrel off it and one guy would stuff the barrel down his pants and the other guy would stuff the buttstock down his pants and we'd take three or four shells with us. Away we go. We'd go rabbit hunting down the river tracks. We're going to take the dogs for a walk, Mom. You know, why are you walking stiff legged, and you got a barrel on your pants, you know. Yeah. Yeah, nobody arrested you or said anything. They held it, you know, but yeah, it was a great adventure down there.

Dean Wetzel: That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that, John.

John McManus: Yeah, so life in the fifties there. We found shit to do. We didn't set around and push buttons on the phone. No. At the damn. Sure.

Dean Wetzel: When did you graduate high school?

John McManus: 1965.

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Dean Wetzel: 65? Yeah. Did you go right straight into the service at that time?

John McManus: Yeah. They were draft and when I graduated in June of 65. I don't know if I was even 18. I might have been 18. Anyway, I was, I went to boot camp by January of 66. So, I had June, July, August, September, October, November, December, January, I was gone. And in the meantime, between graduating high school in January, we had gone over to Detroit and got physicals and all that stuff, and we got sorted out. You know, who was able to, you know, serve and who wasn't, and yeah, we all got our notice in the mail. Greetings from the President of the United States, I think is what it says, I think I got it somewhere. Greetings from the President of the United States, you've been called to service or something. And we went over to Detroit, they split us up into groups over in Detroit. They picked out, a guy in the Marine Corps went through you, you, you, not you, you, you go over in that corner. And then the other guys, you guys all go over in that corner. And then they said, you guys over in this corner are going to get on a bus, and you're going to go down here to the airport, and you're going to fly to San Diego, California, and Sergeant so and so is going to meet you there and he's going to take you to boot camp. You guys over in this corner, you're going to get on a bus and you're going to go down, I don't know where the hell they went, down Georgia or something, I don't know.

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Dean Wetzel: Fort Leonard Wood, probably?

John McManus: Maybe. Yeah, you're going to get on a bus and take a bus all the way down south. You know, that's funny, a buddy of mine, he was in the Army line, I was over in the Marine Corps line. And I said, Hey Dale, Dale ask this guy if you can go on this. We get to fly in a big jet airplane all the way to San Diego, you know. You guys got to get on a sweaty old bus and ride that down to wherever the hell they were going. And you know what? He did. He asked the guy said, "Hell yes, I like volunteers. You go over here. And we go on runs. His serial number, one number out from mine. You know, cause we went in, he was behind me. And He always followed me on runs because we were all in numerical order or whatever. And he used to be kicking me in the ass and in the heels. He was a son of a bitch. You got me in here for a fucking plane ride. Anyway, we got split up. When it came time, we went, did our training, went home on leave. We had to go back to the west coast, and they were going to put us into staging battalions. He showed up at one gate, I showed up at another gate, and we ended up in two different staging battalions. He and I did not go to Vietnam together. Which, it was alright. But, you know, it was, first, I, you know, I stayed by the gate for a long time waiting on him. I said, well, he ain't here, the clock's a tickin I gotta get checked in or I'll be AWOL. So, in the meantime, he'd already checked in from came in another way or something. But

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you know, we'll meet you at the gate. Well, those places don't have just one gate.

Dean Wetzel: Let's roll back here a little bit to, to bootcamp. What do you remember most, or what do you remember from bootcamp? What was that experience like?

John McManus: It was mostly discipline. It was marching. Physical fitness, PT, exercise balance your weight and your nutrition. Fat guys got thin, thin guys got fat, you know, fatter. You know. They make the thin guys get in front of the line, make them eat twice, shit like that. The poor sons of bitches.

Dean Wetzel: And then go run for five miles.

John McManus: Yeah, let them set for a few minutes. They, I don't know where, they go by the bathroom, swing by the restroom on the way back. Okay, shit on my command. Ready? Shit. That's the way they did that stuff.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah that's great.

John McManus: The restrooms were big pipes, and they were all copper pipes, and they were polished to a high copper shine. Somebody was in there with copper polish, polishing them damn pipes. I don't know who all polished the pipes. But they came up and the toilet was sitting right on the copper pipes, you

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know, with the lever to flush it or whatever, I don't remember if it was a foot lever or what it was. But there was no partition or nothing, you just, everybody would run in and drop them drawers and sit on the toilet, you know. Yeah, no privacy in the military...

Dean Wetzel: oh no.

John McManus: But anyway, I, what do I remember about boot camp? Marching, discipline, physical fitness, you had to go through tests, and I think then we went on to advanced infantry training. Oh, we had to go to rifle, we went to rifle platoon or rifle camp or whatever for, what was that, a couple of weeks?

Dean Wetzel: It's usually if it's similar to what I went through.

John McManus: Yeah.

Dean Wetzel: It's one week where they snap in a grass week, which is just dry fire and fire at barrels. Yeah. And then you have your one week of actual range qualification. So, it's like a two process, but that was back up in Pendleton.

John McManus: Yeah, that's where I went. We went to, how do we go, Camp Horno or Camp?

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Dean Wetzel: Horno, no, that's the one right underneath SOI. So, you would have went well it's where Mount Motherfucker was.

John McManus: Baldy or whatever they call it.

John McManus: Yeah, they used to run you up and down it. Well, we went there and went through our basic, more basic training. We got, I think, there we got to shoot a machine gun, 50, we got to shoot a 60, a 50, a Browning Automatic Rifle, I think we shot, I think we had to shoot a rocket a 105-rocket launcher.

Dean Wetzel: This was bootcamp or was this ITB?

John McManus: I-T-R, advanced Infantry Training, I think is what it was. A-T-R, A-T-I.

Dean Wetzel: For us it was ITB Infantry Training Battalion.

John McManus: Okay. So, we went with that and then we, I think we threw we, we had to put a blasting cap and a block of TNT and walk-up and. throw it in a hole or something. We had to go through that, so we knew how to set a satchel charge. We didn't do any helicopter, you know, where they throw you in a pool and turn you upside down in a helicopter. You didn't have to do that. We had to swim. We had to jump off a tower simulated jumping off a ship that was

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sinking or what. I don't know what the hell it was, but we had to jump in a tower. Jump into a pool and we had to be able to survival float. I think we had to drop our boots, take our pants off, tie the legs together and try to inflate them and made a balloon out of them and hold them down in the water and get them wet and they would sizzle. You could hear them, you know, air would go through and then they'd last for a minute or two and then you'd have to re inflate them again and, you know, so it was using your pants as a survival thing. But we had to survival float if I remember rightly. I don't know if we had to save anybody, like lifeguard type, I don't think, I can't remember if we had to I can't, I get it confused with in high school I did scuba diving where we did a tired swimmers swim. I don't know. Anyway yeah, it was mostly physical training and then advanced MOS training. And some guys I think everybody had to go through a certain amount of that. And then they went to their MOS's like, you know, be a radio man or a rocket man or whatever, you know.

[00:20:00] Dean Wetzel: Now, looking back at boot camp. Did you know anything about the Marine Corps? Like, you just ended up in the Marine Corps? Was that even the branch you wanted to join?

John McManus: I, my brother told, my brother was in the Army when I went in. And he's, I asked him what should I sign up? He says, no, just let them take you. You'll probably end up in the Army. And he says you know; they only got

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you for two years then. You don't sign up for nothing. Just go in there and get your duty over and then after you've been in for two years, then you can decide if you want to stay another. And, if you decide you want to stay, they'll pay you five or six thousand dollars to stay for another couple years, you know, anyway, so that's what I did. Actually, I just hung around until they drafted me. And our birthdays apparently, I wasn't sure we'd all, you know, my high school buddies, if we'd all get a chance to go together or not. But pretty much all of us in the same age group went in January, you know, for the whole year, you know. Like, my birthday was in December, so I was, you know, I guess younger, you'd say, or whatever. Yeah. I remember a lot of discipline stuff and hazing, harassment I remember one guy fell out from a run and the DI would get back there and kick him in the ass, tell him to get up off the ground, quit whining and get his ass back in line and he wouldn't run. And I, I can't do it. I can't do it. It's okay, you little fucker. You can't run, you're gonna crawl, and he had him crawl all the way across that goddamn grinder back to the barracks. He had no fuckin pockets on his shirt. His buttons were all gone. Then he told him, get out your sewing kit. He said, you gotta sew them fuckin buttons back on your shirt. Yeah, it was you know, and most of the guys that ran out flunked out on a run and stuff like that. They'd done something. They were either overweight, really out of shape, or they'd overeat or, you know, that kind of thing where, you

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know, you couldn't, you know, you get a gut ache when you're running, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Did they have yellow footprints for you to stand on?

John McManus: Oh yeah. We had yellow, when we got off the bus, we had to put our feet in them damn yellow footprints and you didn't have them. Bunch of D. I. s screaming in your ears, kind of like they show in the movies, you know. Yep, we did that. And they filed us through and shaved our hair and I think we got clothing and everything. They measured us, went out there with a whole fucking handful of clothes, then we went somewhere and got out of our slimy civilian clothes and got into boot clothes. Yeah we were lower than a whale shit on the totem pole.

Dean Wetzel: I'm laughing cause it's just bringing back so many of my own memories as I'm going back through boot camp. I gotta ask you, when, cause I know you had one, so when was your, oh shit, why am I here moment? When was that?

John McManus: I don't know. I don't know. Probably don't know. I didn't draw a lot of attention to me if possible. So, for the most part, I skated a lot of that abusive shit. You know, because when that fucker said, hit the road, I was hitting the road, you know. And so maybe I didn't get treated as harshly. But I

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think everybody in my platoon got beat on or their ass kicked at least once when they were in boot camp. And they would find some excuse to get in your case. And you know, I don't care if it was a mail call and your girlfriend put a kiss, put a lipstick on the fuckin thing. They'd say, you know, this what's this, SWAK, S W A K, sealed with a kiss, you know. They'd write that on the fuckin letter and put a big ol red lipstick. All them fuckers say. Oh, here, let me put this against your lips. You go, whack, hit the back of his hand. He says, swag, doesn't I? Swaggin ya. Fucker would have a bloody lip. Don't ever do that on my envelope again.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. Awesome. Thank you for sharing that. You said earlier, after boot camp you went to ITB and explained that. How long was that schooling and how long?

John McManus: Maybe it was AIT advanced infantry training I think is what it was called. How long was that? Boot camp was eight weeks I think and part of that was rifle camp, another week or two. So maybe it was 10 weeks altogether. And then, went home on leave, came back, and had to go to advanced training, I believe, is what happened. Why did we go straight from boot camp to advanced training? I think we ended up putting in 12 weeks, I think. Maybe another 4 weeks of that advanced shit. I honestly, I don't remember. I don't remember a boot camp. rifle company was in the middle of our boot camp and then we went

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back and finished boot camp, or if we were done with boot camp and then we went to rifle company and then advanced infantry. I don't remember exactly how they worked it then, but I think boot camp was only like eight or ten weeks and I think they added another four weeks on after that. I think some guys said it used to be 16 weeks. And you had sports on Sunday. You had sports, church, and letter writing time, you know, that kind of stuff. Sunday was more of an easy day, but we went to church on Sundays. You either, I think it was Sunday morning, you either could stay back and clean your rifle, clean the barracks. That kind of thing, or you had to pick a religion, and I think you had to at least pick a religion and go at least once or twice to Sunday services. If somebody says, well, I don't know, he says, okay you're going to synagogue or what, I, you know, I can't even remember what the hell they called it. You're an LSD. Well, you're going to go here with the with the, whatever, you know, Latter Day Saints over here. You know, Catholics, you're over here Protestants, you're, it seems like it was just Protestants, Catholics, and I think Latter Day Saints. So Jewish went where?

Dean Wetzel: they might have had something extra with like the chaplain where he, because usually your chaplain can do any service Yeah. In that, but they pick out what's like the main religions or whatnot, and that's what they, and

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then if you need specials, whatnot, you'll go over here with the chaplain and do your thing.

John McManus: I, I think the guys that wouldn't pick, they said, well, we're going to, to this week you're gonna be Protestant, and then next week you're gonna be Catholic. And they send 'em to all the damn services. And then after they did a dose of that, I think then they could pick, you know, put yeah, it was, they kind of made it a joke, you know, oh, look Q Boy is going to be a Protestant this week, or won't.

Dean Wetzel: So, for your AIT schooling, looking back at that. I'm guessing you weren't expecting to be able to play with that many different weapons for you. Was that interesting?

John McManus: No, the idea was you could fill in the slot for somebody else. If you had a machine gunner that went down and you're right there next to it, you, somebody's going to have to man that gun and somebody's going to have to be the team helper, you know what I mean? The ammo hopper or whatever. And truly. A lot of times the machine gun squads would have more than just their guys carrying ammo for the machine gun. They'd carry a belt, whatever fit around them, you know. But we did demolitions. We did, we fired, oh we fired a 105 recoilless rifle, I think, or at least saw a demonstration in it. I know what

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we did. We might have fired, there was a 50 caliber on top of it. We might have loaded the 50, cranked up the controls, and fired the 50. And I don't remember how it was fired. Was it a palm button? Or if that fired the 105? I don't remember, but it was on a tripod. And they did a demonstration with it. They shredded a wooden crate with the back blast off that son of a bitch. And showed us where to properly stand so that we wouldn't get looking like that orange crate. That orange crate was like toothpicks and that thing back blasted it. We learned how to fire a 105-close rifle. We learned how to fire a bazooka. Did not fire an M79. I don't believe. Or did we?

Dean Wetzel: That was the, was that the, or maybe I'm mistaken.

John McManus: It was it looked like a breakdown shotgun, and it had a 20 millimeter?

Dean Wetzel: 40 mike mike.

[00:30:00] John McManus: 40, 40-millimeter round in it. I think we might have fired an M79 in that training. Put in one, fired, I think, because I remember him having an armored vehicle out in the field or something. And it seems like I remember that big, tall ass sight on that thing. They had to put a big lob on it, you know. So, we fired all that shit. Any man carried gun, and some cruiser

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stuff, we learned how to fire. And at least be able to load it, and prep it, and fire it,

Dean Wetzel: So, when you complete your training at AIT, and you've completed bootcamp well actually let's go back a little bit. When did you get the title Marine? Is it Right when you arrive at bootcamp?

John McManus: I think at graduation you went from being a boot to, or slimy civilian or whatever they wanted to call you to a private, I believe, and there was only. One or two PFCs that got, we were privates, we were no strip, you know, no, I think a private is just one Chevron, and that's when they called us marines, I think when, on graduation. Might have been the first time they called you that, I remember, I think.

Dean Wetzel: Did they ever put something like the EGA in your hand?

John McManus: What's that?

Dean Wetzel: The Eagle Globe an Anchor. That goes on your dress uniform. And set it on your hand. Ya, we had to do something like that, I was wondering if you guys have to do a crucible or anything?

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John McManus: The only thing we had with a glob an anchor on it besides something stamped on our clothing, would be for our dress hat had a globe an anchor. I think in the center of the, whatever they call them.

Dean Wetzel: The cover.

John McManus: Yeah, the cover. Cover. That's what they call it. Cover. Military cover.

Dean Wetzel: Alright. So, you look, so you finish AIT, you finish boot camp, become a Marine do you go straight from AIT to Vietnam? Where?

John McManus: Home on leave if I remember rightly.

Dean Wetzel: Home on leave?

John McManus: Yeah, and I don't know what it was, 15 days or so, but home on leave, and I stayed home for part of that time. And then I went back a little early and I visited my aunt in Los Angeles, I believe. And she I stayed with her for maybe two days, three days, something like that. And she had a boy that was about my age. He was older than I was, actually. But we went to a concert or something that she thought was entertaining for us. I think we went to see; it was either Donovan or Bob Dylan, I can't remember, at some nightclub in L. A. And listened to him sang. Went to Disneyland one time when I went out there.

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She was a pretty nice lady. Then I had to go check in at the barracks. Like I said, I waited at the gate for my other buddy to show up, but he had already gone in, so that didn't work out.

Dean Wetzel: Awesome. Now do you feel your training both in AIT and boot camp prepared you for Vietnam. Prepared you for what's next?

John McManus: I don't think it really prepared me for the country and the climate and the war situation and, you know, that kind of thing, but I definitely learned how to operate equipment, the guns of war or whatever you call it, you know, and in that standpoint, the rest of it was just suck it up and go with the flow, you know. I mean if it was too hot for you that's too fucking bad. You know, it's too hot for him too and you know you're him bitching, you know. Yeah. Didn't have anything to compare it with. Maybe somebody else, I mean, we did have people that were Korean War vets, and you know, but never, I never really talked to them because they were all in the command bunker. You know, that's where those guys all were, all the officers and all the NCO gunnies. Usually our gunnery sergeant, our lieutenant, our captain. I think the corpsman stayed up there in the command bunker. There's a radio operator. One of 'em usually stayed up there. I don't know who all, we didn't really have a chaplain there. And they come out to visit. When we were in Da Nang, we got to go to church, I think twice.

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Dean Wetzel: So, what was your first assignment then? After basic, after you get back from leave, you just go into another unit. Do you remember? Do you remember when you were possibly in Vietnam then?

John McManus: We went through training and when training was done, we went home on leave. We came back and I think we went to what they called staging battalion. And staging battalion kept us there until they got enough of them together and they shipped us overseas. Some people left by airplane, went over. We went by ship when it come time for us to stage up. And in staging battalion, we think we went on fucking runs too. I think we went on some kind of cross-country run. I want to say 7, 10 miles, something like that. With light packs and you know that kind of stuff. So, we were still doing all kinds of PT and stuff. We weren't doing rifle drill, you know, left shoulder arm stuff, but we definitely were still doing physical training and stuff. And I don't, I think staging battalion, we didn't do any new stuff. I don't think other than PT and wait for, we got enough people together to get orders to ship out. Because, I don't know, I'm trying to think of what month I went back there, well I left in June, right? Or July, I left in July. When I left in June, I got to Vietnam in July, I think.

Dean Wetzel: Okay, that makes sense because you said you went over on ship.

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John McManus: Yeah, I did. It took 21 days to get over there,

Dean Wetzel: How was that?

John McManus: It was boring mostly, I mean, there's not much out there in the ocean, it's a big place. We didn't even get to don't think we even had any rifles or anything on the ship. We got all that stuff and we got to Vietnam; I believe. We just had sea bags and uniforms. And, Yeah, it was mostly just boring. Oh, we did do something. We when we crossed the day line, you know, across from Sunday into Monday or whatever the other way around. Monday into Sunday or we sailed through into tomorrow. Did we? We were sailing.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. cause you were coming from California, going towards Asia. You would be going into the next day. Yeah. You would re We missed a day. You would skip a day.

John McManus: Yep. We skipped a day if I remember right. So they had an initiation on the boat and they lined us all up and we had to run the gauntlet on the deck and they had fucking, at the end of the gauntlet, they had, we had to crawl and grunt like pigs and do kind of weird shit and they had spread a bunch of garbage on the deck and it was greasy and they didn't want to break anybody's legs or anything but they had fun with it. Spankin you on the ass and stuff. Yeah, is that what that is? What's that called?

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Dean Wetzel: Shellback?

John McManus: Shellback. And that's when you cross the date line.

Dean Wetzel: Cross the equator. You guys might have done it when you crossed the date line. I did it when I crossed the equator.

John McManus: Well, we did get a little card from King Neptune or something saying we, or whatever the hell that is. But anyway, at the end they had some big thing. He was a big fat fucker. I don't know who he was, but he had a big beer belly on him. He had his belly all greased up and you had to kiss his belly, I think. Bend down and really kiss that fat fuck's belly. And I don't remember.

Dean Wetzel: Was there an olive in his belly button?

John McManus: I don't remember. I don't, honestly, I don't. I just, I, you know, it was one of those things like eat shit, do it quick, keep your nose plugged, you know. SO

Dean Wetzel: For me, I heard about the Navy, and it was like hush. Cause I guess it's like the only authorized hazing event the DOD puts on. And I was like wait wait, wait. The navy's going to haze me. And they're like, yes, the navy's gonna haze you. And I was like

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John McManus: I think it was Navy guys.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. I was like, sign me up. Let these guys, let me see what they think hazing is. Can I do it back to them? No, you can't do it back to them. At least not these guys. Next Pollywogs, because that's what we were, we're Pollywogs. You may have heard that term because you weren't a part of King Neptune's deck.

John McManus: Yeah, I heard that. Shellbacks and Pollywogs, yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Bring something back with those little guys? Yeah. That's a great time. Most people don't even know that happens. I love telling the story about that because you're absolutely right. Garbage on the ship, all the condiments that you couldn't eat all of a sudden magically show up that you have to crawl through the stuff. You don't, you can't even identify things. It's a great time. I'm glad you got to experience that because that is probably one of the better things you can do with the Navy.

John McManus: Well yeah, one thing about it, it kept us interested, you know?

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. Like you said, it's a long, boring trip over there, so doing something was nice.

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[00:44:00] John McManus: It seems like we pulled watch duty at night, and it seemed like they had people assigned at the fantail of the ship, garbage watch or something, that's where they threw the garbage off, I believe, the fantail. But yeah, we had to go back there and stand fantail watch, but I don't think I had to. I mean, the ship that I went over on had a name, the USS William Weagle. And I think it was a, maybe it was a freighter ship that had the hull converted to racks, bunks, you know. I don't know how many trips that ship, but I've got a book, you can look that shit up in the book. look up the U. S. William Weagel and they've got a record of every freaking trip it took across the pond. But I think it was civilian operated. But so anyway, yeah. Yeah, it was boring. I remember a couple of exciting things happened. One now ran up topside and there was a report that there were dolphins proposing on the bow of the, of were riding the wakes, they were surfing out there and that was kind of neat. They were just tagging along a ride. I think I don't know if they were traveling long distances and they do that so they don't have to, so they can save energy. I think. Don't know.

Dean Wetzel: Well, so you get across the pond, you get shelled back, you get all that experience done. What is it like getting to Vietnam? I mean, at this point you've had, what, six, seven months of training, a lot of buildup. You know

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you're getting ready for it. So, you ran in, was Vietnam what you were expecting right away?

John McManus: Not really. I don't know what I expected. I know I thought it was kind of weird that they didn't have a dock to come out and got us in mike boats. And I was looking at my pictures and they said, this picture, I wrote on the back of it, after the fact, coming in from Da Nang Harbor to drop anchor, July 9th, 1966. Mike boats come out and pick us up because Da Nang has no docks. I don't think that's true. I think they did have docks. Now why the hell? I don't know. But I thought. I thought we landed in Chu Lai. So, this might not be a picture of Da Nang Harbor, because I added it later, by, but those are the boats that came out and got us. And we, I think we went over the side, went down to some lower level, they opened a hatch down there and we went down a rope and climbed into the boats.

Dean Wetzel: Kind of like World War II status almost, Korea status. That's awesome. So, then you get....

John McManus: that's on a ship. Yep. High and dry. Okay I probably had a camera with me, so I popped a couple pictures. Here's one. This is this one here. Picture taken January 26, while in route for Operation DeSoto. So apparently, we loaded up on trucks. And we went on DeSoto. It was trucked somewhere,

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probably to the airport, and then probably helicopters took us out from there.

Not sure. So, when I was at the airport, I got some pictures of jets landing on the airstrip. And a radar installation I thought was kind of cool. And here's one. Me and a couple other Marines snuck off to Anton. I don't know where that was. for the day and met a couple of drunk Koreans in the Playboy Club. So we stayed overnight at some kind of facility and we were able to get off and usually they kept you enclosed into, you know, they'd put a tent, they'd say you have to go to transit facility and you check into transit facility while you're in route somewhere. Or some outfit would say, here, stay in these tents while you're waiting to, for transportation to pick you up. We're going to go choppers or whatever. But anyway, so those are the kind of shots. Then again, I'm not out in the field. We're just doing that fucking around, you know. So those are times when we were having fun. Here's, here, I've written. Question mark, Hill 65 before Operation DeSoto. Question mark. This apparently is somewhere I'm gonna say maybe in the Da Nang area. Hill 65 or maybe Hill 55. And we were doing gung-ho pictures of where we try somebody else's rockets. You know what I mean? And take pictures of us dealing with somebody else's. So, I got a picture of me with a scope. That's an infrared night vision scope on that rifle on an M14. Big old clunky thing made a, I think a reddish image on a black background or a black image on a red background. It was funny. Okay. There's a bazooka in there, right? And then that is it. What else do I got? I'm showing in

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there. A bunch of us standing around giving us the finger, oh, Ollie. Oh, this is a shotgun. This is a Model 12, a shotgun, I think, and I can't remember if it was a takedown model. I think it was a Model 12, but I don't know if it had a hammer on it, it was a Model 97 maybe? Winchester's.

John McManus: And I remember it had brass shells, all brass. You know, the sides, you know, not plastic, but yeah, so anyway, we do these gung-ho flicks.

Dean Wetzel: That's awesome.

John McManus: Here's another picture. Jet crash let's see.

Dean Wetzel: Do you remember when you did your first patrol? Because as being an 11, correct?

John McManus: Yeah, it was in what the hell is the name of that village. Tantra. Tantra Village, I think was right here. There was a couple of them. Tantra 1, Tantra 2, whatever. And I think the first patrol I did was when I got assigned to a place, I always called it, we were across the road from Mike Battery. Mike Battery, here we go. This was Mike Battery. I think Mike Battery and Chu Lia. They, we had a little low hill and we were across the road from that artillery battery and I don't know what the name of the hill, you know the

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hills went by numbers. Yeah. You know if it was 65 meters tall, it was called Hill 65, you know?

Dean Wetzel: Only a few have I, I've come across that had like....

[00:50:00] John McManus: and so, we ran patrols. Out in to out of off wherever our hill was. I don't know which one of these little things was our hill, but we ran patrols out through these hills. And what's that? The (Sonta Bong River, name, and location not able to be verified by interviewer). Yeah. (Sonta Bong River) comes through there. So, we ran it. So, our first patrols, I don't know which way they were. If they were up here, they were down there, but. I remember I had difficulty navigating the slippery rice paddies and stuff. We were there, I think July and August, and I think in September we were having rains, and it was real muddy and wet, cold. And I twisted my ankle. And I got light duty, and they sent me into Da Nang, and they put a cast on my foot. And I didn't have to go on patrol anymore, but I had to stay in hole watch. And my cast got soaked, and they had a little rubber puck in the bottom of the cast. When I tried to walk on that rubber puck, it crammed up into my foot, the arch of my foot. And it would give me a cramped charley horse. And the cast was all fucking deteriorated. I couldn't keep it dry, you know, Ron Simmons, you know, tried to wrap plastic around it and shit, yeah, didn't work. So, they finally, I think I went back into Da Nang, they cut the damn thing off and wrapped it in

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ace bandages and sent me back, you know. I could keep care of an ace bandage, but. And had a really black and blue ankle. Because I had rolled that damn ankle. Okay, that was across the road from Mike Battery. Here was, I think this was off Hill 65 in Vietnam. This is a jet that comes out of this valley. We're on a hill looking out into this valley and, I can't remember if that's the day the jet crashed or if that's the day after the jet crashed and they sent guys down there with demolitions and they blew the jet up. But it was shot down in a valley there, and we ran patrols out in that valley, and I do not even know what the name was, several, we had run several patrols. We were on Hill 65, I think, twice in Vietnam, early and then after DeSoto we came back, I think, again to it. We, there was a battery out on a peninsula, a finger of Hill 65. And they pulled up and left. And when they left, we went down and tore all their buildings apart and moved their shit up to our hill. And this is what we built. That was the best house I ever had in Vietnam. That wooden shed. We came off an operation up north at Dong Ha. They flew us down there and we were down there November and December, and then Part of January, in January we took off on Operation DeSoto and I don't think we came back to that hill again. But we built that damn thing with a monkey saw and I think we had one hammer, and we straightened the old nails and took them out of the lumber, you know, we didn't have any nails, nothing. We put that hooch together and that was nice. No squeak, it wasn't out of sandbag, funky. Bunker.

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Dean Wetzel: It was dry.

John McManus: It was dry, and we actually built racks. We built wooden racks, and we got the village kids to sell us mattresses that were just cotton or something stuffed in hand. And so, they might've been that thick. You know, you roll 'em up like a bedroll. But man, that was so nice. We spent Christmas there. We had a table where we could write. Sent cards home. I got a care package delivered and it had a fifth of whiskey in it. And oh shit, I was everybody's hero. Popcorn, stuffed in popcorn. My mother packed everything in popcorn because she figured it'd make good packing material and we could eat it even if it was stale. You know, there might be caramel corn, or it might just be buttered popcorn, but ya

Dean Wetzel: How was the mail over there for you? How was mail?

John McManus: Mail we got mail all the time, but I don't, I think our squad leader went up to the command tent. I don't know, mail came out, probably came out with a chow truck, if it brought C rations out or if it brought a hot meal out, it probably, the mail would come with that, and then after the meal was served or whatever, the squad leaders would. We'd go to the command tent and the rest of us would all go back to our hooches, and he'd get all the mail and come back and pass the mail out to whoever got mail. Didn't have to pay for

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anything, we just needed to write address on there and write FMF, Fleet Marine Force, and I don't think there was any postage. No. I think our folks had postage. Come in the other direction. Here's what we flew in. That's why I grabbed this picture. When I was over there, we were flying in those CH 34s. Bullnose helicopter. Gas engine in them. I think they ran aviation gas in them. Piston engine. I can't remember. They held seven people maybe. Plus, the crew. But there wasn't much room in them.

Dean Wetzel: I was in I rode around a lot in Huey's, which I'm sure came after that.

John McManus: Here's some propaganda we must have got some time or another.

Dean Wetzel: So, when you guys were off operation, you guys weren't on guard duty or something like that? What were you guys doing for recreation?

John McManus: Plenty of cards getting some kid to bring us some beer. Not much. I don't remember, I don't remember if they had somebody had a football and they'd throw a football back and forth. I don't know what they played, but I didn't usually participate. I don't, sitting around drinking, smoking, and fucking chewing the fat. Trying to coach some kid to play basketball. Bring his big sister so that somebody could jump in a rack with her or something, you know,

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that kind of shit going on. I don't know. We didn't have any organized activities that I can remember. I don't think I ever had any.

Dean Wetzel: You're all right with it, John, I'd like to talk a little bit about just Operation DeSoto because it's come up a few times now. When exactly did that operation happen? Do you remember? Or when did it begin?

John McManus: DeSoto. It ran, it ran, Where's my award? This says it ran January 27th to April 7th. That's what this says. And I think one of those pictures had me taken off for Operation DeSoto. I don't know. We were stationed for something to go to Operation DeSoto.

Dean Wetzel: Do you remember what your mission was with that operation? Did they even tell you what your mission was?

John McManus: The squad leaders probably knew. They're the ones that got all the information. But I'm going to say, we were going to sweep out a peninsula that hadn't been inhabited by any military, you know, American military in a long time. We weren't sure what we were running into. But we were pretty certain it was Viet Cong infested. And see what we were doing on that. And we, this is a map of part of it. This is Duck Fall is the town, I think, that was nearest it. Well, we started up there at a, at coming up the highway, and we were sweeping villages, coming in on, like, two track roads, and sweeping

through villages, searching villages you know, that kind of stuff. And we had a big operation. There was our company. And I Mike company was on one side of this, and I don't know who was the other company, but there were like two or three companies that was heading out this peninsula. I think that's what they said.

Dean Wetzel: Was it fairly open terrain, or do you remember it being dense?

[01:00:00] John McManus: Right, it was big, huge, open rice paddies with dikes going across them, and they would tee into, or and a village would have a few huts in it, 10, 15, 20 huts or something. And then it would open up into rice paddies again. And then over there you'd see a tree line, thick vegetation. It'd be another village over there. So, it was kind of like that. It was sporadic dikes and that kind of thing. But the place we got pinned down was a big dike. We'd come off a hill called Sabin. We'd spent the night there if I remember rightly. We set up a perimeter around Sabin. They were doing they were doing bomb drops and that stuff softening up the area and getting ready to, apparently, one of the other companies had taken rounds already, I think. And so they were, bombing and napalming and doing all kinds of shit out there calling in artillery strikes. And we were waiting to move out our captain I think moved us out, and so we started pulling back and going up the hill and going off the other side of the hill, you know We were kind of on the Whatever the hell it is the north end of the

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hill, we went off the south end of the hill, I guess but we took rounds out of a village. We spent the night staying there on this hill. We just all crapped out and lined up in a row around the, you know, like below the military crest of the hill. And we all sat there and had chow and stayed the night. And then the next morning we headed out to go on this sweep. And when we pulled back You know, I set a machine gun up on a corner and we were on a trail along the base of that hill and we came back and no we weren't on a base, we were on a hill. We came back along this side trail and then we had a machine gun on a corner and then we turned and went up the hill and off the back side. Well, I think I was on a corner, somebody else had the machine gun, but I think I was just ammo humping at the time. Somebody else had the gun. And when our squad leader went up the hill and a round went right by us, a sniper round went right by us to hit him in the ankle. And so that, that fucked up everything. So, we didn't head out. We got a late start that day because we had to bundle him up, got him medivac. And I don't remember the chopper coming or where the medevac came from, but he went out of there. He never made the operation. And then so we were without a squad leader. The next guy in line was lance corporal. And I think he was running the squad. Anyway, so we took off, we headed off the hill and we started walking on this big, long dike across this open rice paddy. And when we got to the other side of the dike, T intersected with another dike, we turned that corner, and they had a fire, a rifle squad was up in

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front of us, and they turned another corner and they were coming down another trail, so we went up and zig zagged and went in on this trail, and they hit a bunker that was opened up on them, shootin I don't know what the hell they had, 50 caliber or something up there, they had some kind of anti-aircraft gun or something. And they were shooting up the trail and pinned a bunch of guys down out there. So, we stayed there shooting into the tree line and calling in airstrikes on the hill and all that shit. But that's typical, you know, they knew we were coming, you can't move a two- or three-man company quietly, you know. And so, then we stayed all night so they knew we were coming up the valley and I think they called in reinforcements or wherever they could get. And that village had trenches dug behind every fucking hedge row in there. There was, you know, on the village side it was a low trench where they could sneak along, look out through the bushes, so to speak. They had a lot of cover. I mean, they weren't covered from bombs, But, you know, visibility wasn't very good, anyway we stayed there, shooting back and forth at them, you know, we'd take a sniper round, and we'd shoot an area, and we'd take more sniper rounds and shoot an area. I brought a squad up; we had a squad of guys out in the middle of the opening that were taking direct rounds sent another group of guys in to try to help them get out. We had wounded out there, dead out there. It was just a fucking goat rodeo. And finally, after dark, we were able to the lead elements went in there and got all the dead guys out. I remember they went by us

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carrying bodies and ponchos and stuff. We were on a corner with a machine gun set up, even out towards the village, but once it got, started getting dark, it got quiet. Nobody was shooting much, you know. And we were, we pulled back to I think that hill, Sabin, I think we pulled back to there. And I don't know how we ended up, but we ended up at Battalion, and they were on another hill down the road away, so I don't know how we got there. I think maybe we might have loaded on trucks, went back down the road far enough to where we got trucks and went. My trunks, I don't think we walked a battalion. Don't know. Anyway, went back in, we pulled off at night darts. I think we spent the night on Sabin again, I think. And they took a group of volunteers, went back to look for one of the guys who was missing and they. They overlooked him, I think. They didn't know where he was at. They decided they would clear out everybody that was easy pickings, you know. And bring them back, and then they'd go back in. So, they took a group of his close guys, volunteers. And some of them went, but a lot of them didn't go. They had enough. And Other people stepped up and said they would go in, in their stead, you know. And which was good. They'd give them a chance to just get a break, you know, a little bit. Went back in and we, they found me. We didn't leave anybody in a field, so that was good. You know, they were big on that, not leaving anybody in a field. Of course, so would the Viet Cong. They were so good at that. I guess if you figured your bound bodies, you know, you could damn well be sure that they were overloaded. They were

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carrying so many bodies they couldn't haul that one, you know. That's because they were pretty strict about hiding the bodies. Even if they didn't haul them out, they'd hide them. Because they didn't want you to know that you'd been successful. That's probably good psychology.

Dean Wetzel: Well, thank you for sharing that. I know that's probably not exactly easy.

John McManus: Anyway, I never got in any situation where I was hand to hand combatting anybody, which was kind of nice. I, you know, most of my stuff was, we're taking rounds and we fired spray, you know, spray the area down and rifleman angle in and try to, you know, do a move on them and usually the rifleman ended up with the brunt of the stop. The only time machine guns really got into assaulting type things is when they want us to assault a hill or, you know, then you get online, and you start moving up the hill. And we did have some situations with that, but we were fortunate. We lost one guy Jerry DeMunda was his name. He's from Buffalo, New York. And he got died of assault. I don't even know where the round came from. Because most of the action was on the back side of him coming up over this cemetery. And all of a sudden, this rifleman was out in front of him a little bit. You know, his ammo humper. And Jerry was kind of off to the side of him just a little bit. And he looked back, and he said, Jerry laid on the ground, he took a hit, and he was

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down there, like, dead, down. And he said he was, I didn't see it happen, he said Jerry was laying there on his back with a smile on his face. I don't know what, he was a smiling kind of guy anyway. But he said it was the strangest fucking thing. He's laying there with his eyes wide open with a smile on his, dead as hell. I think I had he got hit in the head.

Dean Wetzel: Did you have anything that you considered a good luck charm?

John McManus: Not really, I had, I think I had a St. Christopher medal that I wore for quite a while. I think I lost it. I had my dog tags, kept those on me most, all the time. And I think maybe on my dog tags it was hooked with a chain and I think I had a St. Christopher medal. I might have had, I might have even had a scapular medal, which has a picture of Christ on it, and it's got, it's knitted around the outsides, and it was in plastic, and it was kind of pretty durable, I had one of those. But we, they gave us out. shit like, they give us up decks of cards with aces on them. A whole deck of cards full of aces of spades. And they come passing them around saying, everybody put aces of spades on there because we heard it was superstitious. And so, they were using psychological warfare is what they were using. Then you get. Go out and tack under trees, you know, and shit like that, you know, just to try to spook the enemy, you know, I didn't believe much of that shit. I always looked at that fucking ace of spades and it looked like you were putting a bullseye on your hat,

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you know, a lot of guys stuck them in a rubber band on their helmet. So, you got this fucking white spot on your helmet with a black dot in the middle of this, the ace of spades. I'm going, eh, I don't think I want one of those in my helmet. I'll stick with the camouflage to make it harder to see, you know, I don't want to show up.

Dean Wetzel: What do you think was the best part of your service experience?

[01:10:00] John McManus: You know what I enjoyed the most? Messing around with the kids, little kids you know, we had kids that come around our hill, hung around. I can remember one little kid was teaching me some Vietnamese and I was teaching him English. Mostly this happened mostly this happened in the Da Nang area on Hill 65. We were there long enough, we kind of, we were there like two, three months before we moved out on another operation. And we came back there again later. But I talked to the lieutenant and this kid had a little bit of a speech impediment. And come to find out he had a tooth growing out of the roof of his mouth. And that's why he talked funny. He had one of his tooth seeds, apparently, he got it misplaced, you know, genetics or whatever. And I asked him, I said, well, I had been in Da Nang, I had a molar pulled because I got an infected molar toothache. And the lieutenant put me on a chow truck and I went into the Da Nang and I found the dentist and he had written me permission slip and I went and they jerked that sucker out and put

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me back on the chow truck and I think I stayed overnight and took the next truck going back to the hill. Did the same thing with this kid. I said, do you want to get that tooth out of your head? Yeah. I said, I'm going to ask the lieutenant if, if they could ship you to our dentist and pull that tooth for you, would you want to do that? Would your mom be okay with it? And he was all for it. And I said, you know, it's going to hurt, but I said, they'll get rid of that damn tooth and maybe you can talk a little better, you know? And so anyway, I went to see the lieutenant. He was receptive to it. You know, they were always trying to think of projects that could, you know, win the hearts and minds of the people or whatever. And so anyway, yeah, he went into Da Nang and got his tooth pulled. His mouth was sore for a few days. But yeah. Little Tom. We used to call him Tommy. I think his name was Pom. But I took a picture of him. He's this little guy on a bicycle. And somebody else took that picture of him. But I never had a, I never had a camera when he was around. I never got a picture of him. There's another, that little girl there, she would bring coats and take your laundry back home to her mom and they'd wash your laundry for you. If you had a pair of dirty pants, you know, you give them, shit, ten cents, fifteen cents, they'd get her done, you know. And if you needed new utilities, they'd end up with clothing, they'd take them home, do the laundry, and if somebody shipped out the next day, they might not get the laundry back to them. So, they had shelves full of laundry. You know so and so and I said, no. Well, he Mike

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company, he'd go away, I have his laundry, you see so, and you tell him I got laundry, and I'll sell it to you for 20 cents. You can keep them or whatever.

Yeah. The kids were always fun. I remember I don't know, one of the operations we were on, we spent the night near A small hillside that had tea plantation on it. We set up a poncho there and that's where we spent the night. I think we spent a day or two there. And it seemed like there was a bridge and a river there.

But we had some down time. And one of the guys had a record player. Like a child's record player about this big and it's got a little arm. You bring it over.

And somehow, they got that damn thing rigged up so it would run off the radio batteries. The old, I think we had Perc 10s and then we got Perc 25s, and I don't remember what era that was when they switched over. But one of those batteries, you could disassemble them and throw off enough cells that you could get the voltage right or whatever. Anyway, long story short, they would put that battery, it was a DC record player, then some other guy would carry a record, or maybe you got one, you got, they got three records, they put it back, back on, put a record in it. Well, the fucking records didn't get cracked and damaged, you need to line up the crack and still play it, you know what I mean? And anyway, I remember one time we had the kids singing. To a song on the record and it was the Beach Boys, and they were playing Barber Ann. And Ba in Vietnam I think is beef or water buffalo, mother. It had several different meanings to it depending upon the inflection on it. Whether you go up, whether you go down

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with it, anyway. So anyway, we got the kids all gathered around and most of the song is just saying ba, right? And they knew how to say ba. So, they're going ba, ba ba Barbaran ba. They're out there singing bar ba ran. And we had them singing bar ba ran out in the middle of the fucking boondocks with no electricity on the record player. And you know, I remember those. Those were fun times. And they would, that one little shit, he was smoking a cigarette. Let me, can I have a cigarette? You know, we're giving this fucking 10-year-old cigarettes. He's smoking cigarettes and singing Barbara Ann. Yeah; the Marines were polluting the children of tomorrow. But those were entertaining times. That's awesome. Enjoyed the kids. The kids. The kids are kind of good. Who knows they probably went home and told their mother how many marines were there and what were their ranks and all that shit, but it was hard to ignore them.

Dean Wetzel: Do you recall the day your service ended and where you were?

John McManus: I remember hopping on the chow truck, saying goodbye to everybody. And so, it was like the middle of the day and getting on that truck. And headed to Da Nang to check into a transit facility and I'm not sure if I actually had orders in my hand or I just had a permission slip that got me to the transit facility and the transit facility would give me my orders to go home. I'm not sure what, how that worked. I don't remember is what I'm saying. But yeah, we hopped the chopper and when I, that's it. When I hopped the truck to go in,

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lo and behold, Ed McAndrews was on that goddamn truck. We used to call him Mac. And Ed was in Vietnam when I arrived there. So, he was due to rotate out, right? And he's on the back of this truck coming out to our hill when I'm getting on, I'm getting on the truck to go into, Da Nang to go home. I'm done with my tour. So, I'm going like, well, fuck, I thought you already went home, Mac. You've been gone for two months. No, it's a long story. What happened was, just like me, I took R& R after Operation DeSoto. Mac went right after me, and when he went on R& R somewhere, never to come back. Went back to his outfit. He had a buddy in the Air Force, and he went to the Air Force, and they had these really nice two-story buildings that they stayed in with fucking, I think they had metal racks with mattresses and everything. And he, his buddy gave him a uniform and he, there was a spare bed in his hooch. He joined the Air Force. So, he went AWOL. And was living with his Air Force buddy, eating in their mess hall, and never got caught for like two months or something. So anyway, I'm leaving, and here's Mac Andrews coming in on the truck. He's, yeah, I've been with the Air Force or something. I'm going like, see ya Mac, I'm heading home, good to see ya, you know. Well, I met him at reunion in San Diego, he flew. I don't know. Was it San Diego? Maybe it was Philadelphia. I met him in Philadelphia. He lived in Boston. And he showed up for the Philadelphia Reunion and told me the story of him going AWOL. He said, after he'd gone on Operation DeSoto, he just lost his goddamn courage. He did not

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want to go back to war. And he said, I wouldn't, couldn't admit that for a long time, but he said yeah. I went to see my buddy in the Air Force. He put me up. I stayed there until I got caught. Then I had to go to jail for a while. And Motivation Platoon and I was coming back and rejoining the outfit because I had to make up the time I missed. He Ended up going an extra two or three months in Vietnam. Plus, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Where did you get to go on R& R?

John McManus: Whatever happened to come up, usually be officers and that kind of stuff. Got the better picks. Married men got the better picks. I got to tell you about this.

Dean Wetzel: Yep, I can pause this.

John McManus: I went in April after Operation DeSoto.

Dean Wetzel: Resume, and resume. Alright, John. When you get out of the service, you end your time in the Marine Corps. Do you return to Michigan, or do you go somewhere else?

John McManus: Michigan. I came to Kalamazoo. I started dating my wife. When I was, I came back I came back and got sent to Camp Lejeune because my division had pulled out of the West Coast. So, I went to the East Coast. I

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had, what did I have, July, August, I had July to January to finish up my tour on the East Coast. When I was home on leave, I called up a girl that I'd gone to high school with and actually grade school with too. Went out with her a few times and I started dating her. So, I think once or twice I would come home from the East Coast on a long weekend pass and somebody, I didn't drive. So, some other guy, we all pitch in money, he'd pick us up. He was heading, I think, to Detroit. So, he dropped me off at Telegraph Road in Detroit, and I would either hitchhike or I'd have one of my relatives come get me. And I'd come home. Come home and go on a date with my wife. And have, you know, eat, sleep the night at my ma's place, and turn around And somebody would take me back over to Telegraph Road, Detroit, drop me off, and we'd meet at the Top Hat restaurant, and poof, we'd hit the road and drive all the way to South Carolina, er, North Carolina, back to....

Dean Wetzel: How would you say your service changed you in your life?

John McManus: I don't know. I think it grew me up. I think it helped me focus more on what I wanted to do. I still don't know what I wanted to do for a career, you know. But when I came home, I date, I got dating. I went out, got a job, I started working right away. I was working in January.

Dean Wetzel: Where at?

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[01:20:00] John McManus: I went to work at General Motors. Punching buttons on a press in their room. You know, I worked there. January through August, I think in August, I started school at Battle Creek Community College and my wife helped me get signed up and stuff. She wanted to see me go to school and she was already in school and then I transferred from Battle Creek to Kellogg and then I transferred from Kellogg to Western and transferred, my credits all transferred in except for, I lost one credit going from Valley to Western. I think there was two four-hour classes at Western. And I had to take three, three-hour classes at Valley, so I, nine, eight versus nine credit hours. So, I lost one. But I transferred all that in and I got involved in a program for industrial education, and I was a teacher for 30 years,

Dean Wetzel: Do you think your time in the Marine Corps helped you be a teacher?

John McManus: I don't think so. I, other than maturity, you know, growing up. My, my school skills were horrible. You know, my writing skills, you know, I was shop classes I liked. The rest of that stuff in high school, I wasn't good at anything, you know, because I didn't take an interest in it. But it grew me up enough to where I could at least sit still in class and show up on time, you know. And my wife helped me, didn't type, you know, so I would handwrite my reports and stuff and then stuff I had to get typed up, she'd type it up. She'd

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correct my English and stuff, try to make it look like I was halfway literate. And but gradually you learn more and more how to do that stuff on your own, you know, I went to school, I graduated with a bachelor's degree. Went into teaching, and while I was teaching, I started my master's degree and so I finished that and then I've taken outside classes besides that, you know, I didn't count towards a doctorate.

Dean Wetzel: How did you personally feel with the riots and protests that were going on towards Vietnam?

John McManus: Did, when I got back, I honestly, I didn't let that shit bother me. I didn't, I was focused on going to school, getting married. I know a lot of people want to talk about my experiences and stuff. And I honestly, I just want to put it behind me. I didn't really want to talk about it. And I didn't talk much about it really when I got home. I just got on with what I need to do to get a job, you know, get married, you know, that kind of stuff. I didn't have anybody spit at me when I got off the airplane. This is Kalamazoo. You know, they're that stuff hadn't started, I don't think, or at least if it did, I got off on a day when there wasn't any spitting going on or whatever, you know. So, I don't, I went to Western. I mean, that was a big active campus, but I went to my classes, was in class, and when I got out of my classes, if I went home or went to work. And when I was home, I was studying. You know, I was busy. I didn't really pay

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much attention to protest, or who, you know. I didn't go shoot pool with the guys every night and stuff, you know. I'd go out with some of the guys at the end of the semester, after final exams. Maybe go out and have a few beers or something. But I don't remember playing much. I just, and I don't remember getting all involved, but I remember my cousins and stuff, they always wanted to talk about it. Well, what do you think about this? What do you think about that? And I just say, not much. You know, what do you think, now they're fragging people over there. I said, well, all I can say is I never saw anybody get fragged, nobody in my outfit was gonna blow our lieutenant up. Some of them were pissed at him, but yeah, what do you think about whatever the hell the big issues was. What do you think about Cali murdering all them people in My Lai? I said, well, I can't say as a, I've had taken sniper rounds from a village where I didn't feel like going in there and killing a few people. But mostly it'd get in there and be some old damn grandma and mama's son just trying to you know, survive, you know, and you show up and she's got the Viet Cong showing up at night, stealing their rice, and telling her that she's got to be a freedom fighter or what, and then we come through in the daytime and ask her where's the Viet Cong at, you know. Well, she says anything to us, they're gonna come back there, they're gonna get rid of that, they're gonna cut her fucking head off, you know, those people were caught in the middle all the time. Some of them, yeah. You know, after the United States was over there long enough you know, we

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squashed enough rice and busted up enough orchards and blew up enough villages where we, I imagine, made quite a few enemies. You know what I mean? You can't drive a tank through a god damn village. You can't walk across a rice paddy without fucking with somebody's crops. You know what I mean? Poor son of a bitch. He ain't got a, he ain't got a John Deere. John Deere's an hay eatin bull, you know. Yeah. I didn't blame him, honestly, for not wanting to say anything. Yeah, I did that. I think they were a lot of, for the most part, they were caught in the middle and I don't know who their leadership, I don't remember what his name was, to something. When we got over there, and he was gone and somebody else came in and took over. The rich guys were running the country but the poor guys sure as hell weren't. They were just out there trying to struggle and, you know, feed themselves.

Dean Wetzel: Well, we're getting towards the end of your oral history here, John. I would like to take a moment here and open up the floor to you directly in case there's anything we haven't talked about or covered yet that you would like to add to this oral history.

John McManus: Well, I know when I went back to Vietnam in 2006.

Dean Wetzel: 6 and 14, I think you said?

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John McManus: Yeah, I think it was 6, yeah. The people, the place had changed an amazing amount. I mean, they had interstate highways and their, everything had improved. The people were dressed well. You know, they didn't have ragamuffin shoes on. They had better clothes. A lot of them were western style clothes. You didn't have too many people living in grass huts. You know, making huts with stuff that grew on site, you know, more metal buildings and metal roofs on, you know, wicker walls, whatever, but I thought, as a country, they looked like they were doing a lot better, and what we did teach them, I think, in ten years, we, there was how to be. Capitalists, and maybe they already knew that you know. They all know how to hustle and try to make money to buy the things they want, whether it be a radio or a band or some accessory that they could use around the house to make their life a little nicer, you know.

When I went back, I was treated with respect cheerful faces, the children of my generation, the children of Vietnam that were when I was over there at 19 years old were now running the country. Those, a lot of those people knew English because they picked it up when the Americans were over there. They The cuisine in the restaurants is good. It's, French, cause the French were there a good many years. They know how to make a hamburger good. My wife liked Vietnamese food. I don't know. I think it was a good experience to go back and see how their culture is living today. And how much improved it was from the time during the war. They didn't have shit in there before. You know, their

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country was at war. They were poverty stricken. They were hungry. You know, all the bad things that come along with war.

Dean Wetzel: It's awesome that you got to go back and see it in a peaceful setting. You know, like you got to, it almost kind of completes the story for you almost. You saw it in its ugly period.

John McManus: I'd recommend anybody go back if they fought a war somewhere and go back and make a trip back because it'll improve you. If you got any hatreds and resentments and stuff like that, it'll help you with that. You know, when we went back, when I went with just the military tour, we had South Vietnamese military men that were retired. They'd have a job, government job tending the cemeteries or something, you know, and they would tour you around the cemetery and show you where the sites were and this and that, you know, explain the graves and that kind of stuff. They'd have some interpreter. They had cushy jobs. They weren't hard labor jobs, you know, like the rest of the country has to do, you know, yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Is there anything you've ever, you've always wanted to share about your service or your Vietnam, or your veteran experience that you never have?

John McManus: I can't think of anything. I've never been real close mouthed about it. I mean, I haven't really talked about it, but I guess because I had more things to do than talk about stuff that I didn't have any control over, really. I had I don't know, I guess I had some anger issues, but the, I don't know, I didn't get my leg shot off or nothing, you know what I mean. Lost a few friends, but I don't know. I just, I've never been a grudge carrying kind of guy, you know. If anything, you always felt like you got off easy, you know, in the war, you know. I didn't, I never got overrun my position ever when I was over there. Just got lucky. They guess they didn't want me, and you know, I don't think I was ever on a hill that really got you know, assaulted by a large outfit. I didn't really directly get involved in an ambush, you know, where I went out on patrol, and I was ambushed on the trail that. You know, I ended up being a mess, you know. You know, in a lot of ways I was really lucky. I don't know why. Went up north, wandered all over the damn DMZ. Had to deal with mines and booby traps and that kind of stuff, but really never ended up getting into a hand-to-hand combat, assaulting hills, and stuff. Never ran into that when I was up there. The year after, and what they were doing, they were building troops up during that year that I was up at the DM, or not year, the months that I was up in the DMZ, they were building up troops. And I think then they hit, in 68, they put on the Tet Offensive, and they came into Hue, they came, swept across the DMZ area, came into Highway 9 with tanks from Laos, drove right into Highway 9.

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And people up there caught a lot of shit that year. They had a lot of casualties and death. We were up there six months before that, and we got mortared. You know, we were right along the Vanaha River or whatever the hell that is. You know, they had watchtowers that they would they could see our movements on the other side of the river. We were up in the mountains near Laos. I think we were up near Hill, 8 81. 8 82. We wandered around up in those hills, and we never ran into a shit show. So, I guess you could say I was lucky, you know, somebody was looking out for me. I always thought my mother was creeping me out of that war. She was saying her prayers, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Well, John, I just want to thank you again for sitting down with me today, talking about what you did over there, your experiences, sharing a lot of those stories and photographs with me. It was really special, and I really thank you. And one thing I would like to do is just say welcome home. I don't know if you've been told that, but welcome back.

John McManus: Yeah. A lot more often nowadays, you know, it seems like everybody says it, you know, and, but, you know, it's always nice to hear You know, but honestly I never, I didn't feel like any of that shit was, I didn't run into protesters when I got off the airport that I and I didn't go seeking the shit. So, I didn't go looking for somebody that was protesting. If there was a protest going on, I was busy doing other stuff, so I didn't maybe I'm kind of aloof or

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whatever, but. Yeah. It was what it was. I know one thing, that war in Vietnam bought me an education and I took advantage of it. I was grown up and matured up enough after that couple of years in the military that I was able to stay studying and wanted to study. And I didn't have that maturity in high school. You know, I, I learned more science and mathematics as an adult than I ever did in high school, you know. Think a lot of school and education is state of mind. You know, it's are you ready for it, you know. Do you see a function for it, you know? And if you're, I enjoyed my classes for the most part that I took. The education classes, I used to rumble and gripe about it. I always thought they were, they always wanted you to read a bunch of goddamn books and write book reports on it. Well, reading and writing weren't my forte, but I did, you know. But, as far as the technical stuff about my career, I liked it. I liked learning how to, you know, work the machinery and, you know, that kind of stuff. You know. I majored in automotives, so that was right down my alley.