

Activity 7, Sample: Student-Produced, Time-Stamped Transcript

Student Name _____ Date _____

Note to the teacher: Before assigning this transcript, please make your students aware that what they will be reading is a raw, often unpunctuated, transcription of an oral interview that contains incomplete sentences and single words in places. If students are having difficulty, encourage them to recite passages to each other in order to obtain a better sense of the phrasing used.

Can you tell us the name service and rank? My name is Johns Sims, specialist fourth class of the US Army. I served from 1966-1968. (0:22)

Can you tell me any roles, positions or jobs that you have? I was a harbor craft boat which is a boat operators. Our main function was to unload ammunition to troops on the beach. We unloaded 66-68 pounds per week. We unloaded the ships at sea because you couldn't go into the harbor. Just in case they decided to blow it up. (0:55)

Did you enlist or were you drafted? I tried to enlist when I finished High School but I had double vision in my right eye and they wouldn't take me they said to get on with my life because I wouldn't get drafted. 1965-1969, Vietnam started escalating and they started drafting people overlooking minor flaws as they called it. I was stateside for a year, but then went to Vietnam. (1:40)

Did any friends or relatives serve with you in Vietnam? A lot of guys I grew up with served in Vietnam. We all grew up on an island so we pretty much all had boating experience. (1:55) They put us all in boat battalions, every one of them.

Were you able to stay in contact with them? We got separated when we got to Vietnam. Some went south to the Mekong Delta and I went north into Kenwon area. (2:10)

Can you tell me about your relationship with the other people in your unit? Well it was nothing more than we are around the harbor and things of that nature. We got along great, we joke, and we drink beer. Water was impossible to drink it was not sanitized there was no bottled water. We would want to take a shower in it when you could. We did get to see a few USO shows, the Big Bob Hope Show, mostly smaller shows. (3:00) 5 people would come and sing. One show I really remember was the South Vietnamese man came and sang some country music. We drank enough beer that show that they actually sounded good by the time they were finished.

What did you do on your free time I know you just told me was there anything else that you did? We work 7 days a week, 12 hours a day and every two weeks you would switch from night work, to day work. And you worked 18-hour shift. Then you slept, and took care of a little bit of house cleaning, I'll go to the PX when you had time. There wasn't a lot of places where you could go on Liberty. You aren't allowed to just take off and go downtown. (4:00) Sometimes guys can go visit other guys and other companies and other units. But you weren't really scared. I think that's why they drafted so young because you don't find you have no sense that you could die. We were apprehensive when we got there mostly because of the unknown. They give you an in-country orientation, they call it, and they tell you the local customs and all that. I went there, but we all had jet lag, so you don't really listen to very much of it. But a couple things that really got your attention was at the end they wouldn't ask anybody if you have any questions (5:00) but one little fella from New York said "sergeant were in the jungle over here. I know there are snakes in the jungle. You didn't say anything about snakes." He said "Son, there's one hundred

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varieties of snakes, 99 are poisonous and will swallow you whole” I didn't have any more questions and he said you told me everything I need to know “don't mess with the snakes.” Where I was we didn't necessarily see any of that as I was on the coast, more of an urban area, where I was. Where I was we went up the coast with seven or eight boats, and we would go up north, up the coast carrying food, ammo, whatever, you really didn't think about it. Once we were carrying the marines from Da Nang back down the river, but most the time we just carried ammo. (6:00) But they said they just got to hit this, and my plant blind grandmother can hit this and blow you out of the water and that was the first time I really thought about it, he's right. But none of the ammunition was armed, a lot of the ammunition didn't have detonators, but we did have one blue boat blown up and I'm handling them, and they lost one man. They told us from the beginning to look to the man on the left and look to the man on the right and one of you wasn't coming home. That's just the hard fact. This is not the time to scare you, but that's just the way it is. Watch your back guys. The guys that were in the bush probably had it the worst because every tree was a trap. (7:00) It didn't matter where you were. Our biggest thing was we were probably in a secure area, which wasn't always secure, but you were complacent and you would let your guard down and the days were routine and then all the sudden something would happen and bring you back to reality. There was no safe place in Vietnam. Everyplace got blown up.

Can you tell me about your experience stepping off the plane when you first got there? It was hot, humid when we landed in Cameron Bay. Then we went through 3 days of orientation. We started to get some of the gravity of where you are. (8:00) One person in our group got shot in his foot when foot hit the ground and you couldn't convince him that he was going home. He thought he was going to die here but he didn't as far as I know. He went home safely. But you were really overwhelmed by everything that was going on. There was so much going on. Planes, Vehicles, people running everywhere, in a whole new environment you're just not used to.

Did you ever interact with the locals? When we were at home base we have Mamasan and Papasan and babysan, being the children, and they did our laundry, clean the barracks, scrub the floors, gave us haircuts, they made clothes for us, they made any kind of clothes you wanted (9:00) and if they didn't know how to do it, then they knew someone who knew how to do it. They got a lot of our ordinary routine kind of stuff cleaned, washed our floors while we were at home base. When we were on Convoy all that disappeared and our washing machine was a bucket of water with your clothes thrown in it, thrown over the side of the boat, then put wet, hanging from the flagpole to dry it off, that's how we did laundry on Convoy.

Did the locals ever give you guys anything like food? Oh yeah, we weren't supposed to take it but they always brought it. They would sneak over and pass it through the fence, they brought us something that tasted like ham. (10:00) I don't know what it was that tasted like ham. They tried to make a lot of things that tasted like here so they would make a ham sandwich, cheeseburgers, and things of that nature but I really have no idea what was in that stuff, but we ate it anyway. It still tasted better than army chuck.

Were you able to bring any kick knacks or souvenirs home? I have a statue of a head, I think I still have it, Ho Chi Minh, who was the leader. I brought home. I have nieces I brought them home some silk pajamas and dolls. I really don't know where any of that stuff is gone to now. (11:00)

While you were there what was your favorite meal while you were there? Actually it was Thanksgiving. They had the Blue Bell out for Thanksgiving. They printed up a nice menu. We actually had turkey, we had cranberry sauce. That was the best meal we had the whole time and most of it was really decent food to eat. Not always the eggs were powdered, not very appetizing dumped this yellow powder on the grill, not my eggs. We lugged around small boxes of breakfast cereal that was okay that was breakfast on the boat. (12:00)

Can you tell us about the place where you were stationed? I was stationed in a canyon basically sitting in a big Harbor came to a point and with two big lagoons around it and installation on one side and a

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lagoon on the other side with all civilians. (13:00) I'm okay with them coming on one side down to load it to wherever. The City was pretty much kind of like Annapolis, interesting people there. Transportation was all motorbikes and by three wheeled scooter that was made for 5 or 6 people, but they have 10 or 15 people hanging on to him going through this. The streets and it was Nightmare traffic nobody would give you the right away everybody was on their own the city was an old provincial City very beautiful area whole country was beautiful very tropical lush green pictures with rice paddies Farmer's Fields almost like South Carolina (14:00) it looks exactly like that very beautiful plaque placed hot monsoon season It Would Rain 24 hours a day but you didn't stop doing anything you just kept on loading work right through the rain it didn't matter it was a thriving City with an airport right in the middle of our airport right in the middle of it called the Phuket airport you came in right in the middle of the city that run away with the road right now right around it it was in the plane ran off the Runway and just went right into the ocean who is always interesting the plane was coming right over your head is the change in weather

How did the change in weather affect all the people that were there? Most of the people in my company west coast people from North Carolina, Maryland New York (15:00) couple people from way Upstate New York everybody was used to The Climate here which is a hundred and ten degrees hot and humid everything stays well nothing ever got dry you never had dry clothes even when it wasn't raining you never had dry clothes and it was so hot and humid

How old were you when you decided to pursue your military career? I was 20 years old when I got drafted (16:00) what made that lifestyle seems desirable to you I wasn't really a choice I tried to enlist in the Navy but they wouldn't take me because of my eyes but then all of a sudden my life up-rooted then at 8:26 they won't you we had a guy at 25 who got drafted with a wife and two kids it was terribly upsetting for him now I was single at the time so it wasn't as upsetting to me but I didn't I didn't realize it at the time but if you're the sole surviving son they won't send you to a hostile area I didn't know that till I got there so I went immediately and tried to get a hop back you can't do anything not while you're here you can't do anything once you're in country you can't do anything, you couldn't change your beneficiary, you couldn't change your nothing cause a lot of guys the change for their wives or their children back in their paycheck. (17:00) But the little guys didn't hand over there very well since most guys drink too much which was par for the course. Lots of people got into drugs and didn't get out of there when they got back either. I had a friend who eventually committed suicide, he was a choir boy before he went.

Can you tell me about any positive experiences you had while you were over there? It was a great learning experience since I don't think we really grasp the concept of death. I don't think we knew what it was we saw people died. We had that that's not going to happen to me attitude or some of us have the attitude I'll never get home some of us would wake up in the morning and say you want to die today. (18:00) A few of us in the bush that's the kind of attitude they had I'll probably die today. Me personally thought it was very interesting because it's a completely different culture, but you don't really interact with the culture because you're just busy doing the job and little bit that you did have were The Barbers, the cleaners.

Did you have any personal experiences with Vietcong soldiers or any one form North Vietnam? Here we are shooting at each other now we have an area in the harbor between our beach and the Navy base, but if we weren't busy unloading boat we would just tie up (19:00) and one guy with the answer for everybody hello from New York. We were doing 18-hour, 2 change he was very scared star did you have to lay down and go to sleep if you fall off this but you're gone there's no lights nothing we will find you and he finally lay down. When he lay down the Vietcong came over the hill about 600 yards away from where we was tied up and he just ran through throwing grenades as he went through the barracks and big c-130s came in with the machine gun which made a horrible noise (20:00) we call them Puff the Magic Dragon when they let that thing go and just growled and growled personally as close as I got to the the hostile area. We had the areas that we went into where we had to bring ammo between the Cliffs and a small River and lagoon on each side. There were people standing all over the cliff with weapons in their

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hands and we had no idea whether they were friendly or not if they didn't shoot us we assumed they were friendly but that was unnerving. It was unnerving because things would happen all around you if you were sleeping during the day, people would ride down on these little motor scooters 90cc motor scooters, (21:00) ride by a building and throw a grenade in as they rode by. You had no way of telling who was too the grenade went off that's not a pleasant way to get woke up.

Before you mentioned you were warned about snakes, did you ever encounter any of the wildlife you were warned about? I guess nobody ever gotten me in the air out. I never did, but we had boats some guy that went up north and stayed for several months and he and capture a boa a man kept and made a pet like a lot of people do today give me a good snake is a dead snake, but he kept it and it got so big set up they finally the commander told him he had to get rid of it you cannot keep it in the company anymore and he said I'm going to have to kill it I can't I can't send it back to the wild cause it's used to people and made him sad (22:00) But I never, never saw any except some creepy crawlies bugs. Your bunk had a mosquito net over it but they would crawl underneath the bottom anyway you didn't you have them all over you spiders crawling on you.

Are there any experiences or memories that have stuck with you particularly? The one that we talked about and protect that was in the middle of the night pitch black dark one that broke loose, was very vivid. We had one and sent some Vietnamese here to the states which are now Navy Seals and when they come back we were on constant watch for anyone or anything that looks out of the ordinary. (23:00) There are fuel station bars in the back part of the harbor where somebody was climbing the anchor chain. Who it was, they never found out. Anybody they assumed was trying to get up into the barge that has about ten thousand gallons of fuel in it. That would have been a big explosion. Exxon Mobil had a fuel dump and I have got to it right before it got there right in the Heart of the City. Going into a routine you would get complacent. It was just like a daily job that you did every day, then something like that would happen it would get your attention. (24:00) I did think it was funny to run it over things that float down the river just for something to do, even though we were hauling 80 tons. When there's something over there run over that make a terrible noise when it goes underneath that steel boat. So when I got over to it, it was real close to a sandbar and I had a whole load and over so I swung away and then a Navy Swift boat came out and the guy stood up on the back and he shot it and it blew the water two hundred feet in in the air, it was an uploading mine. They told us not to run over things; they told us not to but we didn't pay much attention to them.

Did you become close to anyone in particular while you were there? Not particularly, there was one guy that I told you about before. He was 25 and lived in Severna Park. Until this day we got in contact a couple of times, (25:00) but we didn't get as tight a Bond as they did in the infantry. Bonds got so close they're like Siamese twins or they never want to see each other again because they don't want to share those memories. I have a friend that has PTSD really bad, he was in the thick of everything over there. They had a guy that lives Landover Maryland that was robbing people at their little Cape Cod houses with the porches on them. He would get up on them on their way to work, he would jump off the little porch and jump on the people. (26:00) He jumped onto Norman and he gave him a flashback to Vietnam and before he even knew what was going on he had shot him and beat him to death and he said I wasn't in Landover I was in Vietnam it's just that simple said I'm disabled set my heart really goes out to him what are you most proud of concerning your service for the most part that. I stayed out of trouble it was easy to get into trouble just little things stupid stuff like miss roll call that the Baywood Court martial call in an order called article 15 (27:00) basically like a speeding ticket around here but you would have to get extra Duty. Latrine Duty was bad in Vietnam because it was not mechanical toilets. The latrines were big wooden boxes with a barrel under it and you had to clean the barrels daily, that was always a good punishment since nobody wanted that.

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Were you given any awards? I received service country ribbons. I was given 3, I was given one with the South Vietnamese flag just a ribbon anybody here would get. I got that, anybody who went there got these three. I didn't get any purple heart, they did put me in for one but (28:00) I didn't get one because I didn't draw blood. What happened was, I actually got clotheslined. We had a red alert in the middle of the night. Everybody had to run to the truck in the middle of the night and it caught me in the middle of my throat and just flipped me backwards, just put a big red mark on my neck and they put me in for a purple heart. Everybody wants a ribbon anyway they can get them but if they would have given me a purple heart for running into a clothesline I don't think it would have meant as much as people losing limbs and being blown up. (29:00) A friend of mine that was a marine over there, guy I used to work with, in one year's time he got twenty two different citations. He stayed in the jungle the entire time he was there and got three Purple Hearts. When he got the third one they send you home. He said he had given enough. 1600 people are still unaccounted for in the Vietnam War. They went out in the jungle and never came back. In our company, we was lucky we only lost one man, and that was really due to operator error. We dropped two 750 pounds bombs in the boat he was operating and then they finally went off and blew them. Then the engineer was climbing up and it blew up (30:00) and burnt him from his tail to his ears with 2nd and 3rd degree burns and the boy running the boat was killed unfortunately. I didn't know him. He was in the first platoon. I only knew him from the boat number, but that was one of the reminders every now and again that's something like that could happen. I got more scared when I came back and settled back into civilian life and realized how easily any one of us could have died. Some of those Vietnam movies I can watch, some of them I can't.

So how is your perspective of your time in Vietnam change as you have gotten older? I think about an incident that happened a couple years ago (31:00) was probably me when I was in the military. I never would have thought I had PTSD until I got reading up on it and then I thought I probably have had it for about 10 years 'cause I drink way too much when I first got out. And then one day I thought I can't live like this. I can't go on and I haven't drank a drop since and that was 40 years ago. I don't even drink champagne at weddings, not one glass. You can't live that way, that's what you call crying in your beer, cry your life away. The people from the VA ask me how I dealt with it, and I said, I got up and to put my big boy pants on and got up and went to work (32:00) and I just haven't touched it since. You just make that decision. But that guy who tried to hit me with a shovel a couple years ago did not fare well rolling around on the ground for a little bit. It was not it was not a good thing the young man who hit the old man with a shovel. That was the past, I would have told you I did not have any PTSD. you don't necessarily have to be in the bush, with people blowing up beside you to get that realization of all the things sitting deep back in the back of your head out come out you respect no trust no one, nobody's trustworthy. I grew up in the middle of the hippie generation never trust anybody over 30 .I'm a little past that now but I do trust people over 30 now, but anything anybody over 30, (33:00) any government, you didn't trust them.

Can you tell me more about the type of Machinery you work with? Actually he was a missionary and worked off the coast of Vietnam on the small island off the coast of Vietnam. He never went into Vietnam. He was a very quiet man. He still goes back, to this day. He learned the language. He helped his customers realize their dreams. He was a positive man unlike myself. I wasn't very positive as a Young Man. He still goes back. (34:00) He hasn't been back in the last 2 years, but he goes back for a couple of months at a time. It's always to work on homes and goes back and help those people out to that island off the coast of Vietnam but he never went to the shore of Vietnam. I don't think he was ever in the military. I'm not sure (35:00) but he is about the same age I am.

Can you tell me about the vehicles and the boats? The boat we drove was an LCM mike 8 boat, called a mike for short. LCM would be landing craft mechanized, 8 means that the size of it, it had 4 GMC 71 engines basically a bus engine, 75 foot long 25 foot wide Wade 60 tons safe load (36:00) 60 tons and

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carried as much as a hundred tons on it, that much on it water would settle back up on the exhaust, so it's not a good thing normally carry 60-80 tons on every trip unless we carry Napalm which is really light, it just takes up a lot of room so we didn't like carrying it. We need to get more tonnage so we can get the citation on our boat and for the most tons carried in the month we would get a little flag that we get to fly. it was interesting cause you go down in the engine room and there was a little plaque that read rejected by the Navy in 1955, but in the Army we had all of them, and what I thought "If the Navy rejected them why do we have them, what's wrong with his boat that the Navy didn't want it." (37:00) we would hit beaches with our food supplies wherever they could get the forklift onto the beach and load it. Sometimes they would bring a tank or would e put it in our own boat. Then when you go up the road if you got shot outside they would send a new boat, but you're the decoy. We're sending you up ahead to get shot at so the other the people behind won't get shot t. That was their idea. That wasn't a pleasant Duty. We had a big overhead cover, and curtains overhead and sometime it would rain so hard you couldn't even see the front of the boat but still you had to unload the boat. (38:00)

Can you tell her about your experience with boats before you went into the military? My father was a commercial oyster fisherman. I grew up on an island in southern Maryland. He also owned a garage that I worked in. I came home from school every day and my job was to go home and clean the boat and bale the boat out and make sure it was ready to go oystering the next day. It was a 33-foot Hooper's Island Drake tail. They called it that, because of the shape of the stern. I got rid of it as he got older as it was harder to work the big boat. I got a smaller boat that was only 18 foot and still went out oystering, with that to run Gill Nets to fish rockfish and fish like that. After I got out of the service I had hot rod boat, a little boat with a big motor. (39:00) We went out and pulled water skis, and things of that nature. I sank that one. I don't have it anymore but hopefully there's one in the future.

Is there anything else you would like me to tell me about your time that you spent there? Yeah I wouldn't advise going to war to anybody. I'm glad I did though. It was the thing to do. I did try to join when I got out of high school. So many people were draft Dodgers and went to Canada and all that sort of thing. You could die being drafted. But I think you owe it to your country for that now. I'm glad it's all volunteer if you're in the military now, you aren't drafted, you aren't snatched up. (40:00) Unfortunately, judges, used to, back in the 60's, if you got in trouble, instead of going to reform school, you had the choice of either go to jail or join the Army. There were a lot of undesirable people in the military. You do meet a vast array of people and culture and stuff in the military. You get out of that little circle of people you grew up with for eighteen or Twenty Years. believe it or not it's a very small circle and then you get out and wonder why do they do such things when you talk to them and then you find out their background and their culture, you find a great deal more respect for people from third world countries. People from third world countries have a great deal more respect for what we have here then we do because we take it for granted. It's always here, it's always at hand. if we want it we just go and get it. (41:00) We would finish unloading the ship and there would be a lot of dunnage, which is just wooden crating and we throw it up on the beach in the village. the people would fight for it and I mean they would fight, hurting each other badly over a 2x4 just to get that little bit of stuff. a lot of the houses are made out of cardboard, 2x4 frame, cardboard, tin, cans, whatever they can find with whole families living in absolute filth. You wouldn't even put your pigs in it back home. There was an area right outside of our compound we called it pig alley it just reeked. How anybody could live to adulthood in those conditions I just don't know. I guess a lot of them didn't. And the kids anywhere you go they were always, "give me, give me". They wanted anything you would give them, Chocolate, anything you have, so just give it to me. (42:00) It makes you appreciate things more here, because we were just a few years older than you guys are now, just two to three years older. We went along and survived every day but it made an old man out of you, sometimes in one day. Sometimes depending on where you were sent, like we were trained to operate the boat, and they would start calling names alphabetically you go to infantry company but some people didn't have a clue how to be an infantryman. They knew which end of a rifle to use but that was

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it. I knew a guys that started out as an infantryman and got sent back to work with us, (43:00) and he said I seen a kid happy-go-lucky and in 2 days you thought he was a hundred and ten years old because he went out on Patrol on the first day there and when that army patrol got Ambushed it made an old man out of him. I had to live 70 years get to be an old man so.

Do you have any funny stories? We used to get a magazine over there, it was a cartoon type magazine it was it was called six to sixty. We got more thrill out of that than anything (44:00) because it was all jokes and it wasn't as raw as you have now. The Bob Hope Show, I actually got to go to see Raquel Welch. She was actually one of the star attractions in it, American Woman what we used to call them, Round eyes, because of the Asians have a different shapes of their eyes, and it was just a treat. We had one guy, we had some characters, guys who can sing, play guitars, guys who can tell jokes, (45:00) guys who can tell stories, that's how they dealt with it. They just constantly making up stuff to talk about. I often wonder if any of them wrote a book when they got back. We laughed at some of the small shows that came by. Some of them had comedians, some of them had really good singers, and some of them just came and gave their time. I spent a week in the hospital. I busted my leg up and I got to see nice, pretty nurses. They waited on me hand and foot. Man that was wonderful. Things always led to some practical joking. Someone would paint the numbers on the boat and then some other guy would come up and paint right over them again. (46:00) Stupid stuff like that, to aggravate each other, make the time pass more than anything.

Can tell what you saying I'm just thankful I've never been known to take another man's life. I've moved enough ammo to take a lot of lives but I didn't pull the trigger, not that I know of.

Thank you so much for coming by. I enjoyed it. Sorry I was just a guy next door. Sorry I wasn't GI Joe with all the medals. I won't go back anymore. (47:00)