

3-8-1990

## Interview with Specialist Four Kerry Steedley

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey\\_docs](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey_docs)

---

### Recommended Citation

"Interview with Specialist Four Kerry Steedley" (1990). *Currey Document Archive*. 15.  
[https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey\\_docs/15](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/currey_docs/15)

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the Cecil B. & Laura G. Currey Archive of Military History at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Currey Document Archive by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu](mailto:ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu).

Interview  
0930 hours, Thursday, 8 March 1990, by telephone  
**SP-4 Kerry Steedley**  
USAAVNC  
Ft. Rucker, Alabama 36322  
Telephone number (HP) 205-774-5223

Sure, you can use my name. I was in Vietnam from October 1971 to June 1972.

I was a 91-Golf, Social Work specialist. I enlisted for three years and it was something--rather than a cook or infantry--I thought I would be interested in. I had just graduated from our denominational school, Free Will Baptist Bible College, Nashville, Tennessee. MPs were 95-Bravo; 95-Charlie was a confinement specialist. In AIT at San Antonio I got orders for Vietnam and the next week landed at Da Nang and went on down to LBJ and that's where I stayed until I came home.

My first impressions? I went over thinking I would work in a drug rehab center. A sense of being overwhelmed and intimidated. I had grown up in a southern, Christian home, gone to a Christian school--a sheltered environment. I grew up in south Georgia and then we moved to North Carolina when I was in high school. I saw another side of life--a country torn apart by war. When I landed at Da Nang they dragged in a body from the perimeter and I knew right then I was in a place where people were being killed. I'd left a wife and baby boy and I was homesick.

When I got to LBJ a sense of seeing another side of life: the barbed wire, the walls, the checkpoints and security of being checked in and out of there. I was assigned to an MP company. Me and one other guy, Bruce Halla, Rapid City, SD. The biggest part of the population I saw: majority were in for drug charges; in maximum security were guys who had fragged their sergeant or their company commander. There were guys who had gotten in a racial fight and killed somebody. Very angry, very hostile. I had never done any drugs. All I knew about them came from a little reading I had done in school. Here I got people talking to me about their drug problems I have no experience with. I got people that I'm counselling with who had killed somebody or who had been in a brutal fight and were on their way to FLVN for several years.

It was awakening to a side of life I had never seen. Not only a war in Vietnam but the enemy I saw over there were drugs, rebellion against authority, draftees who didn't want to be there, the racial issues. It took me awhile to get my feet on the ground and realize where I was living and the kind of people I was working with and to be able to serve them. I was naive.

There were maybe 8-10 counsellors when I was there. Each one had from 80-120 or higher detainees to work with. They couldn't call their lawyers. I had to do that. They couldn't call their unit. We made those folks dependent on us. Some was due to the nature of the system;

some things they couldn't or shouldn't do, but that was true for us, too. A lot of times I was a gofer for those guys--made all their phone calls, ran their errands.

We did an initial interview with everyone who came in there, got a case history on them. We were required to visit those in maximum security every day. Sometimes I didn't do anything but sign their sheet and walk off because they were spittin' and cussin'. I was white, a lot of those guys were black, and I was a part of the institution they were in. Initially I felt threatened, intimidated, but not after the first few times, for they learned that if they wanted Specialist Steedley to do anything for me I better behave. I played their game, too. The phone call didn't get made until they treated me as a human being. It's how I learned to get their attention.

We worked 12 hour shifts, from 6A to 6P--two shifts--and often worked 13-14 days before we got one day off. But there wasn't much to do on a day off. Long hours and lots of people. My captain was a social worker, had a master's degree. The rest of us were sergeants or specialists.

Eli Gardner was Commanding Officer of LBJ when I was there. A black guy. When I first got there Paul Grossheim was there.

One of the things Gardner did that I resented was that counsellors had to pull guard duty. We had a lot of anger and resentment. We talked to him about it but he made the decisions. The guys I worked with saw me in one roll--a buffer between the guards and the command; they would share their anger--some of them should not have been there but most were deservedly sent to LBJ--and then to see a guy whose trying to be sympathetic, listen to your story, try to help you with what personal career or legal things you need, and you look up during lunch time and see the guy in a tower with a shotgun. I didn't like that.

LBJ's reputation was a tough place; people knew when they got there they'd have to toe the line or there'd be some consequences.

I remember one incident. I know it didn't make the records. One morning I went thru maximum security and two black guards had just finished taking care of a black prisoner in such a way that even if he had reported, they left no marks on him. These guys got out of there only an hour a day for closely supervised PT. Meals were slid under the door for them. They had their own sink and commode in the cell. The night before, they had started a black power chant. It would go from cell to cell, passing it to the next guy. This white guy refused to do it because there were some racial things in it. The next morning during their PT a couple of black guys worked him over while they were supposed to be filing out. Two black guards found out about it. They took the black guy who was the ringleader and did a job on him and got his attention. What I saw was among the prison population but didn't sense racial turmoil within the guards and staff.

We were looked at as the softies because sometimes we would take the case of an inmate and be an advocate and sometimes the staff resented that.

There was a lot of racism among the inmates and where you saw that was in maximum security. Some of those guys I was able to establish a relationship with and talk with them. Some not. Nobody--staff, guards, nobody. They seethed in their anger til they got to LVN. A lot were in there because of drug problems, or refusing an order. A lot of it had racial overtones.

I used to go to Chapel and listen to CH Vern Swim. Nazarene. He had a service inside the stockade. Another 2-3 chaplains in Long Binh. I went to both services, one inside, one outside. At the time I wasn't sure what God wanted me to do. The things that happened made me think seriously of becoming a chaplain. It was through observing their ministry that caused me to get out of the army with the intention of going to seminary.

Some positive things happened to Kerry Steedley at LBJ. I think there were at least a few people I helped.