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Interview with Rudolph Gray

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Interview

Thursday, 8 February 1990, 1200-1400 hours, Woolworth's Lunch Counter

Rudolph Gray

1105 Chestnut Street

Tampa, Florida 33607

Phone number: 253-3495

I don't have anything to hide. You use my name. I've been to several colleges. Haven't finished any of them. I come from a well-put-together family.

I was in-country in Vietnam from June 1967 to 13 July 1969, assigned to the 86th Transportation Company and the 534th Transportation Company/1st Logistics Command. I was a light and heavy vehicle driver. A good one. *MOVED*

THERE WAS ANOTHER CO. THE FIRST ONE I GOT TO THEY WENT TO
I was 18 years old. *PEOPLE* When I first got over there, the people looked funny. Little short guys. *THIS PLACE STUNK.* There were big bumblebees. Good grief! Mosquitoes were 'mosquatos' they were so big. *How come* insects were so big and the people was so small? I was a *COMPANY* boxer. Pretty good. A white guy named Flowers from Chicago showed me how to punch while I was in basic training. I had a good defense but no punch and he was really good and helped me. I was also an athlete, artist, self-ordained psychiatrist. *EVERYTHING I DID, I WAS GOOD AT IT.*

Far as I can see, I was stockade-bound as soon as I got there! I got sent to LBJ the first time for shooting my rifle on New Years. It was January 1968, I was gambling, went broke, so got up and went outside with my rifle and started shooting it off. Shit. There were thousands of guys in Vietnam shooting their rifles and they arrested me. I got thirty days inside LBJ for that. They wanted to make an example of me. At the time I was with the 86th Transportation Company at Long Binh.

After I got out, they transferred me to 'Bear Cat', about ten miles northeast of Saigon. It was also a transportation unit, but they wouldn't let me drive. They made me a permanent guard. I put in to go back to driving. I said I wouldn't pull guard duty no more. After I said that, they put me up on a tower, so I went up there and laid down. There was an important inspection and they looked up and couldn't see me and said I was sleeping, but I wasn't.

I was working guard duty with a guy named Smiley, out of Detroit. We were pullin' guard duty two hours on, four hours off. When his time came, Smiley left post, don't tell me nothing. The sergeant *comes OF GUARD* around; finds me asleep. Why aren't you on guard? Smiley is on duty, I *F* say. But he wasn't. He gone. So I got busted. He comes back, tells the sergeant he took off, but they don't bust him, but me. *FIRST PARA NEXT PAGE*

86th TRANSPORTATION CO
Don't give Gray his weapon, they say, for he's a hazard to officers. I told them if they keep messin' with me, I'd kill 'em. That was dumb to say, for if the captain wanted to get me, he could have done it then. *EASILY*
Everybody kept their eyes on me *ALL MY FRIENDS THAT IS TO SEEME*

THROUGH
This paragraph comes after 1

So they transferred me back to the trucks. Guys used to get mad at me. I was highly intelligent. Knew my orders backwards. On duty, I'd make orderly; was a top notch guy. Trained a few people; looked out for a lot of people. But I was discriminated against. An example:

In the 86th Transportation Company, I was on convoy duty. Drove a deuce and a half. Out of nowhere one day while we was lined up comes a five-ton tractor and it rams me. I'm parked in a line of convoy; **TRUCKS** haven't moved yet. I signed the accident report. Three weeks later, the captain pulls the record and gives me an Article Fifteen. I was busted to lowest grade, given two weeks of extra duty, took part of my pay, and grounded. They couldn't get any soldiering out of me after that.

My eleven months in Nam were up. I DEROSsed. I left as an E-1. Went back to the States and was assigned to Ft. Hood for less than a month. I volunteered ~~again~~ for Vietnam, and was assigned to the 534th at Long Binh. They said if I'd soldier for thirty days, they'd make me an E-5.

Something happened. They sent me to make a convoy drive of about 75 **From Long Binh** miles to Quan Loi. I knew the routes blindfolded. They wanted me to get the convoy there and back safely. I said o.k. if they'd give me **A CONVOY** three days at Vung Tau afterwards. Vung Tau was an R & R center. I went and got back. It was on a Friday. I was asleep. They woke me up and said, Gray, you're on convoy to Quan Loi again. No, I'm not! Yes, you are. All hell broke out. I didn't want to go back to Quan Loi again. I jumped on the sergeant. Two more joined in. Sent me back to quarters. I took a bunch of pills--benactols (spelling?). They're for migraine headaches; have about 6-700 mg; I took about eight. Tried to commit suicide. I was just nuts. Threw some shells inside the OR. They revived me. Two days later I was in the stockade.

The Court gave me six months and reduced me to E-1. I stayed in for two months. I was in LBJ 48 days, from 24 May to 10 July 1969.

What did LBJ look like? Well, Long Binh itself was the largest post in Vietnam. General Westmoreland had his HQ there on a hill. LBJ was about 350' by 150'. No streets or paths laid out, just a big yard. In 1967 there were no permanent buildings, just tents. The tents were maybe 10 feet apart. Each tent--GP (L)--held 15-20 guys. Each inmate had a cot, a footlocker. We had a mosquito net over our bunks. The tents had no sides, just a top and a wooden floor. Just a roof. A latrine was maybe 10-15 yards away and we had to empty it by burning the shit. I burnt shit, cleaned up, policed the area. That's mainly about it.

WE HAD
We got regular GI food. Sometimes ~~some~~ some real tough red meat--we thought it was water buffalo, but the cooks called it veal. It was no veal.

There were no guards inside the wire. Why? There was nowhere to run; nowhere to hide. Not all guards were MPs. The different units at Long

Binh pulled guard duty once a month or so off a duty roster. They'd come over by trucks from their units. Armed with M-14s or M-16s. Guards stayed on the watchtowers; one on each corner. There was a sergeant of the guard. The orderly room was also inside the gate, but it was fenced. There were lots of fences beside the ones around the whole place. The chaplain and the chapel was inside the wire. You could put in to see a chaplain if you wanted. But first you had to put in a request slip to the sergeant of the guard. We had church every Sunday. I was a firm believer. I really wasn't a bad guy. Mailcall every day.

I was to do hard labor; that was picking up cigarette butts. LBJ was not a scary place; it was not as bad as it seemed. We'd get up, exercise, do calisthenics every morning, eat breakfast, police the area twice a day. We took turns cuttin' hair. I barbered a lot. Some just would sit and sing, talk about homelife, what they'd do when they get back in the states. Some would holler through the fence to passersby: WACs, nurses, friends, associates. They had a TV in the OR. We had close-order drills where we put our own steps into rhythmns. No weapons to carry, but used sticks instead. We sang. Talked about life, what they do in their hometown; gets to know others fairly well. That's about it. It really wasn't bad.

A PERMANENT
JOB.

They did have a sweat box for guys who got out of hand. It was a one-man sized bunker. I never got in it. One person who'd stay all crunched up. They might give you a day.

The attitude of the guards all depends, if you were a tough guy. A guy who thinks he's bad, who has no humor, who wants to whip up on everyone, jungle fatigue. I didn't have to worry about getting jumped on by nobody. Nobody could beat me.

There was some drugs. The guards might bring in reefers. They was plentiful. Pills--yes. Opium--no. Who knows? Not to my knowledge. Somebody at night would come by and throw marijuana over the fence. It was easy. The guards made occasional shakedown searches and inspections.

ABOUT THE
OPPIUM

^{LBS}
I couldn't stand it. While I was there, some VC blew up the ammo dump three/four blocks away. I didnt run to the bunkers, but stayed and watched the fireworks.

We worked sometimes in Big Red. It was inside the wire. It was red clay. Everyone worked there would fill sand bags. After working there, no matter what color you were when you went in, everybody looked alike coming out.

Sometimes there was a water shortage; they had to ration drinking water; hard to bathe except during monsoons. You smelled; others did too. We'd stand in the rain with a cloth. Best time was monsoon times.

The baddest part is when you're in, you think about life in general,

period. Home, friends you can't see. Worstest time was when they blew the ammo dump. Oh boy! Couldn't see nothin' but red. Boom! And the fire was 'nuff to scare anybody. It was so close.

There was officers in LBJ, too. Sergeants, too. There was a separate area for officers. Sergeants and EMs were together. Officers were in for stealing, disobey direct orders, kill, work the black market, rape.

I put in for a discharge out of LBJ. I only had three months to go but they had given me six months hard labor, no pay, no rank. After the six months, I would have to finish the three months as an E-1. They told me, say, in a years time my discharge would become honorable. The chaplain told me not to do it. I've seen your records; you're a pretty good soldier. Do your time and make it from there. But I was too far gone; unsuitable to perform military duties. I take discharge. After a year, they said, write in and we'll turn it into an honorable discharge, but they didn't. I got a general instead. Three years later, I go to the Veterans and had 'em write Washington to get it changed from general to honorable, but they didn't.