

2-21-1990

Interview with Wayne Price

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Interview
Wednesday, 2030 hours, 21 February 1990, by telephone

Wayne Price

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It's fine for you to use my name in the text of this book. That doesn't bother me.

I was with the 935th Medical Detachment which was attached to the 93 Evacuation Hospital, located near LBJ. Around September 1967 through December 1967 was the time I did work at LBJ. I worked there full time and a social worker came up about a day a week. We had an office inside the main gate. I provided orientations there.

Guards carried mostly shotguns; some .45s. Work details were about half a dozen inmates with about 2 guard escorts. Maximum security had wood cells with two conex boxes at the end with slits cut out of them. Medium security inmates lived in tents. Troublemakers got put in the conexes for whatever reason.

The 'cadillac' was a 2-man broom they used to sweep the dirt.

In the army at that time a social work specialist provided some counseling, did the initial and subsequent work-ups prior to professional staff seeing them. Evaluation work, intake histories if a person needed to see one of the professional staff. Providing support and doing some general assistant social work things at times, primarily either counseling or doing preliminary work before seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist. We went through training at the Medical Field Service School at Ft. Sam. Later the training produced Social Work/Psychology Specialists.

I didn't particularly look forward to working at LBJ. I went up there and gave an orientation to all the prisoners about our services. I did a pre-screening interview to try to understand if any of them were having psychiatric problems. I arranged to see those later that did, so they could see someone at a higher level.

I'm not sure if they had social workers prior to me. I don't recall.

There were some race riots when I was there. One was a little one in 67 prior to my arrival. I think a couple of people got killed. Then a bigger one where the prisoners torched the place [August '68]. But they didn't touch the particular building I worked out, but much of the rest got burned down. At least that's what I heard.

When I was there it was overcrowded; 70% black at least. Significantly higher number of blacks. Draw your own conclusions from that. Make one wonder if something wasn't quite right. Maybe military justice was a

little racist-oriented. The commander of the LBJ compound at that time was a black guy. A major or light colonel. Carried a short-timer's stick and he'd march around there sometimes.

The guards patrolled security in twos. In maximum security they messed with the prisoners a little, maybe being slow in responding to requests or not letting them out to go the latrine. But nothing serious. There were tensions within the place, mostly racial. A number of people weren't fond of that black major. But I'm not aware of any major mistreatment of inmates. I have seen them hog-tie a guy with leg irons and handcuffs and chain him to the wall in a conex box. I think he was creating some kind of behavioral problem so they cuffed him like that, so he laid on the floor on his back and side with his legs and hands chained to the wall above him.

There were probably more white guards than black. Probably 2/3ds.

I'd try to get an impression from the inmates whether their thinking was clear and their associations relevant. I had such a short period of time to do that after the orientation. One of the questions I would ask was How is it you got here? One of the more interesting stories was where two guys got angry with each other and got in a fight throwing grenades around their company area at each other. I remember we had one of the more decorated guys in Vietnam there. Lot of medals for combat stuff. He just decided not to do it anymore. He quit. They took offense to that. A warrant officer in maximum security was accused of killing a Vietnamese woman or 2-3 people, but I don't remember the details. Other than that, most of them were military oriented crimes: sleeping on guard duty, AWOL--more than drugs. In 67 there weren't that many drugs around; a little marijuana and alcohol, some opium, amphetamines from some units. Heroin came in later--69 or 70--came in everywhere. I had relatively brief contact with the inmates.

Some of the prisoners were clever. When they went out on detail, everybody got searched two times. A couple of guys were clever enough to get a pair of large wire cutters in there. Probably a foot and a half long. How did they do that? They cut themselves out and took off running. They did another search and found a pound of marijuana someplace. That took a little planning. A guy out on detail had the Vietnamese make him up one of the patches the MPs wore. After he was brought back in, he put the patch on and walked back out the front gate.

At that time a social work MOS was a 95H20; later it became a 95G--I think. Or 93H20. Something like that. We went thru part of the medical training at Ft. Sam and then went up on the hill to the Quad area on the parade ground, 8-10 weeks at the Medical Field Service School. Interviewed 3 times. I was attached to what was called a KO Team; only two of them in-country. KO is a mobile psychiatric center. Theoretically we were supposed to be able to put our tents in our trucks and go off wherever people had emotional or psychiatric problems. KO. I don't know how they got KO out of Mobile Psychiatric Center.

In a nutshell, that's what I did there. I got along well with many of the black prisoners at a time when there was a lot of racial tension. I felt positive about that. I put in long days. There was a lack of clinical support for what I was doing. Mental health services were not overly advertised in the military, especially in Vietnam.

We did this orientation. I told them we were there and that we provided counseling and if anyone had problems they could check with me and I would tell them how to get in touch with the professionals. It was relatively brief and then as everyone was walking out the door I'd touch base with them, ask them 3-4 questions and if there was a question of them having emotional or psychiatric problems I'd ask their names and tell them I'd be getting in touch with them. Then I'd have them come over to my office.