Beechcraft RU8D used for radio/voice intercept & aerial radio direction finding (ARDF) by triangulation of target.

Cara: This is Cara Vanderree of the Ashland City Library. It is October 8, 2022 at noon, and we will be interviewing Jonathan Swayze, normally called Jon, and asking him about some of his memories of the Vietnam era. We are doing this interview through Humanities Kansas, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read Project. Jon, first of all, I need to ask the branch of service?

Jon: It was the Army Security Agency, ASA.

Cara: What was your rank?

Jon: With my four-year enlistment was Specialist E 5

Cara: And where did you serve, please?

Jon: I did four years in the Army Security Agency and the first year was basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, then to my AIT which was for specialized

training at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts for eight months. After graduation we all went through a ten-day tactical training (survival) course. My graduating class all were sent to Vietnam, as 1967 was the big buildup to the War. My year there was near Pleiku.

My second year I was given the choice of a duty station in Shemya, Alaska, where we would monitor the Russians, or Taiwan where our mission was the CCP, Communist Chinese Army. Obviously, I chose Taiwan as it was the best duty station in the world at that time. At the end of my year on Taiwan I had one year left of my 4-year enlistment. I was looking at returning to the States for my last year and likely Ft. Carson. At this time the ASA had upgraded their mission in Vietnam using Aerial Direction Finding (ARDF) to triangulate the enemies radio transmissions. This was advanced technology at that time and we were using fixed winged platforms as well as helicopters called "Left Bank" with what we called "Elephant Brander" antennae on the front. This advancement in technology was because we had lost more than one ASA Team in the field who were using PRD-1 radios often mounted on a Jeep or truck. One of the first Vietnam casualties was James Davis an ASA PRD-1 Operator who was ambushed.

So being bold and wanting to fight for the South Vietnamese people I chose to volunteer for the ARDF Mission. This would be my fourth and final year in the Army.

Cara: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Jon: I enlisted for four years.

Cara: What year was that?

Jon: 1966. There were three of us from Ashland. We went together to the Army Security Agency at the same time, and that was Darrel Rankin and Charles Allen and myself.

Cara: Where were you living when you enlisted?

Jon: Ashland. I had three years of college and was having trouble with money and grades. I had a potential football scholarship and also a monetary (Swayze) scholarship from the college. My football Coach Peterson suggested I study teaching (education) and biology as he did. I had a 3.0 grade average after my second year, but let a home town friend talk me into transferring to K-State, where I totally got lost in the large classes; my grades fell and after a year there got a draft notice. So, rather than be drafted, I enlisted.

Cara: And got to choose where you went.

Jon: Pretty much.

Cara: Why did you choose the ASA?

Jon: I wasn't sure about ASA when I went to the recruiter to enlist. I'd gotten the draft notice and I chose to go to the recruiter and talk to him. And he said, "With your college you might qualify for the ASA, the security agency, because it takes a certain grade point average. My grades were really good up until I got to my third-year at K-State and I got into trouble with some courses. Anyway, he said, "Take this test." So, I took the test and qualified for ASA and was sent from basic training to Fort Devens, Massachusetts for a year, that's where they trained us.

Cara: What were your first days in the service like?

Jon: Well, it was basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. All of my memories are really pretty good, unless I get to thinking in my mind about the bad ones. But really in your old age... I remember the good memories. Fort Leonard Wood Basic was pretty tough and I was initially in trouble right away with the DIs (Drill Instructors) when I talked back to one. I learned quick that you don't do that. It was good experience. You learned to live with other people of all kinds in basic training. Anyhow, I mean to tell you, there was very nice people and there was some guys coming out of the woods. It was very educational. There was some good people, never forget them.

Cara: Do you have some experiences of boot camp that you could share?

Jon: One just jumps out at me right away, and that was when I got in trouble. Our company was E53, I even remember that, we were in four platoons and every platoon went out to different kinds of training each day. Then the one that did the best in their training got to go to the mess hall first and then you got in line to go eat at supper-time. My platoon did badly one day and with my last name being Swayze (end of the alphabet), I was at the very end of the line and by the time I got through the mess hall there weren't much food left and what there was not good. We weren't good enough to eat inside the building, we had to eat outside on picnic tables. So, going out the door to my table, I was mumbling about the food and how bad it was and what little there was, and I didn't know the DI was standing against the building behind me listening to my words. So, when I sat down at the table, he came over and got in my face and said, "You're going to eat every bit of that" and a few more words. I talked back to him and I just said, "Okay," and I just picked up my tray, walked to the trash and threw it away, and walked away. Well, the next morning at 4:00 am, we all were up. The whole company were raised out of bed and we had to go out for formation and had to run a mile. And everyone was told it was because of John Swayze's mouthing off. They weren't just marching them, they had to run and while they were running the mile, I had to circle them as best I could as they ran, with my rifle above my head. And that was quite a struggle, thank goodness I was in pretty good shape from sports in high school. So that was my memory there.

Cara: That was a negative one! The next question is what do you remember about your instructors?

Jon: In basic, most of them were black and big guys and boy, they were mean. But you know, when we graduated, they were all our friends. I mean that was their job, to break you down and humiliate you until you obeyed. At the end of basic training, they liked you. You know, they called you by your name and not something else. That was just part of it, you grew up pretty fast.

Cara: How did you get through that?

Jon: Oh, good. I did really well. I remember the graduation ceremony and my mother, Bonnie Swayze, drove down to Leonard Wood to the graduation ceremony. I was really proud of that and they recognized people that excelled. It was just many memories, I still have pictures from all of that.

Cara: And you've sent me some of them, but we would love to have as many pictures as you will share because we will put them with your project.

Jon: Thanks!

Cara: Well, we would love to. You served in Vietnam and you told me a little bit about where you served, but where exactly did you go at first?

Jon: On my first tour of duty, coming out of AIT training in Massachusetts, they sent us to Davis Station (named for the first ASA soldier killed in combat, James Davis). It was a top-secret post at the side of Tan Son Airforce Base in Saigon and it has quite a history. The unit that we belonged to was the first unit to ever go to Vietnam and we were under secrecy. We were called Radio Research and our job was to find the enemy electronically. I've got a lot of stories there of going out and doing that. Many of us were sent out with PRDI radios, where you were sent out and set up in a field location and listened for the enemy's communication and triangulated his location by intercepting his Morse Code. That was my training.

Intercept operator inside the Operations “Deuce and a Half” truck.

We also had trucks with the same radio receivers in them and I was sent up from Davis Station to Pleiku, and we sat in the back of Deuce and a Half Radio Vans there listening to radios and the enemy in the area.

Operations "Deuce and a Half" trucks with radio & voice intercept operators.

Right behind us on Engineer Hill, which is where we were, were the combat engineers, thank goodness, because they saved our bacon a few times when the enemy attacked. We had our perimeter that we guarded on one end of the mountain. In the Tet Offensive, 1968 they hit us pretty hard, so we did see plenty of combat, even though we were called "non-combatant" So I can tell you many stories of that, if you want to ask about it, go ahead.

Cara: I do. Please tell me the ones you think were most important to you.

Jon: There's two that jump right out immediately. It got pretty boring there. You just did your radio work for eight hours and then you filled sandbags on perimeter for five or six hours and then you went to bed. So that was daily life. We were the 330 Radio Research company and we predicted the Tet Offensive. But the higher official -- we were so high-tech that people didn't believe us, that we could intercept enemy messages and then break their codes, which we broke all their codes through the National Security Agency, who were really our bosses. So, we predicted but nobody believed us. They hit us anyway, throughout the entire country and when they hit us on Engineer Hill, they came through our concertina wire with what they called "sappers" and in this case the sappers were... There were a lot of them. They hit both us and the combat engineers behind us in the middle of the night and they turned out to be young boys, stark naked, greased down so they could get through the concertina wire carrying satchel changes. They ran through our company throwing them. And their main goal, we found out later, was the heavy equipment that the combat engineers had. So they ran right through the top-secret antenna field to get to the engineers' Caterpillars. Our 330th Radio Research Company was on full alert with everyone assigned to a Bunker or position. Marchal Cash (from Kentucky) and I were assigned to Bunker 8, next to our Tower bunker. We were told to fix bayonets on our M14's and use the M60, as there was one in each bunker. Cash handled the ammo box and I was on the 60. We learned later the large number of Sappers were all killed and the Engineers were stacking them up behind us

My M60 used in bunker #8 during the TET Offensive.

At daybreak, following the sappers breaking our perimeter, two F-4 Phantoms came In real slow and so low we could see the back seater in the 2nd one salute us. They then went up, came back around low and fast dropping napalm. It was an overwhelming site to see.

The weeks and months after the TET Offensive started there was a lot of action around us. On the night of May 4, 1968, I was in my assigned bunker #8 and we began getting mortared and rockets coming in. Above and in front of us "Spooky," an AC47 that we called "Puff the

Magic Dragon" was shooting what looks like flames into the enemy locations were 7.62 mini guns, 6000 rounds per minute.

Suddenly Spooky exploded and crashed into Dragon Mountain in front of our location. He had been hit by a VC Rocket. (this happened May 4, 1968).

The picture of me on guard duty with the .50 Caliber machine gun we used to take out the VC Rocketeer who took down the Douglas AC-47 Spooky (also nicknamed "**Puff**, **the Magic Dragon**"). On Guard duty it was always our responsibility to clean the .50 Cal. here in the Tower bunker, or the M60's that were in the other 8 bunkers on our S/E stretch of the Perimeter; which we shared with the 20th Combat Engineer Gp on Engineer Hill.

Cara: Shooting flame.

Jon: Yes, the mini guns looked like a flame at night. This picture of me with the .50 Cal has quite a story: Just as Spooky exploded, our Sergeant of the Guard, SSG Steiner who was in the Tower bunker next to me yelled: "I know his location, and said "Swayze, grab the .50 ammo can and follow me. He had the .50 in his arms and was climbing the Tower ladder. (I thought being in a Tower during a rocket attack is the last place to be, but followed up the ladder) SSG Steiner set up the .50 and using some elevation began firing and I was feeding the rounds. The VC rocketeer went quiet, and the next day the Fourth Infantry, who patrolled in front of us, confirmed the results. He did take him out, so I'll never forget that, it was quite an experience.

Our Company Perimeter Tower where the Sergeant of the Guard (SSG Steiner) and I took out the VC Rocket that had shot down the AC-47 Spooky Gunship outside our perimeter, with the 50 Cal. Machine gun.

Cara: Was that your first experience with combat then?

Jon: Yes, it really was. We were trained for combat but classified Non-Combatant. In Vietnam, you were always prepared for an attack. I went back for my second tour and flew ARDF, I saw plenty again, but from the air.

Cara: What does ARDF mean?

Jon: We went up and did radio direction finding, location of the enemy with direction finding of enemy radio signals with triangulated antennas and dipoles attached to the wings. Back then we were the high-tech of our era because nobody really knew about direction finding. ARDF is Aerial Radio Direction Finding. You've got antennas wrapped around your aircraft. In 1961, when the United States first went to Vietnam, we had a guy by the name of James Davis. He was the first casualty of the Vietnam War. We had PRDI radios and they'd take them out on the back of a Jeep where they knew there was enemy activity and he had some Vietnamese soldiers with him to guard him. They went out by this little village and set up and they got ambushed at Cau Xang village. All of them got killed and he was killed. It's quite a story (Google James Davis) but the radio research agents decided this was too dangerous for the men. They came up with aircraft platform where they set up antennas on aircraft and you went up in different types of aircraft. They even tried it on helicopters and they had a pilot, a co-pilot, and the radio operator that went up. We flew Beechcraft

aircraft as well as a De Haviland, Beaver and Otters and we would listen for the Viet Cong's or the North Vietnamese Army's communications.

Me, looking at the VC radio operator that we just did an ARDF fix. I told the Australian radio operator who I was setting side saddle with. "Nobody will believe this" and handed him my instamatic camera from my flight suit. We were flying about 6 ft. above the ground. Aussie pilot Captain Driver always wanted to get a "birds eye view" of the target fixed!

We knew who they were, and by the time I got there, the NSA had their codes broken and even had their units named with call-signs. We had them figured out, but they were always moving on us and we're just trying to follow them where they went. And so, to tell you how we did it, if the enemy came up on the radio with his Morse code and you knew who that was, who he was, because you knew his call sign. You flipped that signal from my earphone up into the pilot's earphone and he would turn the aircraft and start doing some acrobatics in the air to get right in the middle of that signal, triangulation, to get a fix on his position. When you fly into a radio signal, it goes quiet. When you fly out of it, you hear it again. So, when we were right on that mark, we marked it on the map. We would do three of those from three different areas of the sky and the mark it. And that's where he was sitting and where the enemy was located. Often, the enemy used their vast tunnel system and would vanish when our troops did a search for them.

On two occasions, I had the opportunity to call artillery on one and an airstrike on the other. That was a big experience doing that because everybody was looking for him, he had vanished and he was a Viet Cong unit in the southeast province south of Saigon, near the ocean. I do not remember that province. I called for an airstrike and they said we didn't have any in that area, they all were up north. And he said, "You've got the Navy out there." So, we flew out to the Navy battleship, which was not too far away from the location. I got the opportunity to read the coordinates down to him, and while I was talking to him, I could see their guns moving. Then he read the coordinates back. On the way out of the area, they almost blew us out of the air with the air reverberations of their big guns. But they didn't miss and we went back and looked and we were right on target They fired inland just over 20 kilometers

Another time, we called an airstrike on a unit in the Iron Triangle. The 25th Infantry was in a lot of conflicts up there and we were working targets there. I was flying with a linguist at the time. He picked up a Chinese advisor working with a North

Vietnamese unit and we listened to what they were up to doing and we called in an air strike. Not long after that, we were working the same area and got too low. We had an altitude we had to watch and the aircraft got shot up pretty bad. We lost an engine and I remember telling the pilot on the intercom, "I'm ready to jump if you want me to," because we had parachutes under the seats. As I was reaching for it, he said, "Swayze, that parachute was packed when they built this airplane and you're going to have a hell of a lot safer trip home with me." So, he did, and we came back in to Long Thanh safely on one engine. There were a lot more experiences like that. I got to fly into Cambodia a few times when the Americans went in with a lot of movement there. We were searching for "COSVN", the Communist Central Office for South Vietnam. ASA lost 55 men in Vietnam.

Cara: In the entire war or during your service?

Jon: The entire war, 55. Several aircraft got shot down and several killed by mortars.

Cara: What airplane were you flying?

Jon: Most of my missions, I flew a little over 100 missions, were usually in the Beechcraft RU8 or the RU8D, a twin-engine turboprop. But we also flew in the De Haviland Beaver and the De Haviland Otter, which were little single-engine planes that flew much slower. I did have the opportunity to go on TDY (Temporary Duty) two weeks with the Australian army who were south of us at Nui Dat.

They were doing much the same thing with a different type of aircraft and the Australian unit was the 547 Australian Signal Troop and they flew in what they called a Pilatus Porter, it was a Swiss-made turboprop that they could fly off in what seemed like about 100 yards and you could go straight up. Captain Driver was always my Pilot and was very adventurous; you'd get a target fixed and he wanted to go down and eyeball the target. I actually have a picture-- I was carrying my little Instamatic one day in my flight suit and I took a picture of the target when we were flying about six feet off the ground and they were back in a rubber tree plantation. But we were flying in pretty fast and it is kind of a blurry picture, but I can prove that I took a picture of the other radio operator that was just targeted. It's ironic to have done that,

but the Australians were very good to be with. I saw several of them just five years ago at a reunion we had in D.C. Aussies Denis Dean, his wife Jenn, and Phil Rutherford were there. We have a museum at Fort Meade. The National Security Agency is located there and the ASA has a museum there with aircraft that we flew! They brought them back and they're sitting out there on pedestals. That's at Fort Meade. Several of the Australians I flew with came to the reunion and they're still friends, too, on Facebook. My TDY with the Australians was the highlight of my Vietnam experience.

Cara: Remind me what TDY stands for.

Jon: Temporary Duty as an opportunity to get away from our own unit and learn something in a different unit for your own experience. I loved it. Temporary Duty with doing the same thing, usually with a different military unit.

Cara: Just a change of pace.

Jon: Yes, a learning experience.

Cara: You were never a prisoner of war.

Jon: Oh, no. Thank God. We did have people shot down, but not me.

Cara: Were you awarded any citations or medals?

Jon: I received the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal (which was given by the Vietnamese government at the time), the Vietnam Gallantry Cross (which was given by the Vietnam government), 13 air medals, and both units that I was in at Pleiku and then also at Long Thanh with the ARDF received the Meritorious Unit citation for doing extraordinary work locating and identifying the enemy.

Something else I'd like to mention with technology today, did you know all of our military records are now accessible online? Anybody can access their own military record now that shows all of your awards, your health records, any experiences like

military orders are all right there. Of course, it has to be accessed by the veteran and you pull it up with your identification. And then the family, with your permission, can look at it too. If you were to die in old age, your ancestors may want to look up your military record. They can do that now.

Cara: We would love any of that that you would be willing to share with us, that is for public viewing. We would love to have that.

Jon: And it is actually is online now with technology; just go to eVetRecs National Archives.

Cara: Well, let's talk later about how we can share some of that, but only the things that are for public consumption.

Jon: Sure.

Cara: Well, you served for four years and you said you got 13 medals.

Jon: Thirteen Air Medals. They are given for things that you did. At one time, you automatically got an air medal for how many hours you flew, but then it was later changed to Meritorious Achievement while flying.

Cara: How did you receive some of those?

Jon: Just through the experiences I mentioned. You know, like the airstrike call and artillery locating through ARDF. Things that you've done while on a mission. I was also chosen to fly on the first "legal" flight into Cambodia the day before the US incursion in search of radio activity and location of "COSVN" – VC Headquarters.

Cara: Which one are you the most proud of?

Jon: That one when I got to call to the navy locating that one Viet Cong company. I mean everybody was looking for him and couldn't find him and he popped up when I was over him. I was proud of that: locating him and then them being able to take him out.

Cara: Your work had direct results.

Jon: Yes.

Cara: Some questions just about your life in the service. How did you stay in touch with your family?

Jon: Well, obviously letters, you know back then technology... Back then we did not

have satellites but used the “MARS” system. I remember going to a location; I think it was at Bien Hoa Air Base to call my mother. They'd get you hooked up and it was like the telephone. You got hooked up and then they kept relaying your message and you could talk back and forth. But after you said something you had to say, "Over," like on the radio. But other than that, it was letter writing. I love to letter write. I had two brothers that really didn't seem to care too much about my military service. I don't know why. But my sisters wrote, and my mother, and I even had a few people that I went to school with that wrote that were really nice. I enjoy that. Getting the mail was the big thing.

Cara: Could they send you food?

Jon: You'd get treats in the mail. We sure did, you know. I didn't that much, but I know once in a while people would get like homemade cookies or something like that.

Cara: How often did you get to do the MARS?

Jon: I think I only did it once. You had to request it and not many had the time to do it. I just did it once and I think it was just to see what it would be like.

Cara: And it was fun.

Jon: It is like a telephone call, a long-distance telephone with communicating with an "Over," and back and forth. A good memory with my mother.

Cara: The next thing about your daily life: what was the food like and was there enough of it?

Jon: We always had plenty to eat. C-rations were available when you pulled guard duty down there on the perimeter, when I was at Pleiku, but everywhere else that I was at was a good location and we had a mess hall and good cooks and good food. I've got to mention, when I was on Taiwan, it was Shulinkou Airforce Base up on the top of a mountain and it was 1,000 Air Force, 100 Navy and 100 Army working in one large building. We monitored the Chinese military. But where I'm going with this is that air force base was like state-side. They had every convenience you could image up there. The dining hall was like a restaurant with menus and they had a huge night club that had performances of bands that would come in. Also, they had a swimming pool and all of it was run by Taiwanese civilians. It was the best duty station in the world at the time. The Taiwanese Army now have that and the ASA no longer exists. They've changed that to INSCOM, intelligence and Security Command because the navy, army, and air force were all doing the same thing. You remember the Pueblo Incident?

Cara: What happened?

Jon: Back in Korea, that was just right at the time Vietnam started. The Pueblo was a ship that was run by the Navy and was captured by North Korea. Google it, this was quite a story. Those guys were taken prisoner and tortured. But they were doing the same thing that we did in the air and on the ground, intercepting the enemy North Korean communications. The Air Force did the same thing. They took all of them, these three units, and combined them into INSCOM. That's what it is now doing. The same thing, but different. They don't use Morse Code now, everything is high-tech, telecom you know, for communication. You've seen the AWACS, large aircraft, things like that have taken the place of the ARDF.

Cara: Back to where you were staying. It sounds as though you had everything you wanted or needed while you were there, plenty of supplies.

Jon: Yes, in Taiwan, we did. Vietnam was a different story, but most of these stations that ASA had throughout the world-- we were all over the world, Turkey, Germany, East Asia, and European countries. You name the nations back then, and we had the ASA there. They all had excellent facilities; they were taken good care of. Even here in the states, our location was called Vint Hill Farms and it was a huge listening post here in Virginia. Of course, now it's a museum, but back then it was a big old barn, huge barn, but inside it was all electronic equipment. It's a museum that I would like to visit soon.

Cara: Where is it?

Jon: Vint Hill Farm is just an hour's drive west of Washington D.C.

Cara: I'm getting the impression that when you were there, things were very well done. You were very well cared for. Were you under pressure or stress at the time, though?

Jon: Not really. I think it was on your off-duty, you were just bored, not stressed. We always had... wherever I was, if there wasn't a club, we built one. We could get beer and whiskey. That's where I learned to drink and it was a bad deal because I took that habit home with me. It took me quite a while to get over that. I got into some trouble in civilian life. Back in the military, in those days, they saw nothing wrong with drinking and that's what most people did on your off time, play cards and drink. But you can't take that kind of attitude home with you and I did that. It cost me some trouble after I got out of the army, straightened my act up eventually, sure did.

Cara: But it was hard.

Jon: It cost me a marriage and a beautiful wife. But everybody gets along today. I even go to church now with my ex-wife, and I'm out here in Virginia with everybody. My granddaughters are here with my daughter's family and I've never had it so good. My daughter is my best friend.

Cara: Back to when you say people entertained themselves. There was alcohol, they played cards; were there drugs?

Jon: There was, but nobody really got into that, or looked for it, in our unit because we knew that drugs were a bad thing in the military. They knew it was out there, and they didn't like for you to get involved with it. If they so much as knew you were, you were kicked out of the military immediately. So, it's kind of ironic. Alcohol was OK, and I remember getting into some trouble. I got into a fight one time we were drinking, a bad fight. I could have gotten into really bad trouble, but being in Vietnam and where we were, we got a slap on the hand and they said, "No, you just don't do that anymore." It was a different world back then.

Cara: Did you get to go on leave?

Jon: Yes, I did, they called it R &R, and I had the opportunity to go to several different countries. I went to Thailand for a week and then I also got to go to Singapore. I wanted to go to Australia, but couldn't get it because so many people wanted to. I did get Singapore and Thailand on my two R & Rs. I'm talking about over a period of two tours in Vietnam. On the last tour, I went to Japan for a week.

(*Information added after the initial interview.)* "When we put in for Leave or R & R, The Company always paired us up with another ASA member in the Unit and we traveled together for two reasons: we had a Top-Secret Security Clearance and for safety."

I recall we always checked out the restaurants, and fancy taverns, leased a driver and toured the country, and of course, shopped for souvenirs. I also ordered China ware for my mother, and her friends. She worked with at the Clark County Courthouse.

Cara: What did you do when you were there?

Jon: You just went out and shopped and took in the culture. As a young kid, it was a whole different world and I enjoyed it. I've got a ton of photographs and of course we'd party too, but it was just a different experience. I'd also like to tell you about Leave. What they call "Leave" in the military, in my situation, was when I went from my first tour in Vietnam in 1968 to my second tour in Taiwan. But if you're going inter-theater, you had to put in for leave to go home. Otherwise, you had to go straight to your other duty station and I didn't want to go straight from Vietnam to Taiwan. I wanted to come back to the States for at least a month. I got that, but you had to find your own way home. If I was going to a different duty station like they wanted me to, they would pay the way and provide the ticket and the plane. But two of us were going inter-theater in Taiwan, and we flew down to Saigon from Pleiku Tan Son Nhut, and we walked around with our military orders in our hand and started talking to pilots to see if we could hitch hike a ride back to the United States. We finally caught a guy, c141 pilot, he said, "I got room," but he was loaded up with nothing but

body bag containers. And this was of course 1968, when the United States was losing 100 men a day over there. Anyway, a guy from my company named Tommy Donn, he was from North Carolina, a good guy and it was just he and I sitting in the back of that c141 with their crew and us two, and there behind us and in front of us was containers of body bags. I flew a 12-hour flight back with those guys, and I always wondered what kind of a reception that they got when they got home. The war was pretty bad, not well-received at home.

Cara: Do you have any other unusual things that happened to you while you were there?

Jon: I think I've told you the major ones. Unusual things happened. The Classified paperwork that we copied of our radio intercept of the enemy transmissions was taken to Pleiku Airfield by an MP and A Troop riding shotgun as guard.

PRD Radio intercept operator in the field. They were sent out with all Army & Special Forces Units.

This classified material then was flown down to Bien Hoa then flown back to the states to the NSA, where they broke the codes in the Morse and linguist intercept copy.

On one occasion in 1968, I volunteered to ride shotgun with the MP to the airfield, approximately eight miles away. Halfway down the old dirt road, our Jeep quit and we could not get it started. We pushed it approximately a quarter of a mile into a 4th Infantry camp and into their small motor pool area. Their mechanic came out to help and said, "Hi, Jon Swayze. What are you doing way out here?" It was Pat Yaple from Ashland, who was a freshman when I was a senior. We had a good visit while

he looked at our Jeep and fixed the carburetor. I believe God put him there; it was a miracle!

Picture of me leaving my 8-man tent and geared up as I walked to our Operations center, which were the "Deuce and a Half" van with Radio Intercept equipment. We worked 8-hour shifts; and each operator was assigned particular VC Radio Call-Signs to monitor; (see attached pic of Operations). We copied all of their transmissions and notified military units in our area of their activity. We had broken all their Morse codes through the NSA. All radio traffic deemed important was sent back to the NSA via aircraft where encrypted codes were broken, if necessary. Our unit copied and predicted the TET Offensive of 1968, but sadly many field Commanders disregarded our prediction.
When our 8-hour shifts were done (I worked 3pm - 11pm), we were assigned other tasks to keep us busy for 16 hours, leaving 8 hours sleep. This usually was Guard duty assigned on our Perimeter, filling sand bags for our bunkers, or other duties. Occasionally we were chosen to ride "shotgun" on a Courier Run to the Airbase near Camp Holloway for our Classified Copy to the NSA.
I have a memory of riding "shotgun' for a courier run when our Jeep broke down half way to the airbase; (the country roads were relatively safe in the daytime, but the night belonged to the VC). Unable to start the Jeep we began pushing it knowing there was a 4th Infantry Camp with a motor pool on the road; as we pushed the Jeep into their camp and up to their motor pool, their mechanic came out to help and said, "Hey Jon Swayze!" It was Pat Yaple a guy from Ashland High School who was a freshman when I was a Senior. We had a good chat while he quickly fixed what was just a "vapor lock" on the carburetor, due to the heat. An unforgettable memory.

More unusual events are memories on 330th RRC, Engineer Hill, in 1968. Each day we had company formations in the early mornings, but that ended three months after I arrived when we had sniper fire. I recall a bullet passing by my right ear so close that the whirr of its sound was actually felt for a period of time.

One of our assignments was to work as the company "CQ" at night every month. The CQ monitored all friendly radio transmissions in our area. The 4th Infantry ran patrols at night outside of our perimeter, approximately a quarter mile out. One night I

listened as they thought there was enemy movement. A lot of low whispering, talking. And then all kinds of automatic weapon firing, then silence followed by, "Damn. It was a water buffalo."

The last unusual event was an unforgettable memory my night as CQ listening to the combat engineers on our hill who would always send out two men as "listening posts". They were to quietly set up in the evening to listen for any enemy activity or movement outside our perimeter wire.

One night, I listened as they began warning they had movement. Then suddenly, after a short firefight, began screaming they needed help. Then they went silent. A patrol was later sent out to recover their bodies. A sad night.

We had to be careful as we had a small Montagnard village not far out from our S/E Perimeter; who were friendly and their Chief always warned us of possible enemy activity in the area.

A good friend of mine, Ralph Morton from Phillipsburg, Kansas, worked with the Montagnard's and has written a book titled "God, Kate & I" about his late wife, western Kansas farming, and his military service. Ralph and I were at the 330th on Engineer Hill at the same time and during the TET offensive. He would verify my experiences, and more as he had some wild experiences which earned him a "Purple Heart."

I've always wanted to write a book and I'm going to, of all of this and just put it on paper, at least for the grandkids, because there's some extraordinary experiences, but right now that's all I can think of I wanted to mention. There are two books about my unit, if anybody ever wanted to read them, I even have my picture in one. The title of the book, which is in the Ashland library (I gave you the book) is Unlikely Warriors, the Army Security Agency Secret War in Vietnam, and that thing has got pictures of everything I've said and people I served with. And then there's another book, a very expensive book, that's about our unit in Vietnam, also.

Cara: What's the title?

Jon: The title of it is The Most Secret War and the author of that is James Gilbert. It's a very, very good read, but I think the value of the book is like a $140.

Cara: Wow.

Jon: I don't know why. I don't know why, but maybe it's rare.

Cara: But have you read it?

Jon: Yes, it's very good and there is great explanation of our technology and great pictures.

Cara: I will look into it, but I can't make promises. Are there other experiences? Did you pull pranks on people or did you have things done to you?

Jon: I'm not sure, thinking of pranks, not really. I can tell you about pranks pulled on us by the Viet Cong. When we were in 330th up there on Engineer Hill, we lived in eight-man tents there. Eventually they built some billets for us, but the first eight months, we were in eight-man tents. It was kind of tough, but we liked it, we made it, but like most all the United States units over there, you hired the locals to come in and do work to help you out. If they wanted to work for you, we had daily things that they could do and we paid them pretty good, the military did. They came on-post. They had to be checked out, there couldn't be any weapons and they'd come in and do things. They had people that did laundry for us, washed out your fatigues and things, they paid them for that. They had a guy that they hired to watch our generator, that ran our equipment for our trucks and radios, and we had a barber that cut our hair. Now let me tell you about those two guys. One day one of the lieutenants in the unit saw the guy that was hired to watch the generator, all he was supposed to do was make sure he kept it running and checked oil and all that once in a while. But they noticed him walk and pacing from there from the operations to the orderly room and different locations. Most people wouldn't have noticed, he was just walking around, but he was watching him and he was pacing off how many steps, and of course that was for the mortar boys, the Viet Cong, so they would then know the distance between buildings. We wondered why they never missed when they mortared us, it was pretty much a target. And then I learned later the guy that we hired to be our barber was found when the perimeter was hit by the Viet Cong. He was shot and he was in the wires, one of the Viet Cong. So, this is the guy we hired to cut our hair! It was always something like that. So those were two pranks they pulled on us that could have been pretty bad. We didn't really pull pranks on one another that I could think of.

Cara: That's kind of scary, that you're trying to trust people that aren't trustworthy.

Jon: I think so too. You know, looking back then, I had a whole different world view of the Vietnam War. I thought we were really helping the South Vietnamese people keep their government. But then you know, when you get older, you look back and it's probably a war we shouldn't have ever been in to begin with, because a lot of the Viet Cong were the guys that were trying to save their country from the Americans. If you thought that maybe another country came in and did that to the United States, if we had a civil war, you've got to look at it two ways. I love the Vietnamese people. They were always the best people in the world if they're on your side. I always felt bad for how the Vietnam veterans were treated and for years have bothered me. We were called names and I saw the things that... You know, when I came home from Vietnam, the war being watched on TV with Walter Cronkite telling everybody what was going on by his point-of-view (and he was quite a left-wing liberal back in his day) and my brothers and family and people, hometown people, didn't really want to hear what you had to say because they already knew all about it and it kind of bothered me. I said, “Don't you know what this is doing to Vietnam Veterans?” A lot of them were really bothered at being called murderers or baby killers or whatever.

I always had a dream. I wanted to take care of Vietnam Veterans. I consider them my brothers and that dream came true when I went into nursing and retired from the Veterans Hospital in Wichita, Kansas and took care of a lot of Vietnam Vets. It was a dream that came true. The Good Lord looks after you when you pray about it. There's a lot of things that go on we're dealing with today. Most of your veterans, the Vietnam Veterans that I know of, are dealing with Agent Orange. They dumped Agent Orange on us at Pleiku and Long Thanh both where I was at. I got it bad and I'm feeling the effects today with bladder cancer and diabetes type 2. And the thing it is, we drank the water, and that Agent Orange defoliant went into the rivers and lakes. We hauled up tanks of that water out of the lakes. They cleaned it and got the bacteria out. That was called "potable water". You drank it and took showers in it and washed your clothes in it, but you can't take the chemical Dioxin of Agent Orange out and if you can imagine, it's killing Vietnam Veterans today, in their older age, what is it doing to the Vietnamese people today? Kids are being born deformed and with problems as well, because the soil and the water was poisoned. So, it will take years for that to go away, and that's kind of something to keep in mind.

Cara: You never see anything on the news about that.

Jon: No, but you can sure Google it. I have friends on Facebook that that go back over there and help with these orphanages and hospitals. They actually do. There's Vietnam Veterans doing that, flying over there, or they've set up a charity to donate to these hospitals and orphanages that the kids are being born that way. If you ever need to know it, you really need to know the charity that they do. But yeah, there's people really helping, doing their best for what they can. So I appreciate the interview, Cara. That's been wonderful.

Cara: Can I ask you just a few more questions before we're done.

Jon: I got all the time.

Cara: I was born in '64, so there's a lot of things here that I have never heard, and the little bit of research I've been trying to do leaves out... there's gaps. Just back to very quickly when you think about the people with whom you served, were there any officers or fellow soldiers that really stood out to you as great humans?

Jon: I know there's a bunch and I think most of them are Facebook friends, the two guys that wrote that book, Unlikely Warriors, they are awesome people, Lonnie Long and Gary Blackburn. They did the same thing that I did over there and they're friends on Facebook. In fact, we all stay in contact. I also stay in contact with a couple of Australians that I served TDY with: Dennis Dean, Phil Rutherford, and James Weeg. Jim was one of my pilots. We stay in touch. He was in the plane when we got hit that time. I'll never forget Captain Weeg, I think he retired a colonel and with a lot of recognition, a Bronze Star. I know there's more, some wonderful guys, just if you get that book, it's got everybody's name in it that participated, they did so much. A lot of them have written their own books and Harry Locklear is one of 'em. He got shot

down there. I think he got captured and got away and came home and wrote a book called, “Blessed Are the Peacemakers”. He's an awesome guy and you can find him on Facebook. One more good friend is Ralph Morton from Phillipsburg, Kansas, who I served with at Pleiku. He received a purple heart when there and has written a book, God, Kate, and I, and writes about his experience in Vietnam with ASA. He would verify the events I spoke about.

Cara: That's a lot. After your service, you mentioned that you went into nursing, but I want to go back just a little farther. Do you remember what day your service ended?

Jon: It was an Early Out. I went in September 14, 1966 and got out August 2, 1970. My last duty station ended in Vietnam, the ETS from Long Thanh in Vietnam, it was the second of August, and so I got out a month early and that was August 2, 1970.

Cara: Where were you?

Jon: I was in Long Thanh, Vietnam. We were given the reenlistment speech and nobody took it. And then we were debriefed on the classified nature of our mission and what to expect when we got home. Our ASA mission in Vietnam was classified top secret for 30 years after the end of the war in 1975, which affected our telling “our story”. So, thanks for this interview.

Everybody said, "Folks don't expect a parade because there's not going to be one there. You're not going to be well-received, so just avoid it." I remember when we landed in Oakland and we went through the Army discharge process at Oakland Airforce Base there in California. There was people that didn't like you. But when you got out on the street, you just got on the bus and went to the airport and got out of there. I flew to my sister's home in Denver, at the time and then drove back down to Ashland in a car with my niece. I wanted to tell you that, you know, people didn't really care. When I got to Ashland, there you were! You just drove home and said "Hi" to everybody at home. Nobody in the community really said much and this just kind of bothered me. A lot of people didn't care. I remember one guy saying, "Where you been, Jon? I haven't seen you in a while." But there was two guys I'll never forget from Ashland that thanked me for my service: Donley McCarty and Raymond McMillion. Those are the two best guys that I can remember.

Cara: On August the second you were still in the service. How long did it take to be home in Ashland?

Jon: Twelve hours from Vietnam, the flight to Denver, Colorado. I think the county fair was getting ready to start. My niece and one of my friends from Ashland, Bob York, let us borrow one of his beautiful Quarter Horses and my mother had a Shetland my niece rode in the Clark County Fair Parade. I'll never forget that.

Cara: So in a week's time, you went from being in the service to riding in a parade?

Jon: That was my Welcome Home Parade, the Clark County State Fair Parade.

Cara: All right, you mentioned that you really didn't get a ticker tape parade when you came back. Did you meet with poor responses from some of the people at home?

Jon: I sure did, and it bothered me. It really did, because it came from people that were close to you. You know, like classmates or even one family member who never really did like Vietnam or anything that I ever really did. I'm from a family that's big and we all love one another. But I've got one brother that in my lifetime has never said anything good about me. They said things that really hurt, there weren't true, and it can be proved to be not true. Then I remember going to college. I wanted to go back to school and use the G.I. Bill because it was one of the reasons why, besides grades, that I left school. I didn't have the money and so I went to Southwestern College and used a scholarship that I had there and that was available. But I got up there in 1971. We had a chapel requirement, that the student body went to, being a Methodist college, and I'll never forget one of the student pastors standing there telling everybody how bad Vietnam was and that if anybody served there, they were a murderer. And on and on he went, and this guy's going to be a preacher! And I went off on him and I just quit school. I think I got into some trouble over that and of course I was drinking. I always went back to drinking. When things started bothering me, that was my easy way out. But you can't do that in civilian life. So I took what people said and it burdened me, but I think eventually it was God's way of telling me that you need to get right, and today with the good Lord, life is a miracle every day. So I have no complaints. I just wish people didn't judge by what other people might say or what they've heard, because you need to go to that person and find out the truth.

Cara: I admire that you came back and pretty much went into a life of service to others. You became a nurse. I'm going to ask: what were you studying at K-State before you went to the war?

Jon: I was wanting to be a school teacher. Really. what I did was I had a football scholarship to Southwestern if I made the team. I went up there and talked to the coach and the coach at Southwestern said, "You've got to make the team before you get your money." Then I got to thinking about my injured knee I got in high school my senior year and I'm looking at these big 200- and 300-pound guys coming through the door and I thought, "I don't know about this!" So, I started studying biology and teaching. I wanted to teach biology and the reason is because I like that sort of thing, I loved biology. My football coach in high school, Coach Peterson, said, "Do that. That's what you need to do. I had a 3.0 average at southwestern and then my old buddy friend from Ashland, I'm not going to mention his name, but he knows who I'm talking about, came up there and said, "Jon, you should come up here to K-State? It's much better, we'll all get a big house and rent it. There was four of us in that house when I transferred up there. But I went from a biology/zoology class of about 12 or 15 to a class of about 100 to 150 up there and I just got lost. I just couldn't do it and so

my grades suffered badly. One good thing about it is I had about 60 college hours of biology, botany, comparative anatomy and chemistry, you name it, and it all worked towards my career in nursing, and so all that came together.

Cara: How many years did you serve as a nurse?

Jon: While I'm still doing it, in retirement. I'm working part-time but I would say 35 years, and I retired from the Veterans Hospital.

Cara: You got your degree from Southwestern.

Jon: Oh no, I didn't get a degree. I ended going to vo-tech to be a licensed practical nurse, LPN. It was through the Wichita Area Vo-Tech School then, back in 1985. I tried to get my RN though Butler County and I tried Southwestern. I wrote them, but they said, "You'll have to take all those classes again. Botany, chemistry..." And I said there's no sense in that. That doesn't change. Even algebra doesn't change, and they wanted me to retake algebra. And I said, "I've already taken it, I'm not going to." I just went and got my LPN and that's what I've been for 35 years. Right now, I'm just working part-time for special-needs kids. I love the work but you've got to love it if you're going to do it, because you're not going to get rich

Cara: Well, I feel like you put the GI Bill to good use, though.

Jon: It sure did, it helped out.

Cara: Did you join any veterans' organizations then, because you've talked about knowing your friends on Facebook?

Jon: Yes, I've been in the VFW, I've been in the American Legion. 30 years ago, the VFW did not like or some did not accept Vietnam veterans. I eventually dropped both. I rode in the Patriot Guard with them and with the American Legion riders, the VFW riders with my motorcycle. Back when the Phelps' Baptist Church from Topeka were protesting veterans' funerals, we would get up in between them and the family to protect them. And I did that for years. So that's the group that I rode with and I'm really glad I did. You don't hear from Phelps any more, but I do help out. I rode many years with Patriot Guard in a lot of weather.

Cara: Did you come to Coldwater? Because the Patriot Guard came and stood there when Phelps came to protest one of the veterans that was buried there.

Jon: Didn't go to that one, but I remember when that happened. I came through Coldwater when I got to escort... Willard Aldridge. I escorted him from Wichita when they brought his body back from Hawaii, from Pearl Harbor, when he was killed

there. They identified his remains and I got to escort that when Oliver Shupe and the family rode with the school bus of high school kids and they let me escort. I wanted more Patriot Guard riders to go with me, but it was the Memorial Day Weekend and all of them were busy at cemeteries. So, it was just me from Wichita to Ashland, but the Patriot Guard Riders came from Liberal, Kansas. We rode the next day to the cemetery. So, it worked out.

Cara: That matters, but is there something else that you would like to bring up that I just didn't realize I should ask you.

Jon: Trying to think, I think I pretty much covered at all. I certainly don't have any regrets and I'm glad you're doing it and talking to other people about this. There are several that I thought of names later that were navy over there. There was Ivan Priesner who served in the Navy during the Vietnam War and then I've talked with Tom Berryman and Gary Allison. I know were both over there when I was. Bill Broadie was a good friend; it's is a shame that he's gone. He went through so much. Pat Yaple that I mentioned earlier from Ashland, who fixed our Jeep near Pleiku; I've learned died just a few years ago.

I sure appreciate the ability to tell you my story.

Cara: I'm just going to say thank you for your service, because it really mattered and no matter which side we fall on the war, people were doing it in good faith at the time.

Jon: Exactly, and do tell people that if they need a person's record and want to know, what's the true story about what it was like when they were in, its online now. Technology has your medical records, your awards. Everything is online now in your military record. If you want to question something, there it is, about your granddad or your dad.

Cara: You can get permission if you're family.

Jon: Yes, there is a way of doing that. I mean not just anybody and go on and do it, but you can go through the family and get it done. Its online, and just put in military records when you go to it: eVetRecs, National Archives.

Cara: And one more thing: you already spoke to this about you, how you changed your perception of the war after you figured out other people involved. Did they influence your feelings about the military in general?

Jon: No, the military in general, I think, is probably improved with the all-volunteer. I mean it's sad what our government is doing to the military now. We've got to change this government. It's destroying our military. It's just crazy what they're doing. They're destroying... People are getting out, they can't meet their enlistment goals and making them take this vaccine that's just experimental. I can go on about that, but I won't. But the military itself? I've always loved like military. We were so patriotic when we were younger. My uncle served during the war before me and the Korean War. Then when I was in high school our American history teacher was Mr. Humphreys, he was the superintendent of schools there for years and was a WWI Army sergeant. We flew

through American history till we got to WWI and then you didn't forget the Treaty of Versailles. I still can tell you all about it. I have so much patriotism you just didn't question your government back then. Today I look back and there's things like the Gulf of Tonkin. I believe the government lied to us about that and a few other things, but we didn't know that at the time. You just went with the government you trusted, and so things are changing fast with this government and I hope the people wake up to that because things are happening pretty fast. Just pray, pray for our nation and the Lord will show you the way. That's for sure.

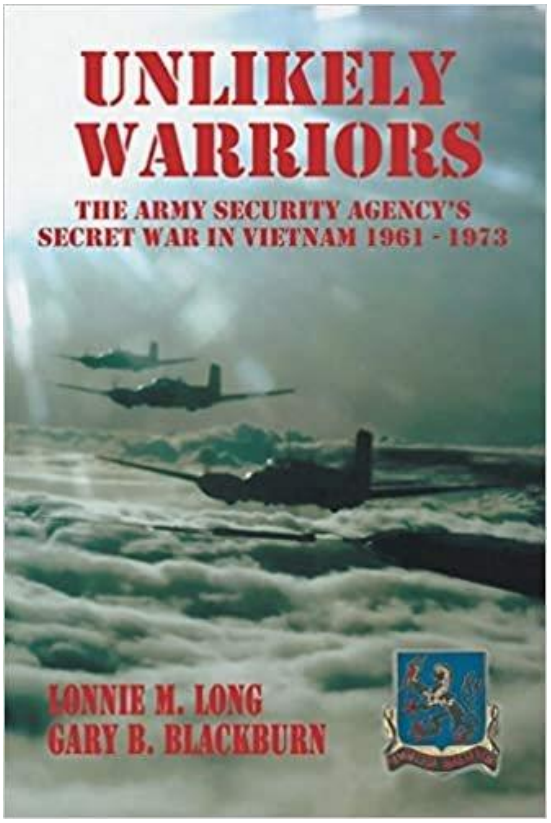
Cara: Because we were lucky to be born into this country.

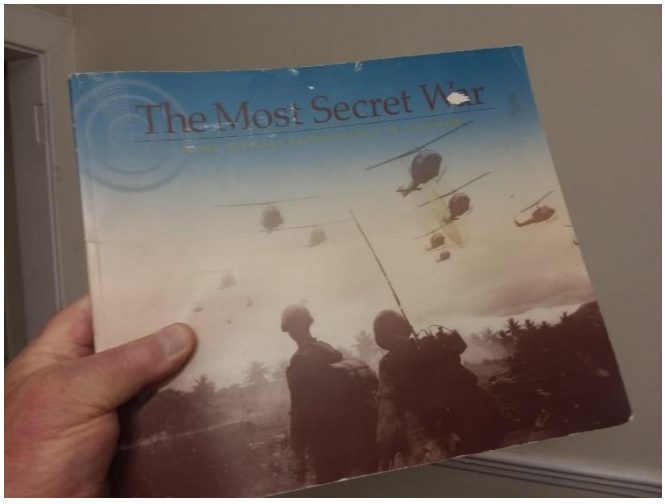
Jon: I've got to tell you, the best people today, the most patriotic people today are friends that are Vietnamese that are in this country. When I was a nurse at the VA hospital, my best coworkers were Vietnamese nurses and this is because of their work ethic. they love this nation because their family taught them what Communism is really like One of the ER Doctors that I worked with was a Vietnamese and a KU Resident Physician. He was excellent and one of the best I worked with. One evening at work when things were slow, he told me his parents were Vietnamese “Boat People” and escaped but lost everything when their boat was boarded by thieves and ransacked. They and his 3 brothers were just small children, and survived. He and his 2 brothers are now Physicians in Wichita, Ks.

So, they're the best patriots you want to be around it. It's amazing where a lot of Americans don't realize how bad it can be, and so I just appreciate that experience is good. That comes out of everything, I guess.

Cara: Thank you very much.

Vietnam Era Memories, Jon Swayze





Unlikely Warriors: The Army Security Agency's Secret War in Vietnam 1961 – 1973 is placed in the Ashland Library.

It is the complete history of my ASA Unit in Vietnam Mission (which was declassified in 2005, 30 years after the War).
My picture is on page 151.
years after the War).