

## Vietnam Era Memories: Gary Vashus

*Cara:* This is Cara Vanderree at the Ashland City Library and we are talking today with Gary Vashus about his Vietnam War memories. It is October 11, 2022 at 1:00. Gary was born in 1946. This interview is done by the Ashland City Library through Humanities Kansas, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read Project.

*Cara:* Gary, what branch of service were you? What was your rank?

*Gary:* I was in the Army. When I got out, I was a sergeant.

*Cara:* Where did you serve?

*Gary:* Germany.

*Cara:* Were you drafted or did you enlist?

*Gary:* Well, I enlisted.

*Cara:* Why?

*Gary:* Well, I couldn't... I went to the bank and they wouldn't loan me money because I was on the list to go and they didn't want to get involved in that. I just got tired of it. Nobody would give me a job because you might get called up the next day. I had a job, but if I went to get something better or something, I wouldn't have got it. They wouldn't hire you if you were on the draft list.

*Cara:* When did you enlist?

*Gary:* Well, it was in July of 1967.

*Cara:* So, you joined because your options were so limited if you stayed here.

*Gary:* I just wanted to get it over with, get it out of the way. Just sitting around, wondering if... You see, my boss had me on a deferment and every time I got to the top of the list, then I'd go back. I didn't like that. I thought, well, if I'm going to go, I need to go and get it over with.

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*Cara:* Why were you receiving a deferment?

*Gary:* Because he wanted me to work on the ranch, agricultural deferment.

*Cara:* Why did you pick the army?

*Gary:* Well, I ain't a duck. I didn't want to join the Navy or the Marines because I'd just as soon stay... I want to keep two feet on the ground.

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

*Gary:* First days in the service? We didn't know what the hell we was doing. I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. They sent me a paper that said I needed to go Denver to the deal. They run us through a whole bunch of tests and doctors and all kinds of stuff with information and they was writing... It was a whole-day deal. Then about dark, they put us on a bus and sent us to the airport. We flew to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and we got there in the middle of the night. We had a little time at the airport, so we bought all the whiskey we could get our hands on and we stuck it in our duffle bag and got on the bus. They flew us to Nashville and then they put us on a bus to go to Fort Campbell. We broke out the whisky and started passing it around and we was in pretty good shape when we got there. These old drill sergeants came out, came in there and starting hollering and yelling and run us out. We had to get mattresses and some blankets and stuff and they was going to put us to bed. Just about the time we sat on the bed, they said, "Get up, let's go." For the first 96 hours, I don't think we had any sleep. We was so tired, we just passed out.

*Cara:* When was this?

*Gary:* In 1967. That's when I went in, July 30, 1967. And they put us in a bunch of tents because they didn't have basics. Their deals weren't over yet. So, for three weeks, we was in the tents and all we done was Police Call and go get shots, and I never got so many shots in my life.

*Cara:* What's Police Call?

*Gary:* Picking up trash. Picking up trash, cigarette butts, it didn't matter, whatever was out there.

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*Cara:* So you didn't start training for the first week?

*Gary:* About three weeks, they didn't have a place for us yet. There was so many people there, they just kept putting them in tent cities and backing them up. But they run us through all that and then we got to Basic and did the regular basic deal. That's one thing about these guys, we'd get up at three o'clock in the morning and go run before breakfast.

*Gary:* And the first little while, we may run a mile or two, and then it was five miles, and then it was 10 miles. When we left there, the 101st Airborne run on the same road we run on and we outrun 'em. I thought that was pretty good, but I wasn't at the head of the class on that. But I was there, and then when Basic was over, it was August... September or October or something. We had 90 days in Basic. I think it was six weeks.

*Cara:* What did you learn in Basic?

*Gary:* We just did a lot of physical exercises and handling our weapons and they made us clean 'em and stuff once in a while. Setting up pup tents and this basic stuff that you need to know. I got out of there and they put me in an airplane and flew me to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. They flew us to Lawton and then we took a bus in to Fort Sill. I was there till December on that Persian missile deal. That was a big missile. I've got a picture of it at home, I'll show you.

*Cara:* What was the Persian missile deal?

*Gary:* Well, it was a nuclear... It was all nuclear weapons. The smallest one we had was 10 times larger than the one they dropped on Hiroshima. Now the bigger nukes are like 100 times larger.

*Cara:* What were you? How were you involved?

*Gary:* Well, I was a crewman to start with and I think I did every crew station there.

*Cara:* What is a "crew station"?

*Gary:* Well, you have three crewmen and a NCO (noncommissioned officer) to fire the missile. It was our job to take care of it all. We had an officer over us, we didn't actually fire it, the officer had to do that. But some of them knotheds weren't the best in the world.

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*Cara:* So, you're saying, if you had to set off a nuclear missile, you were capable?

*Gary:* I'd a done it. I might have got shot because I did, but I could have done it.

*Cara:* Do you remember any of your instructors?

*Gary:* Well, one sergeant. We had a Sergeant White and a Sergeant Black that was our drill instructors and how we got that deal, I don't know. That was a black guy and a white guy. The white guy he was a high rank and the black guy, his name was Sergeant White and the white guy was named Sargent Black. So, we had a multi-racial thing there. But we went to Fort Sill and we didn't have no duties while we was at Fort Sill. We didn't pull no K-P, we didn't pull no guard duty, we didn't pull nothing.

*Cara:* You were on vacation?

*Gary:* No, we was exempt because they wanted us to pay attention when we went... We went to school all day long on that missile and then we went to the barracks. We had a standing pass; we could go down to the PX, or go to a movie or something on-base. On weekends we'd get an off-base pass. We could go down town and be rowdy or whatever.

*Cara:* How did you get through all that?

*Gary:* How did I get through it? Just do it. You've got to do it anyhow, might as well get it over.

*Cara:* Now this was during the Vietnam War, so you started out in Nashville. What camp was that?

*Gary:* Fort Campbell Kentucky!

*Cara:* Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Then they sent you...

*Gary:* The Kentucky and Tennessee, I think it's Tennessee, state lines ran right through the middle of our barracks. They had a line painted on it and we fought over that.

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*Cara:* I said you went from Fort Campbell to Fort Sill. Where else were you?

*Gary:* In December, they sent me home for two weeks. I left home on Christmas Day and went to Germany. I got up real early that morning and we went to town, I got on a bus and went to Denver and they picked me up and took me to the airport. They put me on a plane and they flew me to Fort Dix, Pennsylvania or New York. (New Jersey). They gathered up and put us on the airplane and flew us to Frankfurt, Germany, non-stop.

*Cara:* How many hours?

*Gary:* I don't know. I slept through some of it. I was thinking it was eight hours but I hadn't had any sleep till then. We got to go to Frankfurt and it was dark and they picked us up and took us down. There's a concern, I can't think of the name of it. It was a German SS deal where they took people and beat their heads out. And then there's little old rooms down the basement, they're probably six-foot wide and eight-foot-long, got little-bitty window, got glass on it. Then I could look and see what you're doing. There's just room to turn around in there. The whole round the basement was full of them. But anyhow they gathered us up there and sorted us out, and everybody was going different places. They put us put us on a train we went to Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany, which is close to Stuttgart. I'd have to look at a map now to tell you, but they put us on this train and put us in the last car and they shut all the heat and electricity off. There was no electricity. There was no heat, you know, there were no lights or anything. There was none. We crawled up amongst the... they had a bunch of mail bags going down that way and we crawled up amongst the mail bags to keep warm. It was about 40 below zero.

*Cara:* Why would they shut off the heat?

*Gary:* Germans were getting even with us. There was still a lot of dissent in Germany when I was over there. That was 20 years after the war. And boy, there was a lot of people that still thought Hitler was pretty good. I mean, you get in the right places and they was a little touchy. We fixed that, though, most of the time. We'd be a little worse for wear the next morning, but we fixed it, mostly.

*Cara:* Do you remember arriving?

*Gary:* They put us on that train and we went down there and they sent a... oh, it's a three-quarter ton pickup with a tarp, and they picked us up and the mail. There were seven or eight of us from that class that went there and the mail bags. We went up to headquarters

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and there this officer come out and he was talking to us. "Welcome to Germany" and blah, blah, blah. I don't know what he said, but he told them to feed us and put us to bed and leave us alone. We went to bed and slept for about 24 hours. Food ain't the greatest in the world. We got over there, and the enlisted people, they fed them C rations and stuff. The cooks would take the C rations and break them out and make a meal out of them. We didn't get a lot of good stuff. The officers would go in there and load their car with the good stuff. We'd get meat and the officers loaded it up. We never ate fresh meat. It was all that canned stuff. We'd get meat and the officers would go in there and the mess cooks would cut it up and divide it between them. All the officers in the battery would go in there and get their share of it and take it home. They'd have barbecues and you could smell it down the hill.

*Gary:* The worst thing about that was the drugs were starting. We had people jump out of five-story buildings.

*Cara:* Where would you get drugs?

*Gary:* They'd get 'em off-post. Somebody would bring it in and sell it to them.

*Cara:* What kind?

*Gary:* I don't know what they was, cocaine, marijuana, whatever. I don't know what they was, but I didn't get involved in that too much. There was a lot of marijuana; there was a lot of hard drugs, but they ain't as hard as the ones we've got now. That was kind of a bad deal. They put us in a battery. We had a section sergeant that was just a bad person. I wanted to get rid of him a time or two, but some of that was kind of hard. I didn't help it any because I was always getting in trouble with him. I ended up on KP and guard duty back-to-back. When you got to be there three or four o'clock in the morning, about four o'clock, to help the cooks get everything ready for the morning meal. You do that and you get off of there about nine o'clock at night, eight o'clock, and then they'd send you to CQ, that's Charge of Quarters. They've got a couple of guys that they'll walk the halls once in a while, a couple of times a night, to see what's going on. It's just something they do. They sit there by the phone and if something happened, they have to answer the phone and get the proper people. Because we were the highest status alert deal in Germany.

*Cara:* Why?

*Gary:* Because of the nuclear weapons and the Germans. If the Germans started something, we was number-one deal.

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*Cara:* Who did you feel was the enemy then?

*Gary:* Well, it was the Russians and the Czechoslovakians.

*Cara:* Everyone else was worried about Vietnam.

*Gary:* We were sitting there and they tested us all the time and we were testing them. But the tankers and stuff, we spent more time in the field than any unit in Germany.

*Cara:* Why?

*Gary:* Because of what we did and the lack of personnel.

*Cara:* So, this really is the definition of the Cold War.

*Gary:* Yes.

*Cara:* So basically, you're baby-sitting nuclear weapons.

*Gary:* Yes. And after a year or so, they wanted me to go to NCO school and I told them, "I ain't going there. I don't want to be... I don't want no part of it. You let somebody else do it."

*Cara:* Is that a noncommissioned officer?

*Gary:* Yes. So, one time they just printed out some orders and made me an acting sergeant, then they read that deal out at the morning work formation and I carried that paper around in my back pocket. About four o'clock in the afternoon, my lieutenant, he was a pretty good guy, but he said, "If you don't get them stripes on in the next 15 minutes I'm going to Article 15 you."

*Cara:* What does Article 15 mean?

*Gary:* They can court martial you, well, it's company punishment. They can take money out of your paycheck and give you extra duty. It's corporal punishment, kind of.

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*Cara:* How did being a sergeant change your life?

*Gary:* Well, not too much, because we were doing the same thing I was doing before. They got after me because we'd get new guys and they didn't know what they was doing and I'd say, "Here, get out of the way." I could do everything on that missile by myself, but you have to have them guys because you can't be three places at once. But I had a pretty good crew. They picked the best firing crew of all the batteries in Germany and sent them to the States to fire a missile. I got to go twice, me and my crew got to go twice. That's quite a deal to watch that missile go. It was for me because I never seen one take off before.

*Cara:* What kind of missile?

*Gary:* Well, it was a two-stage rocket. It was probably, with the warhead on it, almost 50-foot-long, and it was about four-something feet across the middle of it, the diameter.

*Cara:* So, you practice-fired ones...

*Gary:* We only fired... They picked us up, we loaded all of our gear. We'd go to Frankfort, and they'd fly us to White Sands, New Mexico. We'd get our gear off there and practice a few days, and then we fired the missile and then we'd load everything up.

*Cara:* You fired a live missile?

*Gary:* Yes. It didn't have a nuclear warhead, it just had a cement one for balance. It was a dud. But we fired that missile at one time 400, like 480 miles or something. I don't know, and put it in a 55-gallon barrel. They had a grid staked, you know, like for surveying. They had a grid staked with the coordinates on it that we put on the missile. One of them guys out there decided to put a 55-gallon barrel over it and we took the barrel out. That was one of the best shots ever made with that missile. So, we did pretty good.

*Cara:* So, they let you practice and then sent you back to Germany.

*Gary:* We just practiced a little bit to get our equipment running. It was so hot out there. We went to Salt Lake City and then we went to Green River, Utah, and we fired into White Sands, New Mexico. When we got done, we loaded up and come back. When we got back, we had to clean up everything. Everything in there had to be washed and clean and shined up, ready and we put it back on-line. We didn't get much rest and out there at Green River,



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it was so hot. They sent us to Salt Lake City, to the airport there and a bus picked us up. We loaded all our duffle bags and stuff in the bus and headed for Green River. It was hot in that bus, and we said something about the air conditioner ain't working and he said, "Yeah, it is." And we got out there and it was like a 120 and guys coming off that bus would step out there and pass out. They had medics standing on each side of the door to catch 'em when they come out. You'd come out of that bus and boy, everything went 'round. I didn't fall or anything, but it was sure kind of hard. I was used to the heat better most of them, but we just had tents. We pulled the flaps up so that the breeze blow through it and everything else.

*Cara:* How long did you spend at White Sands?

*Gary:* We were there probably a couple of weeks.

*Cara:* One time that you went?

*Gary:* I went twice, two years in a row. I remember at the last, I was getting kind of short, probably the last six months. So, they had a colored guy, his name was Rhett, and they wanted him to take over my job because they needed a colored guy running it. It was starting to get dicey.

*Gary:* We had a lot of trouble there for a while, with all that negro fighting with, you know, in the sixties. If you went across the parade ground (you've seen that picture with all equipment on it.) If we walked across to the \_\_\_\_\_ Club, they'd split your head open with a tire iron. If we walked across that, and that ain't that far, if we walked across that area, there'd be as high as eight or 10 of us together. If you had that many people, nobody bothered you, but they'd be hiding in them trucks and stuff ready to. There was guys that had their heads split open all the time. I know of two got killed. They hit them wrong and killed them. Nothing ever happened out it because the colored guys, they kind of... But some of the nicest people I know were colored people. This guy's name was George Washington. He'd been to Vietnam and he got in this missile deal somehow. He was with the First Cavalry in Vietnam and he still wore his patch. But he was one of the nicest fellers. One night a bunch of them caught me outside by myself and was going to whip me. When we was doing this talking back and forth deal before the ruckus started, I knew I was in pretty bad shape and Washington walked out there. He was a big, six-foot four. He walked out there and said, "You fellows better go home, before I hurt you. You leave him alone." But he was good all the time Anybody in our battery, if they was in trouble, he stepped in the middle of it.

*Gary:* So, it ain't just colored people, it's just them individuals. Just like back there in New York City where they're burning stuff. That's the kind of people that causes trouble. It's not.

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There's a lot of good colored people out there, just like white people are the same. There's some of them that ain't worth a darn and there's some people, that's just pretty good

*Gary:* So, I was kind of in a command situation and I just sat around in a chair and told Rhett to go do stuff. When he done it, then I'd go check on him. Sometimes I stood around and watched him. I had to do that, but I kind of got used to it. They had a little coffee shop that they run and you could eat breakfast down there and stuff if you wanted to buy it. You could read the paper. We could get Stars and Stripes down there and I'd go down there and sit and drink coffee in the morning. I didn't even go to work formation. Let Rhett take care of that. I didn't want to deal with all that junk.

*Cara:* Since you were a sergeant!

*Gary:* Well, so I'd take care of that, I had a driver with a jeep to go to the battery. When we were in the \_\_\_\_\_ concerns???? we'd go out and service warheads at the warhead dump. It wasn't too far away; Mitten Wald was the name of it. We'd go out there and service warheads. Boy, they had guards on that thing. There was three or four electric fences around it, guards with machine guns. When we went in there to service weapons, we had two guards on us, one on each side.

*Cara:* What does "service" mean?

*Gary:* You've got to take them out and check them, make sure they're in usable condition. Sometimes they use them and send them back when there are scratches on them or something. Well, if there are, you've got to send that warhead in to ordinance and they fix the paint on it. That paint is very important. If there's little scratch on the warhead, when it goes it'll burn up. It won't hit the target and it will burn it up. There's some kind of special, chalky-looking paint on that, about a 16th of an inch thick. You have to mirror it with a micrometer to see how deep the scratch is, there's specifications on that. If it's (the scratch is) so deep, I can't remember the numbers, it's not a whole lot. But if they're so deep, you have to send it into ordinance. We did stuff like that. They got desiccate; it takes the moisture out of there. You're supposed to put so many in there, but we'd get these big old tubs, there's like 30-gallon tubs, and we'd just about dump a whole tub in there so we didn't have to mess with it and they stayed dry. We wasted a lot of it.

*Cara:* So, if I get you right, you were servicing nuclear warheads.

*Gary:* Yes. Check the pins on where they connect, make sure there ain't no bent ones and all

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kinds of little stuff. There ain't much to do on them. It's basically just a big bomb setting there.

*Cara:* How exactly do you shoot a nuclear warhead?

*Gary:* They set it on there and they've got a solid, fuel rocket and it's kind of like shooting an old percussion cap rifle. Well, there's a detonator in there and it just lights it and it goes, "Pow!" This is a two-stage rocket, and when it gets so far it blows the case-venting device, it blows one on each side of it and it blows the sides out of the rocket. It blows the splice then, there's a ring that splices them together and when it comes apart, it unplugs and the second stage lights and takes off. There is a guidance system on it. This is old school.

*Cara:* Where were you aiming these things?

*Gary:* That was supposed to be a secret, but we got the coordinates and looked them up on maps and they was like supply works, a whole bunch of train yards where all the stuff comes for if they have to fight a battle they need supplies, vehicles, whatever it is, everything that the army would use. Some of them were troop concentrations. If there was a big troop concentration, some of them would take out little countries. If we fired that thing in Kansas, it'd take out the whole state of Kansas.

*Cara:* I wanted you to be sober for that.

*Gary:* Sometimes! We did a lot of drinking, just putting up with them. I had an officer one time, they set him in there and I can't remember what his name was. I think it was Swartz. He was out of OCF (Office of the Chief of Finance), he was just a strutting peacock. Now I mean, everybody had to be just right. He'd pull guard duty and he'd kick the whole guard off duty. He'd make them go and they had to go do it all over again. Then that gets you in trouble at home because you got kicked off guard and you go on extra duty and all kinds of stuff. But he kicked them all off several times and even the brass didn't like it. And one day, I went in the office when Rhett was running the deal. I was setting there with my feet up on the desk reading the Stars and Stripes and he come strutting in there and went to chewing on me. I said, "I want to tell you something. If the balloon goes up and we go to war and whatever happens. If they fire a missile at us fire and we have to go. You're the first son of a bitch I'm going to shoot." I said, "I will kill you deader than a doornail immediately if I see you." Because he got out there one time, he supposed to make the connections on the warhead. We spent over 72 hours. He just kept at it. Every time he got to do it, he'd twist a pin and it wouldn't mate.

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So, they'd have to go back to Battalion, go back to Mitten Wald and get a new warhead and bring it out there. This went on and on and on. Finally, I just stepped up there and I said, "Sir, get the hell out of the way. I'm going to mate this thing. So, we can go home." He just stepped back because I talked to him kind of strong. He just stepped back and I just plugged her together and we put it together and everything went.

We was in the field when I left, when I got ready to clear post and leave. I had most of the stuff signed, but there's some stuff for the last day. You've got to get your commanding officer and your platoon leader and everybody to sign off. They have a jeep that runs in the concern and sometimes they take messages and stuff. So, I was supposed to ride in with him. We had breakfast and then they had a work promotion type deal. Somebody come up and said there was something wrong and this guy hadn't been shown up for work for four or five days. They have a little store type deal in the field and he run it. He kind of just did what he wanted. He could sure get you in a corner if he wanted to use it. If you wanted something, you'd better do what he said. But anyhow this E6 was standing there and we went over there and had to kick the door down. This guy had hung himself with a pair of trousers, off the heat pipe in the top he was just plumb black. I never seen such a gross deal in my life and nobody had a pocket knife. So, I got mine out and gave it to them to cut him down. That was one of the worst things I saw. But we had several. They'd get on them drugs and just... You'd have one every once in a while, commit suicide.

*Cara:* How did you get selected for this service rather than sent to Vietnam?

*Gary:* I don't know, because I wasn't that smart.

*Cara:* Don't you have to take tests?

*Gary:* No, they just said these people go there and these people go there. When I got out, they just sent us to where they want us go. Some of them were cooks, some of them were infantry, some of 'em, you know. They just sent you. Maybe then went to mechanics school, whatever.

*Cara:* Did you receive any citations?

*Gary:* No. Good conduct medal! Boy, I cheated them on that deal.

*Cara:* How did you stay in touch with your family while you were over there?

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*Gary:* Not very much. I got a letter or two. They knew where I was. If something was wrong, we let somebody know. If everything's going right, we didn't worry about talking to anybody.

*Cara:* Did you feel pressure or were you stressed?

*Gary:* Oh God yeah, mainly just the people you had to deal with. Some of them, you know, like the officers or the NCOs that was there, and then it was just people in general that caused it. We had people in my platoon that I wouldn't turn my back on it for fear they'd stick a knife in it. That's why I'd rather have went to Vietnam, just shoot me and get it over with. All I wanted to do was get through it and come home and live my life. But I drank so much in the army that when I come home it was... I got home in '70. It was probably 15 years before I quit drinking. I drank so much that I'd go home and sit down on the porch at night and open a fifth of whisky and drink the whole thing and throw the bottle away, every day. I didn't drink in the daytime, just at night, but I was drinking so much that it about killed me. I got in a little trouble doing that. I got a DUI and I had to go see the judge. So, I got into Norton but waited till we got the wheat cut. We cut wheat the first part of July, around the fourth, I don't remember when it was. I went up there and I was in such bad shape that it's a wonder I lived. The doc up there checked me out and said, "If you keep drinking you won't live six months." Now, I don't know whether he was telling me that to scare me or whether it was true, but it wasn't good. I seen guys come in Norton up there, just yellow, jaundiced. Then they'd go home and then you'd hear they died.

*Cara:* Is this Norton, Kansas?

*Gary:* Yes! Valley Hope.

*Cara:* They try to help people straighten up?

*Gary:* Yes, they do drugs and alcohol. It's a good deal, or it was then.

*Cara:* Is it Alcoholics Anonymous or did you get into that later?

*Gary:* Well, it wasn't Alcoholics Anonymous, but they use that in there even. We had meetings.

*Cara:* How long were you there?

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*Gary:* I was there two months, I think, and my councilor, they had little groups like 10 or 15 or 20 people in a bunch, and they had a councilor that we'd sit there and talk every day, stuff like that. He told me, "I don't think you'll ever quit drinking, I think by yourself, like you are. I don't think you got a chance in hell of staying sober."

*Gary:* I went home and I decided I was going to stay sober. I had a friend and I'd go down there at night if I got... you just get to where you've just got to have a drink. That's almost kind going crazy or something. I'd go down there and bang on the side of his trailer house and go out to the barn and he'd put his clothes on and come out there. He could sit down there and there was a hallway through the middle of the barn, a runway, and he could sit down there and lean back and go to sleep. As long as he was there, I was all right, but I walked back and forth in that barn so much... I don't know whether they tore that barn down or not, but if they did, there's still a trail in the middle of that barn where I walked. I did that several years. I put a chain out there on a tree with a padlock so that if I couldn't go somewhere and I got that way, I could chain myself to that tree and throw the key away so I could get out and wait. I didn't ever use it, but it was there.

*Cara:* Where was this?

*Gary:* Fowler. I was working for Stanley Post over at Fowler. He didn't help my drinking any, but I should have got away from there a long time, but I didn't know where to go. I was drinking so much, you know, I hated to go ask somebody for a job. I just tried to hang on to the one I got and kept going. But, since then things have been pretty good. But the first five years after I quit drinking was rough.

*Cara:* So this would have been mid-seventies. Okay, how did you come to Ashland?

*Gary:* Well, I needed to get away from Stanley and I was talking to a guy and they had an opening at the county down here. I come down and talked to them and they hired me. I didn't know nothing about running a maintainer or anything and I got to run the maintainer. That's how I got down here, and then I broke horses. I had some lots over here and a pen. I'd take horses in and break them.

*Cara:* I should have asked you, how did you get out of the military? Did you serve one tour?

*Gary:* I served one tour, three years, and I got out, but I got it over with. I had three years of inactive reserve on top of that, and they could have called me back, but I never heard from

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anybody. They could have called me back for something if they wanted me. They didn't want me.

*Cara:* When were you discharged?

*Gary:* Well, it was July, the 20 something of 1970. I give you that paper.

*Cara:* And then you came back and got a job and it wasn't the greatest, but you spent a little time at Norton trying to kind of get things leveled out.

*Gary:* I had to. It was so bad there wasn't no choices. If I didn't do it, they was goin' to send me to the... They had an alcohol deal up to the state hospital. They was going to send me up there, if I didn't do it on my own. There ain't very many people go through that deal that stay sober, but Valley Hope I've got all the good things to say about them there is.

*Cara:* Do you remember what do you remember the day that your service ended?

*Gary:* Yeah, that was that day the guy hung himself, and then after that I got on the jeep, went to the concern and signed out the next morning. The bus was there and I had to sign out. I didn't have but 24 hours to get my stuff straight and leave. I signed everything out and got on the bus the next morning and headed home.

*Gary:* I was so tired. My brother lived up by Byers, Colorado, and I got a bus and I met him there and he came and got me. It was right at the time that the Cheyenne Frontier Days was on and we went up there. That night I went to sleep in the front seat of his pickup. He had a camper on it and him and his wife were sleeping in the back. I went to sleep and laid on the horn. I never even knew it. They was banging on the doors and windows trying to get me awake so I could quit...

*Cara:* So you stayed with your brother for a little bit after you got out.

*Gary:* Yes, a week.

*Cara:* Then what?

*Gary:* Got a job, went to work.

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*Cara:* Because you did not technically go to Vietnam, how did people treat you when you got back?

*Gary:* The same way they treated them that went. When I come through Denver, there at the bus station. There was people there calling us baby killers and just like they treated... there was lot of them guys burning their cards and all that. They called you baby killers. And hell, I didn't have nothing to do with babies, but they couldn't tell the difference. I got to Denver and I went in the bathroom and took my uniform off and stuck it in a deal and put some civilian clothes on. That was the last time I ever wore that. It was enough for me.

*Cara:* Did you make any friends in the service?

*Gary:* Yeah, like Lynell, he's a really good guy. Really, I don't know what that was in the picture, but I think it was accidental. (Referring to photograph)

*Cara:* Did you keep up with him?

*Gary:* I was going to and I never did. I never got a letter from them and we just... Him, and there was another guy that was from close to Helena, Montana. Them guys was really nice people. There was four or five of us run around together all the time.

*Cara:* Did you join the VA?

*Gary:* No, I can't join. You mean the VFW? I got to join the legion, but I never did because most of the time I'm busy and can't get to it. They ain't never told me what they can do to help you. They keep sending things, but I can't get them to... They give you little pocket knives and stuff if you join or this ring and I don't need that stuff. I need help with handling the VA and stuff. There's a veteran's deal up at Dodge, and these guys work for the veterans. They're not government-hired but then they can help you navigate some of the stuff. But it's hard to get through all that. But that's about it.

*Cara:* So, after the war you came back, you worked on a ranch for a while, you came to Ashland and worked with the county for a while.

*Gary:* Well, I worked for the county and I day-worked. I'd go down and I did most of mine in Oklahoma. I'd break horses down there. My friend Jim Applegate. He was at Fowler when I was there and I'd go by there and help. He moved on a ranch down here in Oklahoma, down



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there at Ralston, part of Barby's deal. I'd go down there on a creek, set my tent up and ride colts. He'd come by the morning and I'd have one saddled up ready to go and we take him down on the crick. I'd get on him and we'd ride him a little bit down the creek and then take off through there. When we got to going pretty good, I'd have a halter rope on him and old Jim would throw me the rope. He'd just ride off. The next day he come back and say, "Are you alive?" I seen him a time or two when I was riding and he'd be sitting way off somewhere. You could just barely see him, sitting on the hill looking to see if he could find me. Making sure I was moving, but he did come around and let his presence be known.

*Cara:* He didn't pester you.

*Gary:* No. But he'd be way off there somewhere looking over the hill. That helped. It made you feel better about getting your brains knocked out.

*Cara:* How did those three years of service affect your life later on?

*Gary:* I think it made a better person out of me. I got out and seen the world and learned a little different way of living, but I think it made a better person out of me.

*Cara:* In retrospect, how do you feel about serving?

*Gary:* I'd do it again if I had to. If push came to shove, I be there. If we got in a deal and we had to do something, I'd be there with them.

*Cara:* Is there anything that you would like to add that we didn't cover?

*Gary:* I think we've covered about everything. That's about it.

*Cara:* Thank you for your service.

*????Cara:* Check picture of big missile he was talking about at 8 minutes, during Persian Missile deal.

*?????Cara:* At 11 minutes, there is a "concern" maybe? Where SS beat people. Don't know word, sounds like concern.

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