

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
UNITED STATES ARMY

PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

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: INTERVIEW OF  
:  
: DAVID WOOD  
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December 1, 2003

## 1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. KILLBLANE: -- by Richard Killblane,  
3 December 1st, 2003.

4 Okay, David. Would you go ahead and tell me  
5 about how you got into both fields?

6 MR. WOOD: Can I talk away from this thing?

7 MR. KILLBLANE: Yes. Lean back. It'll pick  
8 your voice up.

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. I trained at Ft. Knox,  
10 Kentucky, and I transferred to Fort Ord, California. I  
11 trained with the 1st Infantry Division. I went to  
12 Vietnam as a 1st Infantry Division as a mortarman.  
13 That's what my qualification was, in mortar. And then  
14 when we got to Vietnam, our unit was displaced. We  
15 went back to a holding camp. They came down and asked  
16 for volunteers to go down as an engineer for diesel  
17 engine for landing craft. So, I took that position.

18 MR. KILLBLANE: Do you remember what time  
19 frame?

20 MR. WOOD: It was '66-'67. I can send you  
21 those exact dates, because I've got everything written  
22 down.

1 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

2 MR. WOOD: But I don't remember the exact  
3 dates.

4 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

5 MR. WOOD: So I went down to the river,  
6 started out as a mechanic. I did that for about two  
7 months. Sergeant Bresson, I believe was his name, was  
8 the coxswain at the time. He rotated back to the  
9 States. So, they gave me the coxswain position on the  
10 boat.

11 MR. KILLBLANE: And how long did you work on  
12 the boats?

13 MR. WOOD: Before I got that position?

14 MR. KILLBLANE: Yeah.

15 MR. WOOD: Probably about two months.

16 MR. KILLBLANE: Two months, okay. And what  
17 were you doing during that two months?

18 MR. WOOD: Mechanic.

19 MR. KILLBLANE: Mechanic.

20 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: Were you running up and down  
22 the river?

1           MR. WOOD: Yeah. The way we did it, our boats  
2 never shut down. So, we would shut a bank down, change  
3 the oil, change the filter as we're going down the  
4 river hauling barges, and then we'd crawl underneath  
5 that one, start the other one back up, shut that one  
6 down and change it out.

7           MR. KILLBLANE: You had two LCMs on the barge?

8           MR. WOOD: We had one LCM-8 with two 500-ton  
9 barges on each side, one tied up to each side of our  
10 boat; full of bombs, mostly, that's what we hauled.  
11 And then, I did that for, like I said, about two  
12 months, I believe. And then the guy rotated, they  
13 didn't have anybody else to take their place, so I  
14 volunteered to do it.

15           So I did that probably for another two months,  
16 maybe three months. Like I said, we hauled bombs, we  
17 hauled the barges. We unloaded troops in Vung Tao and  
18 brought the new troops on. We had trucks and all that  
19 stuff we hauled to the beach.

20           MR. KILLBLANE: What beach, do you remember?

21           MR. WOOD: Vung Tao.

22           MR. KILLBLANE: Vung Tao.

1           MR. WOOD: Most of it was Vung Tao. All the  
2 mechanical stuff that we hauled went to Vung Tao.

3           Well, I take that back. We did haul some to  
4 Saigon, but not very often.

5           MR. KILLBLANE: What were your usual  
6 destinations? Weren't you based out of Vung Tao?

7           MR. WOOD: We were based out of Vung Tao.

8           MR. KILLBLANE: And then ran upriver. What  
9 were your usual destinations?

10          MR. WOOD: Well, what they would do with us is  
11 we would go, like, to Bien Hoa, and then we would stay  
12 there for a day or two and take our orders from there,  
13 and we may go upriver or may go downriver, we may come  
14 back to base.

15          So, I didn't spend much time at base at all.  
16 I probably wasn't there out of the whole time a month.

17          We just actually lived on the boats.

18          And then they called us back to Vung Tao, and  
19 they had this operation, they wanted to put a 105 mm  
20 howitzer on the boat with about 30 or 40 infantrymen.

21          We were going to take it out, find a location, clear  
22 the beach, send these guys out on patrol, fire cover

1 fire for them, and then bring them back after it was  
2 done. The whole process, if we didn't get stuck, took  
3 no more than a day and a half. Of course we didn't  
4 want to stay in that position very long or they'd find  
5 out where we were, and we didn't want that to happen.

6 There's be four different invasions. Four  
7 different locations we did it until I rotated home. It  
8 was right at the end of my service.

9 MR. KILLBLANE: Now, was it only one LCM in a  
10 battery or artillery piece?

11 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

12 MR. KILLBLANE: Or did you travel with other...

13 MR. WOOD: We had one, and then we had another  
14 boat to back me up in case something happened.

15 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. The boats are backed up  
16 to take your...

17 MR. WOOD: Take the artillery pieces. Because  
18 there's only one artillery piece; we only had one.

19 MR. KILLBLANE: In support of the infantry?

20 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. Tell me about how you  
22 operated that artillery piece.

1           MR. WOOD: Well, first thing we did was put  
2 about seven tons of sandbags on the boat. We had two  
3 50 calibers, two 60's, and there was a crew of four, I  
4 believe. I think it was four. And then what we would  
5 do to stabilize the boat, we would actually hit the  
6 beach. Well, what we'd do first is we had beehive  
7 rounds. So, we'd come up to the beach about 100 yards  
8 off, 50 yards off, drop the ramp at water level, and  
9 we'd fire these beehive rounds.

10           Boy, you talk about destruction. My God. I  
11 mean, so that would pretty well secure the beach for  
12 us. Then we'd go up and get the boat as far on the  
13 beach as you could, drop the ramp, and then would  
14 actually maneuver the boat to coordinate the firepower.

15           MR. KILLBLANE: Or the direction of fire?

16           MR. WOOD: The direction of fire, after the  
17 troops went off. It depends on what their objectives  
18 were, how far out they went, and they would call back  
19 for supporting fire. And we'd actually move the boat  
20 to adjust it.

21           Now, they did their own adjusting, too; we did  
22 them both. But we kept the motors running all the

1 time, and actually let the boat slide back and forth.  
2 Then, like I'd mentioned earlier, the problem we had  
3 that was the tide, it went out so fast there that if  
4 you weren't careful, you'd get stuck and you couldn't  
5 move. You'd have to stay there overnight.

6 MR. KILLBLANE: So what did you have to do to  
7 keep from getting stuck?

8 MR. WOOD: We just kept backing up. As the  
9 tide went out, one of the guys would actually stand  
10 outside the boat to make sure that the water didn't get  
11 away from us to where we couldn't get out. So, we were  
12 constantly moving.

13 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. Now, for the artillery  
14 piece that's in your boat itself, how was it anchored  
15 down? What keeps it from moving around?

16 You place sandbags on the deck, right?

17 MR. WOOD: Yeah. You know, there might've  
18 been sandbags. That thing might've set on sandbags. I  
19 don't remember.

20 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

21 MR. WOOD: Yeah, that's a good question. I  
22 was trying to even think if it had the tires on it.

1 I've got pictures of it; I'll have to look.

2 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. We'll look at that.

3 MR. WOOD: I'll have to look; I don't  
4 remember.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. Do you remember any  
6 unique operations that you participated on?

7 MR. WOOD: Yeah. We did two that I remember  
8 of, and they were night operations. We actually came  
9 in at night. And they deployed, and then my God, we  
10 must have fired for must've went through 200 rounds.  
11 We just never stopped, so until they came back in the  
12 morning.

13 Now, I did actually go out where these guys  
14 had their base camp. They would go out and set a  
15 perimeter up. So I went out with them sometimes just  
16 because I wanted to get off the boat and get out where  
17 some action was. So, it was interesting. I didn't  
18 know until I just talked to you that that didn't work.  
19 I didn't know that. Because I came home and they were  
20 still doing it.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: Yeah. They were going to  
22 later put them on barges.

1           MR. WOOD: So that's the first I'd heard that.

2           MR. KILLBLANE: So, what other problems did  
3 you encounter with the artillery on a boat like that?

4           MR. WOOD: Well, one of the biggest was the  
5 noise. Set down in that hull, and boy, when that thing  
6 went off, I mean, the concussion was those guys that  
7 were down there loading it, I don't know how they ever  
8 made it.

9           MR. KILLBLANE: Well, did you do any damage to  
10 the boat itself?

11          MR. WOOD: No, no.

12          MR. KILLBLANE: The vibration of the rounds  
13 going off?

14          MR. WOOD: No. It would push the boat back a  
15 little bit, but you always had your motor running and  
16 had your (indiscernible) all the time. So, the only  
17 thing it would do is every time they fired, you had to  
18 re-aim it, because it would knock it off.

19                 I think it worked well. I thought we did  
20 great. I was just when you said that, I was surprised  
21 because, again, I think Westmoreland came down and, of  
22 course he wanted his picture in the paper. So, he

1 didn't go with us, but he came down and stood on the  
2 boats, him and our captain. And when they got their  
3 pictures taken, why, then, they got off. But no, I  
4 thought it was a good idea.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. Successful for the  
6 time?

7 MR. WOOD: Yeah. I thought it was, yeah.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. What infantry unit was  
9 it that you supported, do you remember?

10 MR. WOOD: No, I don't.

11 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

12 MR. WOOD: I may have that information for  
13 you.

14 MR. KILLBLANE: And who approached you about  
15 this idea?

16 MR. WOOD: Our captain.

17 MR. KILLBLANE: The captain did?

18 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

19 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

20 MR. WOOD: He came down and asked for  
21 volunteers for a special operation, and myself and my  
22 crew and another boat volunteered.

1 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

2 MR. WOOD: And it was the first one, because  
3 the article I have in the paper is an Army first, and  
4 it's got a picture of it. I know we were upset because  
5 they made us tear our hooches off the back, because  
6 they didn't want Westmoreland to see we were living on  
7 a boat. So, we were pissed because we had to take all  
8 our stuff off the back.

9 MR. KILLBLANE: Did you build the hooches back  
10 up after he left?

11 MR. WOOD: After it was over, they did, yeah.

12 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

13 MR. WOOD: But they didn't want us to stay on  
14 them because it was too dangerous and stuff. But it  
15 really wasn't. You felt a lot safer there than you did  
16 at the base camp.

17 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. Now, so once you've got  
18 the artillery pieces on your boat, are you working and  
19 basing primarily with the infantry?

20 MR. WOOD: Yes.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. So where did they have  
22 you operating out of?

1 MR. WOOD: Actually, the South China Sea.

2 MR. KILLBLANE: Oh?

3 MR. WOOD: We would go out in the South China  
4 Sea until we got our orders of where to go to.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: Did you link up with a mother  
6 ship?

7 MR. WOOD: No.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: Or you just stayed in open  
9 water?

10 MR. WOOD: Yeah, we just stayed in open water,  
11 and they would call us and tell us where our  
12 coordinates were and where to go from there, and that's  
13 where we'd go.

14 MR. KILLBLANE: So it's just your two boats  
15 out there?

16 MR. WOOD: Yeah, just the two boats. We had  
17 some gunships, I guess they're called, the fiberglass  
18 boats. We had a couple of those.

19 MR. KILLBLANE: PBRs [patrol boat, riverine].

20 MR. WOOD: PBRs, yeah. We ran across a couple  
21 of those. I don't necessarily know that they were  
22 assigned to us, but they were up and down the rivers

1 that we were on. They'd fire support for us, too, so.

2 So, we ran into those. And they may have been  
3 assigned to us, but nobody told me if they were.

4 MR. KILLBLANE: They usually cleared the  
5 canals and the rivers --

6 MR. WOOD: Yeah, yeah.

7 MR. KILLBLANE: -- ahead of you. All right.

8 So, you're parked out in the open sea. You're  
9 outside the mouth of the river?

10 MR. WOOD: Right, yeah.

11 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. And you received radio  
12 call to move in. And what's your usual instructions  
13 when you get a call?

14 MR. WOOD: They'd just give us the coordinates  
15 of where to go to, the mouth of the river or whatever.  
16 We had maps, so we'd just go there.

17 MR. KILLBLANE: Oh. You were lucky.

18 MR. WOOD: Yeah. We'd just go there and head  
19 down whatever coordinates they gave us.

20 And I'm not too sure, I don't think it was  
21 really a precise operation, because we had the guys  
22 with us. So, if we were off a mile, it really didn't

1 make any difference because everybody was with us.

2 MR. KILLBLANE: So, the artillery crew lived  
3 with you on the boat, too?

4 MR. WOOD: Yes. Everybody stayed on the boat.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: Now, the hooch on the back  
6 only has enough room for --

7 MR. WOOD: Oh, yeah, I know.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: Where did those guys live?

9 MR. WOOD: Down in the hull. Yeah.

10 MR. KILLBLANE: What kind of arrangements did  
11 they make for living quarters?

12 MR. WOOD: None.

13 MR. KILLBLANE: They just slept out on the...

14 MR. WOOD: Right on the deck, yeah.

15 MR. KILLBLANE: And they were competing for  
16 space with the ammunition, too, right?

17 MR. WOOD: Well, there was a lot of room. The  
18 howitzer and the ammunition, sandbags and all that,  
19 there was plenty of room.

20 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

21 MR. WOOD: Yeah. There was an abundance.

22 One time we did pick some guys up that had

1 gotten in trouble, and we went down to pick them up.

2 And I think we picked them up and brought them back.

3 But these guys were never on over two or three  
4 days. So, it wasn't like we were on there for months.

5 It'd be a two- or three-day operation, then we'd come  
6 back and they'd give us another crew, another bunch of  
7 guys that we'd go back out again.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: Keep the same tube?

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

10 MR. KILLBLANE: Just a different artillery  
11 crew?

12 MR. WOOD: Yeah, yeah. And we only did that  
13 maybe three or four times, maybe. But I left then, so  
14 I just assumed that it went on, because it did seem to  
15 work.

16 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. So when you came  
17 upriver when you were given your coordinates, your  
18 destination, all right, did you end up linking up with  
19 a little flotilla or Marine force, or did you end up  
20 just pulling in wherever they told you?

21 MR. WOOD: Yeah. We just pulled in wherever  
22 they told us to pull in. There was no other support

1 for us.

2 MR. KILLBLANE: You mentioned the infantry  
3 would clear the river. They're on your boat, too?

4 MR. WOOD: They're on the boat, too.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: So, about how many passengers  
6 did you have on that boat?

7 MR. WOOD: There might've been 50.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: Fifty?

9 MR. WOOD: Yeah. And again, I'd have to go  
10 back and look at the pictures.

11 MR. KILLBLANE: So those infantrymen are  
12 primarily security for your boats?

13 MR. WOOD: Yes.

14 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

15 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

16 MR. KILLBLANE: All right. They're not part  
17 of the infantry group sweeping?

18 MR. WOOD: No.

19 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay. That makes sense now.

20 MR. WOOD: Yeah.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: All right. You told me an  
22 interesting reason why you went into the boat field as

1 a diesel mechanic.

2 MR. WOOD: Yeah. I didn't want to stay in the  
3 infantry. Your life span wasn't too long.

4 MR. KILLBLANE: Okay.

5 MR. WOOD: So what happened was, they came  
6 back to -- did I tell this already?

7 MR. KILLBLANE: No, not on this.

8 MR. WOOD: Okay. They came back to the  
9 holding camp and they asked if we had any diesel  
10 mechanics. I'd never seen a diesel in my life, but I  
11 said, yeah, me, yeah. I said, I worked around them all  
12 my life; my dad owns a garage. So, they picked me and  
13 I went down, and that's how I got started on it. But I  
14 knew enough about diesels to know there's nothing you  
15 can do with them. I mean, they're very simple. You  
16 change the filter and you change the oil.

17 And in Vung Tao they actually had mechanics  
18 that were stationed there that did all the work on the  
19 engines as far as valves and heads and all that stuff,  
20 so we didn't do any of that.

21 MR. KILLBLANE: But the comical part is you  
22 didn't think a diesel mechanic would be getting shot

1 at.

2 MR. WOOD: Yeah, no, uh-uh. I thought this  
3 has got to be safe. Well, it was safer, I'll say that.  
4 It was safer.

5 MR. KILLBLANE: So what was unique about being  
6 on the boats? What was it about being on the boats in  
7 Vietnam that you liked?

8 MR. WOOD: I liked it because I was in  
9 control. Because somebody wasn't telling me follow me,  
10 and somebody wasn't saying something that I knew wasn't  
11 a good idea. And that's what I found in the infantry  
12 was that I didn't agree with a lot -- you did it  
13 because that's what you're there for. But at least in  
14 the boats, you had control over something. You can  
15 move if you want to move. We called in air strikes,  
16 you know. You could do all those things that gave you  
17 that sense of control your destiny. (Indiscernible)  
18 shoot at you when you're stuck down in a hole  
19 somewhere.

20 But I have a lot of respect for those guys,  
21 believe me. Don't take this the wrong way. I'm the  
22 guy that left, you know. They stayed, so.

1           MR. KILLBLANE: Yeah. But it's that idea  
2 you're skipper of a boat, with how many years in the  
3 Army and what rank?

4           MR. WOOD: Yeah. I was a SP4 and I had not  
5 even a year. Because I went over in '66 and I went in  
6 in '66, so we're looking at months. So, I was a  
7 coxswain the first year, maybe 13 months, they gave me  
8 that position.

9           Which, I wanted it. I asked for it. I worked  
10 for it, because I didn't want to be a mechanic anymore.

11 It got too hot in there. It would get so hot, you  
12 laid underneath those engines when you were running  
13 because you couldn't stop. And it was so hot, you'd  
14 get burned. You'd actually get like a sunburn, it got  
15 so hot down there. So, I wanted out of there as fast  
16 as I could get out.

17           MR. KILLBLANE: How many pounds did you lose?

18           MR. WOOD: Well, I only weighed 95 when I came  
19 back.

20           MR. KILLBLANE: How much did you weigh you  
21 went over?

22           MR. WOOD: I weighed about 150.

1 MR. KILLBLANE: 150.

2 MR. WOOD: I wasn't very heavy then.

3 MR. KILLBLANE: All right. Now, you're a  
4 draftee. How did you feel going over to Vietnam and  
5 coming back?

6 MR. WOOD: Well, I think I pretty well knew  
7 when I went in where I was going. So, that wasn't a  
8 surprise. My dad was in the service; my uncles were  
9 all in the service; they were all World War II, all  
10 decorated. My brother was in, my cousins were in.

11 So, I really didn't feel that bad about doing  
12 it. I thought that's the least you can do for your  
13 country. And so, I had a pretty decent attitude.  
14 Naturally I didn't want to go over there; I sure as  
15 hell didn't volunteer to go over there, but I felt  
16 like, you know, we've got a job to do, we need to be  
17 here, we need to do it. Whether it's politically right  
18 or politically wrong, that's not my decision to make.  
19 It's somebody else's.

20 MR. KILLBLANE: At that time no one was really  
21 asking that question, though, were they?

22 MR. WOOD: No, no.

1                   MR. KILLBLANE: Yeah.

2                   MR. WOOD: My cousin lost his leg over there  
3 in the infantry, and they could probably tell you  
4 better than I could. You really weren't too concerned  
5 about whether this was politically right or wrong. You  
6 weren't even concerned about whether you were going to  
7 win or lose. You were concerned about one thing and  
8 that was coming back alive, and that's how you made  
9 every decision, your friends, where you went, what you  
10 did, you know, all those things, just based on coming  
11 back alive.

12                  MR. KILLBLANE: All right. So how did you  
13 feel when you were coming back?

14                  MR. WOOD: Pretty damn good when I was coming  
15 back.

16                  When I got back, it was a very bitter  
17 situation, very bitter. The way we were received when  
18 we came back. I got in trouble in the airport going  
19 home.

20                  MR. KILLBLANE: How?

21                  MR. WOOD: I never got spit on like some of  
22 them did, but the comments about baby-killers and those

1 things.

2 MR. KILLBLANE: So what did you do?

3 MR. WOOD: Probably some things I probably  
4 shouldn't have done, but --

5 MR. KILLBLANE: Maybe you should've done it.

6 MR. WOOD: When I came home, I stopped at one  
7 airport, and I don't even remember where it was. So I  
8 when in to get something to drink. And of course we  
9 had to have our uniforms on or we couldn't fly, they  
10 wouldn't pay for it.

11 MR. KILLBLANE: Yeah.

12 MR. WOOD: And a guy made a comment in there -  
13 - and a loud comment. I mean, he wasn't sitting next  
14 to me; he was down at the other end, and I just kind of  
15 lost it. So, they didn't arrest me or anything; they  
16 just took me out of there.

17 (Mild laughter)

18 MR. WOOD: But I walked out, I'll put it that  
19 way. I walked out.

20 MR. KILLBLANE: Did he?

21 MR. WOOD: No, he didn't walk out. But I  
22 think that was how everybody felt, and I came back to

1 Ft. Eustis here to serve my time out. And all of us  
2 felt the same way, we just wanted out, you know. We  
3 were just done and we just wanted out.

4 I wouldn't say we weren't mean or anything  
5 like that. It's just that your mind-set was so  
6 different, and this happened to be a training base for  
7 OCS [Officer Candidate School], or whatever it was.

8 MR. KILLBLANE: No, not anymore.

9 MR. WOOD: Okay. Well, it was then. And we  
10 had all these first lieutenants running around. And I  
11 had to go down to the boats every day and pull it away  
12 from the dock and pull it back. Then I headed to the  
13 bar. That's all I wanted to do.

14 Well, these lieutenants would come down the  
15 street, and if you didn't salute them, boy, they'd slam  
16 on their brakes, they'd back up. And so, it wasn't a  
17 good Army life, yeah.

18 MR. KILLBLANE: Not the peacetime part.

19 MR. WOOD: But now that I'm older, I look at  
20 it, and shouldn't have been that way. You know.  
21 They're lieutenants, they're doing their job, and  
22 they're part of the military and they deserve that

1     respect.

2                   MR. KILLBLANE:  Is there anything else you can  
3     think of?  That's pretty much what I wanted.

4                   MR. WOOD:  No, no.  No.  I'll send you the  
5     pictures and all the stuff that I have.

6                   My dad was a photographer when I was overseas,  
7     so I got a lot of pictures, because I just took them  
8     and sent them back and he developed them.

9                   MR. KILLBLANE:  Oh, great.

10                  MR. WOOD:  So, I can give you some history of  
11     that.

12                  MR. KILLBLANE:  Okay.

13                  (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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