

Interview with: John Rea

Interview by: Richard Killblane

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**Killblane:** John, could you start out by telling me how you became a truck driver and got to Vietnam?

**Rea:** Right out of high school I joined the Army in December 1966. I went through Basic and AIT [Advanced Individual Training], and was stationed in Alaska. A few friends, myself, and some other guys in Alaska, 1049, were transferred to Vietnam. We had a 30-day leave then went straight over to Vietnam by way of Hawaii.

**Killblane:** Did you volunteer for Vietnam?

**Rea:** I had to wait until I was 18, I was 17 when I joined the Army.

**Killblane:** Why did you want to go to Vietnam?

**Rea:** Young and stupid.

**Killblane:** As a truck driver?

**Rea:** Yeah, transportation. I always loved to drive. I was driving cars and tractors on my grandfather's farm when I was a kid, easiest thing to do. I knew I didn't want to go into the Navy, and I definitely didn't want to go in the Air Force. A truck was about as far off the ground as I wanted to get, so, that was fine.

**Killblane:** Tell me about how you got to Vietnam and the company you were assigned to, where you were at?

**Rea:** I was originally assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> [Infantry] Division in Bear Cat, but I never made it. We were in the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement [Battalion] in Vietnam. I don't remember the name of the place, Tan Son Nhut, wherever the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Center was. I was then transferred into the 163<sup>rd</sup> Trans [Transportation Company]. From the 163<sup>rd</sup> Trans we formed a big convoy and went north to Chu Lai.

**Killblane:** How soon after you got there?

**Rea:** Within two weeks. Other companies were with us, or parts of other companies. From what I understand it wasn't the whole 163<sup>rd</sup> Trans, it was just certain elements of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Trans, certain elements of 10<sup>th</sup> Transportation [Battalion]. I think they were in the First Log [1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command], and we just motored all the way up to Chu Lai instead of a base camp. We stayed in tents or anything we could, and started running convoys in direct support for, not only the AMERICAL Division, which was being formed, but like I mentioned before, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne [Division]. We picked them up when they came in country. We moved the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne [Brigade]. We moved the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne [Division], up north. We supported the Marine Corps. Anyone who needed anything in the I Corps area, that was our AO [Area of Operations] and that's what we did.

**Killblane:** When you moved up to Chu Lai, then you belonged to I Corps?

**Rea:** Right, well, I Corps was the area of operations. We'd run south to LZ [Landing Zone] Dotty, down to Qui Nhon, to Pleiku. We'd go north to certain fire support bases that were

alongside roads and highways that we could get to and as soon as we got there then the Hueys or whatever would come in and sling it right off the trucks out to the field. We had fire support bases that were only accessible by air, and we'd just air support them right off the LZs. We went to LZ 69 and LZ Baldy on a daily basis. We had a convoy going there. LZ Ross was the furthest west we had out in the mountains. We were just everywhere. We'd been to Dong Ha, Kan He (?) Camp Eagle. Wherever you needed to go you went. We had three or four trucks that would be assigned to the 196<sup>th</sup> [Infantry Brigade], then if they needed a couple of trucks and an artillery battery, or said they lost a truck or whatever, they'd send a driver and truck there. They'd just fold off the convoy and stay as a convoy, just kept going.

**Killblane:** What kind of trucks did you guys have?

**Rea:** If I'm not mistaken we had up to two 10-tons, we had duce-and-a-halves, we had the 5-ton tractors, we had 5-ton cargos, we had a couple of tankers, we had a few Charlie tankers, 1200 gallon tankers. Most of the fuel we hauled in bladders.

**Killblane:** That's why you're 163<sup>rd</sup>, or that would become B Company, 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T [Supply and Transport Battalion]?

**Rea:** B Company, 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T. Which we were never told, you're not in the 163<sup>rd</sup> Trans; you're in the B Company, 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T.

**Killblane:** When you arrived in the 163<sup>rd</sup>, what kind of trucks did you have?

**Rea:** The trucks that we brought with us.

**Killblane:** What kind of trucks were those?

**Rea:** Duce-and-a-halves and 5-ton tractor trailers.

**Killblane:** So it was all cargo trucks?

**Rea:** Tactical, all tactical. Duce and a halves, three-quarter tons, two or three jeeps, no commercial-type vehicles, nothing with standard rubber on it.

**Killblane:** So, when you become part of the AMERICAL, that company was made up of tractors and trailers and dry cargo?

**Rea:** Right, well we had a couple of reefers, too, but, they were just refrigerated boxes. We'd bring ice up and we'd bring body bags back. We would just kind of keep them refrigerated.

**Killblane:** So, tell me about what you do when you got up there, when did you join a gun truck crew?

**Rea:** They manufactured the Abortion gun truck. I don't remember the dates on it. It was just on a day-by-day basis. One morning you might be asked to go, one morning you might ask to go. I've driven it; I've been a gunner on it, not on an every day basis, maybe two days a week for three weeks. I can't really remember. I can remember it almost turned over a couple of times.

**Killblane:** Did that gun truck already exist when you got there?

**Rea:** No. It was built in our motor pool.

**Killblane:** Tell me how that came about.

**Rea:** I can't really remember, I think we lost a truck up towards LZ Ross, by mine, and we would get different sniper fire or whatever. We just needed some support. The first couple of convoys we ran just had gun jeeps, and they were supplied by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Military Police. That's about the only support we had. We had air support; I want to say the 14<sup>th</sup> Aviation [Battalion]. I know their call sign was 'Rattlers.' We'd call and have air strikes come in. I wasn't a RTO [Radio Telephone Operator] so I don't really know who supported us. Whenever we did start catching something we'd just get out of the area and we'd get support from other units, the combat units would come in. The Abortion was pretty nice to have around. It was pretty handy.

**Killblane:** They built that as a result of an ambush you guys had, not the big one in September '67, down in An Khe and Myan Yang Pass?

**Rea:** I don't think we were down there then. I think we were already up. If I'm not mistaken, that's about the time we moved up there.

**Killblane:** September?

**Rea:** I'm not sure about the exact date.

**Killblane:** Do you remember hearing about that big ambush?

**Rea:** We'd hear about all kinds of stuff, but what we'd get would be from trucks coming up from down south or we would send ten trucks down to Qui Nhon or Pleiku or down that way with a convoy. The guys that would come back from up north of Da Nang would have stories. It wasn't like a whole unit moving at one time. Our unit was just scattered. When you went out the gate you knew which way you were going and that's the way you turned. Chu La had only one

gate; you either went north or south. I think it was LZ Dotty was down south, we supplied them every day. We had some guys, that's all they did was just run straight to and from certain areas. Then we had the main convoy, which would go over at night to the ammo dump and load your trucks, go to POL [Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants] and load or go to the S4 [supply] Yard and load. Everybody would come back to the Yard, and in the morning you'd marshal all the trucks in one area and take off on a convoy.

**Killblane:** What time were you getting up in the morning to do this?

**Rea:** Before daylight, I couldn't tell you exactly. It was just a commotion. We had a little mess hall in a tent and you'd get roused out and that was what we did.

**Killblane:** How long were your runs, about how far, how long did it take you to drive them, and what time did you get back?

**Rea:** It's hard to say how far it was miles-wise, but time-wise, if you were going to LZ Ross you'd be lucky to make it all the way back to Chu Lai before dark. We're talking about roads that (part of Highway One or Chu Lai 19 or whatever they called it) had open manholes in it. You had flats and fenders fall off and everything. We spent a lot of time on the LZs, you couldn't make it back. They couldn't get you unloaded in time. They couldn't get your cargo slung off or whatever, so you just stayed there the next day or the next couple of days till another convoy came back. Every now and then you'd run back by yourself. I didn't run by myself very often, but it had been done.

**Killblane:** When you're getting in, about how much time did you have to sleep?

**Rea:** It would really depend because we had bunker guard, too. We also had to guard the perimeter at Chu Lai at night.

**Killblane:** And drive the next day?

**Rea:** Yeah, sometimes you'd get four hours sleep, three hours on, three off. You'd sleep in the bunker, one guy would stay awake and three guys would sleep, then you'd alternate around. Sometimes you didn't even go on a convoy. Sometimes you had to stay in the company area.

**Killblane:** For what?

**Rea:** KP, details over in the S4 Yard, the POL Yard. My last three weeks I say I was transferred, but I don't think there's anything in my records, but I went to A Company and worked in the POL yard just fueling the trucks and fueling the bladders and stuff on the trucks.

**Killblane:** Is that more a product of being short that they tend to give you an easy job your last four weeks there?

**Rea:** I told them that's what I wanted to do. I didn't even go on R&R [Rest & Recuperation] to Hawaii. I got an early out came home early.

**Killblane:** You were in a hurry to get over there and in a hurry to get back?

**Rea:** It didn't take me long to figure out what was going on. I would say my first two weeks over there I figured I'd made the wrong decision.

**Killblane:** Why's that?

**Rea:** I was young and stupid and I grew up real quick. It's hard to say. You've got your best friend sitting next to you, he gets shot and you're not feeling that bad, you're just thanking God it wasn't you. It's a hell of a thing to say, but you grow up quick in situations like that. I did a lot of growing up over there. It was an experience.

**Killblane:** You're averaging about four hours of sleep a night. How are you guys staying awake on the road?

**Rea:** You're not going to go to sleep on the road over there. There's no way; we ate dust every day.

**Killblane:** I was hearing some guys were actually falling asleep and driving off the side of the road.

**Rea:** We didn't have a road smooth enough that I'd ever been on. Maybe up around Da Nang somewhere, but most of the roads when I was there, even if it was paved, it would have holes larger than this table that your truck would just fall in or a fender would fall off.

**Killblane:** You're talking about two-foot diameter?

**Rea:** Two to six foot. It would swallow an automobile. You'd see the little three-wheeled motorcycles going all around them. They almost looked like craters from bombs or something, but it's just where the road was just worn out. Number One was actually the only north/south highway there, so everything from M60, VTRs [Vehicle Tank Retriever] and M60 tanks on Lowboys and tracked vehicles were coming up and down it. You can only imagine. The Seabees were rebuilding the bridges all the time. We had to drag the trucks through water and

through the patties and stuff to get around the bridges because they'd blow them at night and the Seabees would fix them during the day, then they'd blow them again at night. It was quite an experience. There was a lot of red dirt out there, too. It would just cake on with the sweat, just ugh.

**Killblane:** Talk about the gun truck again, how they built it, where the inspiration for that came from?

**Rea:** I have no idea. In my way of thinking it would have been for land mines, to protect the driver and the gunners on the truck. It was driven from inside of the cargo box and inside of the firebox.

**Killblane:** Describe how they did that, please?

**Rea:** I don't really know. It was all done with mechanical linkage. The pictures I have show just the steering linkage, but all your clutch and foot control and shifting mechanism was all up in the cargo box with you. The windshield was moved up on the cargo box. We had a roll bar. The stack was moved back alongside on the right side because when they first got going the stack would blow right into the driver and gunners' faces so it was moved back on the side.

**Killblane:** And that was a duce-and-a-half?

**Rea:** No, it was a 5-ton. We had a big roll bar put in. I remember that because we could stretch a tarp over the driver and over the back to get a little relief from the sun. I remember we had a PRC66 radio, but we didn't have all the equipment that all these other guys had. From what I understand they had M79 grenade launchers and such.

**Killblane:** What was the armament to the Abortion.

**Rea:** Two double steel sided with sandbags and steel and sandbags for the floor and that was all the way around. Our ladder went over the side and the ladder was on the left side towards the back and you'd just crawl. I think it was made out of rebar and you'd just crawl up and down and that was it.

**Killblane:** What kind of weapons did you use?

**Rea:** When I was on it, two M60s is all I remember, and they were not the butterfly M60s, they were the regular tripod M60s mounted on a...

**Killblane:** Pedestal.

**Rea:** Exactly. Later on, like I said, I came off of it and started driving 5-tons and duce-and-a-halves. I remember it hitting a mine once, but I think they had it running the next day. They towed it back all the time with those Vehicle Tank Retrievers or with wreckers because a linkage or something would break down on it.

**Killblane:** Was it difficult to drive from inside the box?

**Rea:** It was top-heavy. It would sway. It was a good ride out on those bumpy roads, but it was really top-heavy.

**Killblane:** From you being up there is it kind of hard to control it, different from driving inside a cab?

**Rea:** Oh, it's a lot different from driving inside the cab because it would want to roll and sway back and forth. It was so top-heavy. It would sway because you had all the armament and then you had the roll bar was like a big ol' pipe. It was tricky. It served its purpose.

**Killblane:** And, what was that?

**Rea:** It'd give you a little bit more security.

**Killblane:** You also talked about minesweeping, primarily mine sweeping vs. convoy support?

**Rea:** It was convoy support but it was also, in my opinion, the best thing we ever had for mines, because we could put that out in front. We did lose, I think his name was Van Buren. His truck did hit a mine and he was killed between LZ Baldy and LZ Ross. The Abortion was the lead truck then, so it was command-detonated mine. As a rule you had a little bit of security knowing that something that heavy was in front of you and it would trip a mine first.

**Killblane:** How did they pick the crews for that?

**Rea:** At first it was just a volunteer thing, then, after awhile, if I'm not mistaken, the driver turned out to be one of the mechanics, or a wrecker driver, I'm not sure. He was from the motor pool. The gunners just volunteered and that was their own crew.

**Killblane:** Did they require any special training? Crews tend to stick together, but here you're rotating on a regular basis?

**Rea:** When I was on it we'd just rotate. It was just a, "you go here. You go here," or, "you volunteer for it." I think I asked to go just because I had never seen anything like it. "Oh, I want to try this." But then again, I was young and stupid; I tried a lot of things I shouldn't have.

**Killblane:** Were you in any ambushes?

**Rea:** A couple, mostly sniper fire.

**Killblane:** Just sniper fire?

**Rea:** Mostly, but every now and then we got ambushed going into what they called Fat City, Hill 2935. We spent a day or two there, but we did get onto the LZ.

**Killblane:** Mostly ambushes were just sniper-harassment fire?

**Rea:** As a rule, but there were times when there were land mines, mostly command-detonated. I remember one time a mine went off right behind me and it got a bus. It had ARVNs [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] all around the outside of the bus, so that had to be command-detonated. It was on a bridge and my truck had just passed over it so why wouldn't they have gone for a U.S. Army truck with cargo rather than a civilian bus with off-duty ARVNs on it? I didn't stick around to find out if they had any wires going to it or anything, I just went on out up the road. That was one of those days when I was out without anybody. During the day Highway One, from Tam Ky to Chu Lai and down as far as Dotty, was pretty safe. You might get a little sniper fire or something, but no big ambushes like what happened in Hue or anything.

**Killblane:** How did you know what missions you've got during the day, or how did you get your taskings?

**Rea:** We got tasked at a briefing, like a debriefing when we came in off the convoy. “You go load your truck. You do this. You change any tires.” They catch you as you come in the gate.

**Killblane:** They, who?

**Rea:** I don't know, the convoy commander, platoon sergeant or whoever, I don't know.

**Killblane:** Someone in your company chain of command?

**Rea:** Somebody with the authority to do it. We'd either go to the S4 yard, go to the ammo dump, POL yard, whatever you'd be hauling that's where you'd be sent to. Once you got it done, your truck was fueled up and you were ready to go, you'd park the truck and wait for tomorrow morning. If you had tires to change or anything that had to be done you'd stay with the truck until it was done.

**Killblane:** Then, the next morning, when you woke up, you already knew where you were going?

**Rea:** Yeah, we knew the night before when we loaded, projos [projectiles] or powder.

**Killblane:** Projos are projectiles, right?

**Rea:** Right, or C-rations. It just depended on who ordered it, where it went. We may have a convoy going up to Da Nang and you'd know that you had to turn off of Hill 2935, or you had to turn off at LZ Baldy so you can go out to LZ Ross and the rest of the convoy would keep going straight.

**Killblane:** You said you moved the 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup>?

**Rea:** We moved the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne when they came in-country.

**Killblane:** From where?

**Rea:** From Chu Lai Airfield, and we took them down south. I'm not sure exactly where, but when we dropped them off we picked up the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, which was a rowdy group because they were just coming in out of the field. I had a duce-and-a-half, with guys on the back, and we took them up north of LZ Baldy. I want to say they went all the way up to Dong Ha, but I'm not sure. We took them north of Da Nang, if I'm not mistaken. We'd re-supply anybody and everybody, MACVs [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] and ARVNs. I don't remember what it was we brought out there but I remember I had to fly out on a Chinook one time. It was kind of weird because they had little tunnels around their LZ and they only had two Americans out there and everything else was ARVNs. We moved some [Republic of] Korean (ROK) Marines one time. I remember that. They were mean little suckers.

**Killblane:** Where did you move them to?

**Rea:** I want to say they came in out of Tam Ky somewhere and we brought them back to Chu Lai, if I'm not mistaken.

**Killblane:** You're just moving them from one location to another. It's not like the 82<sup>nd</sup> actually deployed in and you were moving them to where they were going to operate?

**Rea:** No, we didn't move the 82<sup>nd</sup> as they came in. But we did do the 101<sup>st</sup> in a whole move. The ARVNs might be just two truckloads, "Hey take these guys."

**Killblane:** And the Korean (ROK) Marines, they basically just relocated from one place to another?

**Rea:** We'd haul prisoners [of War] (POWs). We'd take them down to LZ Bayonet and put them in a hole. We'd take two drivers or two Transportation guys as guards on the back, one in the front right, one in the front left, or back left, and that's how you transported them, with a driver and a shotgun. Sometimes they were running a convoy, sometimes they were running by themselves, just depends on what time you got them loaded on the truck and everything. Refugees sometimes. They had a refugee camp in Tam Ky that we belonged to.

**Killblane:** What's the stress factor? How did your feelings about driving change from when you arrived to getting short?

**Rea:** I was 18 when I got there. You remember your senior year in high school? Well that was my field trip. You were in an atmosphere where you can basically do anything you wanted to, but you were growing up kind of fast. When you saw what was going on, we were on the LZs all the time, it just got to where you didn't want to take any chances anymore. I'd say six months into it you didn't care.

**Killblane:** Why?

**Rea:** Just got used to it. But when you knew you were coming home, you were going back to the world...

**Killblane:** How far out is that, one month?

**Rea:** No, I'd say about a month before you come home you start getting worried. You've eaten enough dust to know. You see the new guys coming in and they're going through what you went through when you came in. You feel sorry for them, but then again, hey, 28 days and a wake-up, you catch that big bird back.

**Killblane:** How does your behavior change after you get short?

**Rea:** I think you get more cautious. At least I did. I became a little bit more cautious, and a little bit more self-protective. I didn't take as many chances. I sometimes used to take the truck when Jerry Leopold and myself would go out. We'd run up to Tam Ky and buy things and come back, by ourselves, just take the truck and go. Well, we weren't supposed to do that. My last couple of months I wouldn't go out by myself, no. That's wasn't an option. Like I said when you're young and stupid – we sneaked out of Da Nang one night, Jerry and I did. We actually laid down in the back of a Marine Corps, 5-ton truck, laid down in the bed to get out of the gate and he dropped us off down at a house of ill-repute. We were picked up by the CAP patrol. That's a long story, but we got thrown in D-cell that night. I think I've still got the Article 15. We hadn't been there three or four months. We were drinking and just, something to do. Never did that again, though. I'd love to find him.

**Killblane:** You were driving seven days a week?

**Rea:** Yeah.

**Killblane:** There was no scheduled down time, no maintenance, except for the times you had to pull guard?

**Rea:** If we got stuck on, let's just say Baldy, Ross, Dotty, any of the LZs around, you had to pull your weight on the perimeter just like everybody else at night.

**Killblane:** And still drive, so you didn't get any time off?

**Rea:** It was self-preservation. You kind of want to be out there. If somebody throws a rock, you want to throw a rock back. We didn't mind doing that. At night, we'd stick the gun truck up on the LZ somewhere to where if something came in we could go back out with it. Most of the LZs we went to were artillery batteries, and we were re-supplying all the artillery and food and medical personnel going to it or whatever, we'd take them out there. They liked to see us come out there because we brought them everything they needed. Every now and then we'd slip a couple of cases of beer in there for one of them. You got to know the guys in the arty [Artillery] units. If you run to LZ Baldy five days a week, you know the guys up there don't have any beer so you go to the S4 yard and manipulate around to get some beer and bring it out to them. Ice was a premium. We had the reefer so we'd bring ice up there, but you'd always try to keep a little bit for the guys out on the line so that they could fill up their little coolers and get their rice wine cold.

**Killblane:** What did they do for you?

**Rea:** Protect us, basically. I felt sorry for them. Good God, they're out there pounding the boonies all day and all night. We had it made, all we had to do was hold onto a steering wheel. It was basically scratch my back; I'll scratch yours. We'd give them rides. Sometimes they'd give us a bow and arrow or whatever they'd find with the Montaignards. I remember they had bracelets, I don't have them anymore, but just trading junk. Every now and then you'd run into

somebody, "Oh, you from New Orleans? So am I." Just hit it off and you'd get to know somebody.

**Killblane:** You mentioned something about a guy getting shot next to you?

**Rea:** I mean, if that ever did happen. If and when it does happen, you just thank God it wasn't you. It's not like you're in a car and you get in a car wreck and your partner gets killed sitting next to you, and you feel so bad and you're mourning. It's not like that. You're with another driver who hits a mine; you just thank God you're not the one who hit it. You like the guy, he's a nice guy, he's doing a good job and everything, but thank God it wasn't me.

**Killblane:** You finally get your orders to go home. Tell me about that and what it was like going back?

**Rea:** I don't really remember to be honest with you. I don't remember hitting the West Coast. I don't remember going on leave. I remember being reassigned; I had to report to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I remember hitchhiking home for Christmas. I stayed out of the service for about 13 months. My attitude wasn't the same attitude as all the hippies at school. We didn't get along. I just went back in the service and spent about 15 years on active duty, said the hell with it.

**Killblane:** Where were you at when Tet [The Tet Offensive] broke out?

**Rea:** That's a good question. I want to say we were on a convoy around LZ Baldy. We had elements up north of Hue that were cut off from us, elements of convoy, so we couldn't go north, and they couldn't come south. I could be wrong, but I believe we caught some kind of LSTs

[Landing Ship, Tank] or some kind of landing crafts, we put the trucks on to get around Hue. I don't remember if we were coming back or going north. I think we put them on in Chu Lai and went to Da Nang, if I'm not mistaken, because everything was happening in Hue. That was a hell of a time. I must have been in Chu Lai because I remember the ammo dump there.

**Killblane:** They blew the ammo dump?

**Rea:** Oh, yeah. Nobody could ever replicate the fireworks there. That was something else, it was a mess. But they did every now and then anyway. LZ Bayonet was right across the road from us, from Chu Lai. They'd get it about once or twice a week. We'd get rockets all the time, periodically. As far as small arms fire, people hitting the wire, that was very seldom. I left LZ Dotty a day before they got overrun. Didn't have a convoy coming back either. It was just three trucks coming back from LZ Dotty. But, if I had spent the night there I know what would have happened. I had a lot of close calls.

**Killblane:** On Tet they moved you down to Da Nang by LSTs?

**Rea:** I want to say that it was during Tet, but I do remember going on LSTs or some kind of boats that open from the front. They put all the duce-and-a-halves and all the equipment on there, loaded it, and that's how they got from point A to point B. I don't remember if we were coming from Da Nang back to Chu Lai or from Chu Lai north, but I remember when they hit the main ammo dump, and that must have been a direct hit. I think that was Tet, so I must have been in Chu Lai during Tet. But at the same time there was a reason that we had to put everything on the boats. I think that was to get around Hue. Was Hue not under siege for a long time during Tet?

**Killblane:** It was being attacked.

**Rea:** For about a month or so?

**Killblane:** Yes.

**Rea:** Okay, it was within that month that we went on the boat, that I'm sure about, to get around Hue City.

**Killblane:** What were you going to do at Da Nang?

**Rea:** I don't remember whether we were going to go all the way north of Da Nang or we were going to have somebody meet us in Da Nang or what, but we just moved everything. It wasn't a troop movement, I don't believe, it might have been troops, but I think it was supply movement. I think it was everything from C-rations to toilet paper, just anything that moved, moved by us. It's hard for me to remember just what we transported to be honest with you. I know it was C-rations; projectiles were the big thing at the artillery bases. We took people up to Dong Ha, Camp Eagle, I want to say it was the 101<sup>st</sup>. I can't really remember. People would come into Chu Lai and we'd have to load up duce-and-a-halves with them and take them out to the artillery bases, then they'd fly them out to different LZs or whatever. What was that old saying?

**Killblane:** You call, we haul?

**Rea:** If we can't truck it, you don't need it. It was definitely an experience. I don't know why I can't remember all of it. There are just patches I can't remember anything.

**Killblane:** Is there anything else of particular interest that you can think of that we haven't covered?

**Rea:** I don't really know what you want to know. I ate a lot of water buffalo, I'm sure we bought them.

**Killblane:** What?

**Rea:** Water Buffalo.

**Killblane:** Why?

**Rea:** Barbecue. They were getting away.

**Killblane:** Did you have to buy them?

**Rea:** I don't know if they were bought or not. When we were on a convoy we did not stop. We kept our intervals, if somebody got hit, hit a mine or whatever, somebody would stop, but the road had to be cleared. The guy behind them would run up and bump the truck off or whatever, try to make a path to get around. I don't know if it was every third or fourth vehicle or every so often in there we had tracks, APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers). Everybody would jump in a convoy. If you had to get from Chu Lai to, let's say LZ Baldy or Tam Ky, and there's all these trucks going out the gate at the crack of dawn, well, somebody else is going to hop in there. I don't care if it was a jeep or whatever; they'd go with us. We had elements from 196<sup>th</sup> [Infantry], 198<sup>th</sup> [Infantry Brigade], all of AMERICAL, and like I said, anything that moved went through there. We'd bring guys back, just jump in the truck and ride-hitchin' with you to come in out of the field so they can go to the PX, then a day or two later they would go back out. We didn't ask them, "Is it okay for you to do this? You need a ride? Get in." I've driven a truck with my left hand, stood on the running board to use the bathroom. It sounds hard, but...

**Killblane:** You got to go, you got to go.

**Rea:** You got to go, you got to go. Did you see the bathroom they had over there? [referring to the replica of Bill Parker's gun truck The Untouchable]

**Killblane:** No

**Rea:** You didn't see the little ammo can?

**Killblane:** No.

**Rea:** Oh, get the story from the guys on the truck. You know the big guy?

**Killblane:** Erik Freeman?

**Rea:** No, bigger than he is.

**Killblane:** Deeks?

**Rea:** Maybe Deeks. He had to use the bathroom so bad. He couldn't do anything. He had to crap in the ammo box in the gun truck going down the road; he closed the ammo box. I think they gave him something. So, what they did yesterday was got an ammo box, and a roll of toilet paper with a little holder on it. Presented it to him with pictures and everything. Stuff like that, I can't remember. I can remember maybe two names, Jerry Leopold and Bill Bradley. Bill lives in Middletown, Delaware. He's got some pictures I'm supposed to get, but they're not of the gun truck. He was Transportation. He was there before I was. He was in the 10<sup>th</sup> Trans and got thrown into the AMERICAL into our 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T. Jerry got there with me if I'm not mistaken because he's on my orders. He was from New York. That's the only two names I can remember.

All these guys saying who their first sergeant was and who their lieutenants were, I couldn't tell you. I'm sure they'd remember my name, though.

**Killblane:** Why's that?

**Rea:** I was 18. I was a kid. I was like one of the babies of the group.

**Killblane:** One of the youngest guys there?

**Rea:** I had an attitude. I'm sure I had an attitude. I was a spoiled rotten kid. That's where I grew up. Learning all these back streets around here, Tulane University, Newfound College. This is my stomping grounds here [New Orleans]. I was sitting here racking my brains trying to think of things. It was just a year of eating dirt. I can't remember ever wearing goggles. I heard some guy say, "Oh yeah, we wore goggles to keep the dirt out of our eyes." I don't remember that. I remember mud during monsoons, slipping and sliding everywhere. Fire fights now and then, but not on a regular basis. It seemed like every time we'd get into something we'd just run into it. It was already going on with somebody else. I remember Tam Ky. We pulled into Tam Ky and there was a big staging area, like a big field they had, and they had a refugee camp on one side and a city on the other side. There was no airport or anything. As we pulled in they were drawing fire. We just got involved in it. It was already going on when we got there. Nobody bothered to mention to us, stop the trucks or whatever, we just went into it. And, [Hill] 2935, we got into it there and LZ Ross a couple of times. The road between LZ Ross and LZ Baldy, I want to say, it wasn't but 10 or 15 miles. That was the worst stretch of road that I've ever seen. I've been to Qui Nhon and Pleiku and from what I understand after I left they paved the road out to Pleiku.

**Killblane:** Uh, hum, they did.

**Rea:** But, it wasn't paved when I was there. Spots, but not all of it. Qui Nhon had ice cream, I remember. That's something I remember distinctively. The USO had American women and ice cream. I remember getting to go there. I remember a banana plantation; we got into it there. I went to sleep one night on the canvas part of a 5-ton tractor. I didn't know it, but about two o'clock in the morning they started sending fire out and I was right underneath the barrel of one of those 155s. When I woke up I was standing on the ground. It was that quick. I've never met anybody from B Company, 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T. I take that back, well, he wasn't with B Company. At a reunion in Florida for AMERICAL Division, I met the Executive Officer for Headquarters Company of the 23<sup>rd</sup> S&T. I didn't know him over there, but I did meet him. I've got his address back home. That's about it. Bill Bradley, and there's only about two guys I know, and I've never seen Leopold since we came back.

**Killblane:** Do you remember any other gun trucks in your organization?

**Rea:** Not in our organization, I don't, but I remember when we'd get down around Qui Nhon we'd seen a lot, seems like on the way to Pleiku there was another place we'd stop out there. I keep remembering a quad .50 on the back of a duce-and-a-half.

**Killblane:** What kind of armament did they have?

**Rea:** Just a few up around the quads is all I saw, it was just a flat duce-and-a-half.

**Killblane:** You may have been the first to put steel plating up on a 5-ton.

**Rea:** I don't know. I know I saw that quad .50 while I was in-country and I saw it sitting in a company area of a Transportation Company outside of Qui Nhon and between Qui Nhon and Pleiku. It seemed to me it had an alligator on the shield. That's the company that Don Watson was in. He's the one that was in Alaska with me, when we went over. I don't remember the name of the company or their gun truck. I just remember it looked like a duce-and-a-half. It had the small sides on it and all. It had a quad .50 sitting on it, and I remember staring at the quad .50 thinking, "God, and all we got are two M60s?" This big thing sitting up there. Good God. It rotated around. I thought, "Good, God, nobody would mess with him." You could just put Respect on the side that thing. I really looked at that truck hard. I remember that.

**Killblane:** That's about all I have. I thank you for sitting in.

**Rea:** Hey, no problem.