

Conversation with Jeff Butch, Vietnam Veteran
Interviewer: Ken Miller

Miller: For the record, what is your name?

Butch: Jeffery G. Butch

Miller: For what reason did you serve in Vietnam? Draft? Volunteered? Reassignment?

Butch: Enlisted. I volunteered, and I enlisted in the Marine Corp.

Miller: How long did you serve in Vietnam?

Butch: Eighteen months.

Miller: What were the years of the service?

Butch: September 1969 to March 1971.

Miller: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

Butch: I was 19 years old.

Miller: What was your rank?

Butch: I was a Corporal, E-4

Miller: Where were you assigned?

Butch: I was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. My first assignment was with H&S Co., but I was then assigned to Mike 3/7. I was a radio operator. H&S is a company that has all your support people for your ground units, which includes mortars, artillery, intelligence, and radio communications. I was in H&S Comm. Co. and then assigned to Mike 3/7.

Miller: What terminated your service in Vietnam?

Butch: My time was up. It was kind of ironic. By the end of my first tour of duty in Vietnam I thought about reenlisting to stay over six more months. At that time, in '69-'70, there were a lot of racial problems in the United States. However, I didn't believe the racial problems within the Marine Corps in Vietnam were as severe as they were within the civilian population back home. So, I was going to stay there in Vietnam for two reasons. First, I didn't want to go back to the states and get involved with the racial problems. I didn't believe in those problems, I wasn't prejudice, I had nothing against black people. Second, I thought, if I reenlisted, I would save some other eighteen year old Marine from coming over and getting brainwashed, or getting psychological problems from the war. That's the two reasons why I stayed. When it came time to leave, my first sergeant told me I was to leave after twelve months, so now I had two sets of orders: one telling me to leave, and one to stay in Vietnam. He chose the latter, he said to come back stay. So, that's why my tour of duty was for eighteen months, I extended my time in Vietnam six more months, for those two reasons. I didn't want to come back because of the racial problems, and I felt at that time if I stayed I would. . . maybe save some other young American soldier from having to come over here and have problems. So, I did, because I was already messed up with the problems you had in that type of war.

Miller: When you first arrived in Vietnam, how did you feel about the war? It had been in progress for about 5 years. . .

Butch: At that time I supported the United States' efforts. From what I read, and what I heard, and what I saw on the news, I supported what we were doing, I supported the reason for being

there. When I first got there, I still thought that was correct, and that it was true.

Miller: What was your first impression, when you first arrived there and stepped off the plane, what was your first impression of Vietnam as a country?

Butch: It was a beautiful country. There is no doubt about it. It's probably the most beautiful country I have ever seen. We took a convoy to L.Z. Baldy, which is about twenty six miles south of DaNang. The realization set in at that point that this is war, this isn't play, this isn't a practice game, this is the real thing because we had .50 caliber machine guns on top of trucks, flak jackets, our weapons were locked and loaded, you knew it was the real thing. Driving down the road, going to L.Z. Baldy, you saw different things, you saw different units, you heard helicopters, you heard air strikes, you knew it was real at that point. It was kind of scary, at first, because you thought, "Oh my God, What did I get myself into." On the other hand, you thought, "I've been trained to do this, this is the real thing, now I've got to perform."

Miller: Did you feel like you were properly prepared for what you experienced in Vietnam?

Butch: I would say from my Marine Corp training, "yes." Again, but it's hard, it's really hard to prepare anybody for actual combat. You can do all the dummy operations you want, shoot the blanks, but the real thing is like day and night. Up to that point, I felt the Marine Corp trained me for real combat.

Miller: The fighting, and it seemed to be sporadic at times, how long were you in Vietnam until you saw your first combat?

Butch: I got into Vietnam in September, I think the third week in September I was in an operation up in the Que son Mountains, and we got mortared. That was my first experience with actual combat. Four Marines got killed. One of the K.I.A.s (killed in action) was a black man, a young man, and one was an officer, he wasn't in the country more than five days, and he was dead. A mortar round hit from maybe there to here (points out a distance of approximately eight feet) and it killed him. That was a scary experience. At that point, that was the first time I saw death and actual combat, and I think it scared me mentally, because that I wasn't prepared for. You can't prepare anybody for it. Now if I went back two, three, or four times, I'd be prepared for it, you're seasoned, you know what to expect more or less, you become hardened to those kinds of things. But a nineteen year-old boy, and that's what we were. . . boys, we weren't men, we were boys, to see someone get killed, and to watch them die . . . I watched this young Marine die, I watched him die, suck for air, call out for his momma, its a hard experience. Again, as I eluded to earlier, I felt right being there, I thought the U.S. was right, but when reality sets in that "hey, this is a war, and people are dying," you know its not like the movies that you see on T.V., the movies like "Patton", when all the orchestras in the back are playing music, and someone dies, and someone says nice statements. . . none of that is there, you're alone!

Miller: And this seemed to be the first war America was in where war was not glorified.

Butch: No, the war was not glorified at all. Watching all the movies growing up, you kind of get the impression that war is glorified, but in reality its not. I mean you can't train anybody for that. You can't even train inner city kids who are used to fighting in the ghettos, you can't train them for that. It's not comparable. It's two different things. Its a hard experience. I don't want my son to go through it, and I don't want to go through it again. Unless they invaded my country here, but. . .

Miller: Is that one of the reasons you supported the war, because you felt the spread of communism might send your kids off to war?

Butch: I believed at the time, in the domino effect, that if Vietnam fell, the rest of Southeast Asia would fall to communism. Again, as you find out now in 1995, that's not necessarily true. But, I believed in that and I felt that that was right. Who was I, as a young boy, to disagree with the government? Especially the U.S. government. They were saying Cambodia was going to fall, Laos was going to fall, Thailand was going to fall. That's not what happened in reality, but I believed that. Now I've changed my whole view on the war, and I'll explain that more when we get into it.

Miller: With the fighting going on over there, there seemed to be a strong camaraderie amongst all the soldiers. Were they seen as almost your brothers?

Butch: Yes, they were more like blood brothers. Even in a Company of 110 - 120 men, you had squads. And after a while, the closeness of these squads became very important, we were like brothers. I mean everybody in the unit was like a relative, we felt we were related somehow. We relied on each other for support. I mean physical, moral, mental, everything. If somebody fell down, someone could get killed.

Miller: You felt that you would sacrifice your life to save the person next to you?

Butch: Yes, I believe we did. I know I did. We were like one big long chain, we were all linked, and every link was important. We helped each other totally.

Miller: Could you describe any particular close friends you had in over in Vietnam, and how they may have supported you while you were over there?

Butch: (Referring to an album of soldiers who served with him in the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Corp.) This is Sgt. Grady Ehiland I got his name off the Wall (the Vietnam War Memorial), shot in the head with an AK-47. I was really close with the Sgt. Adrian Aragon, he was a mortar man, I was close to him, and Lance Cpl. Brady. . . and Lance Cpl. Compton. . . and Lance Cpl. Al Abear . . . Harry Koutz. Those guys were more or less my immediate unit, that I hung around with. We were all in the CP group. Since I was the radio man, I was in charge of all the communications of all the units. I had to make sure that when all these units went out on operations, whether it was a search and destroy mission, LPs (Listening Posts), night patrols, I had to make sure there radio operators were trained, and knew what was going on. I called in Medi-VACs, resupplies, etc. That's

basically what I did, I was the head radio operator for the unit. So I knew what was going on with the whole unit, at every point and time. I'd make sure that every radio operator knew the call signs, how to use proper radio language. I was important. One thing that was really interesting was, being 19 years old and being trained as a radio operator, and understanding radio language, I really never lost my cool on the radio. I always knew that if I didn't talk slow, and say the right things, somebody could get killed. I had to be precise with everything I said. I called in the numbers of K.I.A., enemies killed, P.O.W.s, M.I.A.s etc., whenever there was a fire fight.

When I talk in an American Cultures class in Hempfield School District, one of the things we talk about is the inflated numbers that were being sent back to America. When I called the numbers in they were not inflated. What the regiment did with them, or what Westmorland did with them, if they inflated those numbers, I didn't know anything about it. The numbers that we called in were from actual body counts. All the numbers that I had to call in had to be correct. Now, what happened somewhere else, I couldn't tell you.

Miller: Did the numbers get inflated often?

Butch: Oh they were! They were inflated to sell America into the war, to show America we were winning. When in fact, I wouldn't say we were losing, but we certainly were not doing the numbers they said we were doing. But, when we called them in, because I was the head radio operator, all units reported to me. These guys wouldn't lie. There not out there saying "we killed ten V.C., N.V.A.," when they only killed one, or didn't kill any! It wasn't like that. People may take this the wrong way, but these people prided themselves. . . if they killed someone, they killed them. It was a actual person, it was a kill. I mean that's war. You talk about that today, people think your psychotic. But, over there, that was important. The soldiers body-counted who they killed, it was a notch in there belt, they took pride in that. But, that's the war mentality that you had.

Miller: If anything in the chain of command broke down. . . People had to take care of their responsibilities. If they made one small mistake, people could get killed.

Butch: Yes. And I can say that for my unit, I know one of the questions, you may bring up is about drugs. There were people in my unit who did drugs, but not to the extent that was reported to the people back here. We knew for a fact, if you did drugs out in the bush, on an actual operation, you're going to get killed. You're going to kill someone else. So I know for a fact, that nobody drank or took drugs while we were out in an operation. Now, we would go out for forty to forty-five days on an operation, come back for forty-eight hours. During this time, we would get new supplies, some steak, beer, and we would stay up for forty-eight hours straight. Some soldiers did do drugs, did do pot. But when that time was over, when the forty-eight hours was up, when we moved out at five o'clock in the morning, whether you got any sleep or not, you went. Now it was serious, because now your going out and somebody could get killed.

Miller: Going along with what we were talking about concerning

the soldiers, as I was preparing for this interview, I was reading some poems and letters written by soldiers while in Vietnam, and it seems as though the soldiers, in a sense lost their humanity, they were dehumanized. In other words, they lost the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong. Is this accurate?

Butch: No doubt! You lost it! You actually came down to the caveman mentality. For example, we were on an operation up in the Que Son Mountains. We were going up the side of the mountain, and we stopped for a water break, to fill up our canteens with the stream water (which was very pure). Along this stream we found a dead body of a Viet Cong, or N.V.A., he had probably been dead about a year. The body was very decayed. We took the skull. We passed the word along that if you wanted a drink, go upstream from the body, because the water washes the contaminates of the body downstream. So we set up a small 360-degree formation so nobody could jump us, and we took turns washing and getting drinks. But the skull we kept. Who knows who this guy was. Everywhere we went we took this skull. We put a bayonet on top of an M-16, put it in the ground, and put the skull on top. We put a hat on the skull, cigarette in its teeth, lit. Put a pair of shades on it. And that became our mascot.

Miller: Did the mascot become something to rally around?

Butch: It was an exciting thing to do. We enjoyed it, to the point, that when we went back for a forty-eight hour rehab, we actually drank beer out of this skull. . . . literally. I mean talking about reaching a low, losing your morals. We didn't care. We filled it up with beer and passed it around, and we all started drinking from this skull. You lose your morals. All you care about is survival; all you care about is killing. The reason why there is no right and wrong in the jungle is because either he survives, or you survive. So, whatever it takes to make sure he doesn't survive, and you do survive, you do it! You get the jungle mentality which is survival of the fittest. It's actually an animalistic instinct.

Miller: But it's pretty much unavoidable.

Butch: You can't avoid it.

Miller: You couldn't really see yourself going down?

Butch: Yes, you actually just become it. In fact, the things that you were doing, if you could look at them twenty years later, you would say I can't believe I did that stuff. How can I act like that? I was born and raised differently. When you put in that environment, you actually slowly slide down to that mentality.

Miller: So, you never thought back to the type of person you were before you went over to Vietnam. You were totally isolated from who you used to be.

Butch: Totally isolated. It became strictly survival. You didn't care how, why, what for. . . it was just, "I am going to survive." Your survival instinct, your living instinct took over. I don't talk about Vietnam to a whole lot of people. Unless we really want to get into a serious discussion, I don't talk about it. I'll mention I was there, but that's about it. Sometimes because I don't believe I was really there, I can't

comprehend I went through this. I see these pictures, and I say, "I guess I really was there." Yet in my mind, its like you shut it off, you try not to think about. Sometimes you dream about it, but I tell people that this was probably the happiest time in my life. The reason is, when I was in combat, you never worry about tomorrow. Because tomorrow may never come, that next bullet may have your number on it. You forgot about yesterday. You forget about. . . Sgt. Ehiland who got shot a minuet ago, because he's gone. You couldn't dwell on that, it's over. You had to live every moment of your life as if it was your last. So it made you happy. Even though you were in that animalistic, Jungle atmosphere, I was happy. I was never depressed. I was never sad. I was happy all the time. Because I thought tomorrow was never going to be here. My time may be up. With that next bullet, I may be dead. . . just like that. And I saw guys that died just like that, one round and they're dead. So you lived the here and now. Even here, in today's society, we say to ourselves live each moment as if it was your last, that's how we lived it in Vietnam. We were happy. We didn't care about the phone bill, or tomorrow I've got to do this paper, or last week my golf game wasn't that good. . . all that didn't matter. What mattered was the here and now, because you lived it as if it was going to be your last. And you never cared about getting paid tomorrow, or going home tomorrow. So, you never had that pressure. That's kind of ironic in a war atmosphere. Back home your mind is always somewhere else, it's never focused on the here and now, and in some ways that's more frustrating than combat. I tell people that, and they say, "I can't believe your saying that, it doesn't make sense." But it does make sense when your in it. Because there is no tomorrow, yesterday is gone. . . right now. You live everything to the fullest, because that may your last. Every kill may be your last.

Miller: Well, that mentality is so far away from our culture.

Butch: It is. But that is the way it was. And I was happy.

Miller: So, there wasn't a whole lot of dwelling on. . . say, "I've only got month to go . . ."

Butch: Near the end, there is. In the beginning and in the end there is. When I first got there in September of '69, When I saw those guys get killed, and I saw that Marine die in my arms. The Corp man said, "Keep him breathing, Butch." And I tried to keep him breathing, and he died in his own blood. He was full of holes from shrapnel, and I saw him die. He was looking into my eyes. . . he was looking at me. . . I was the last person he saw alive. And his eyes were just like yours, he was looking at me, and he died. He sat right up, grabbed his chest, laid back down and drown in his own blood. I mean, I bawled like a baby. I cried because I thought, "Oh, my God, what am I doing here," because I just got in the country, I wasn't hardened yet. This wasn't a movie, there wasn't music playing. I knew this was real, and there wasn't anyone there except me. I was the last guy he saw before he died. Nobody else in the unit . . . me. The last person he saw alive. That was me, I watched him die. I bawled. The Marine Colonel came up to me and said, "Hey, Butch, hey Marine. Crying won't bring him back." But we had to get on

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with the war, then I became hardened. Then, up to about 45 days before your supposed to rotate, then you start getting nervous. Like Sgt. Eiland did. He had less than five days, and he got shot by a sniper. I knew he was scared. They sent him out on an operation I wouldn't have sent him out on. The CP group sent him out on an operation instead of letting him slack off. And maybe it was destiny, maybe it was God's will, who knows? He got shot in the head, he's dead, his name is on the wall. He was such a great guy . . . twenty years old. Now he'll never have a chance to go to college, marry, have kids, he'll never have any of that. It was done on some mountain in Vietnam. Sniper shot, AK-47, through the head. Then you worry, the last forty-five days you call your self a short-timer. We even carried around short-timer sticks. As the time goes down, the stick gets smaller and smaller until your holding a toothpick. And then you get nervous, because there are new guys in the unit that you may be in charge of and who may get you killed because of something stupid they're doing. And everybody was one of them, I was one of them. But, I'll always remember that guy. . . great guy. I took it hard when he died.

Miller: Let's talk a little bit about the enemy. According to records we were fighting the V.C. and the N.V.A. This is easy to see on paper, but was it that easy to distinguish the enemy?

Butch: No. The N.V.A. were. They wore uniforms, you could tell them . . . but V.C., no! They were farmers by day, fighters by night.

Miller: Did you come in contact more with V.C. than N.V.A.?

Butch: Yes. We did come into contact with N.V.A. sometimes up in the mountains. The Ho Chi Minh trail would run along here (pointing to map) and would go into DaNang. We had N.V.A. coming along this path taking weapons right into DaNang. We'd run into units. But V.C. we came into contact with more often, sometimes you couldn't even see them, they'd hit you then run.

Miller: So many times in fighting you would not see the enemy. You would hear the gunfire. . .

Butch: You would hear the gunfire, see the flashes. You knew they were coming. You knew the sound of an AK-47, as opposed the M-16. It could have been one, it could have been five, twenty, it depended. You knew who they were, but you could never see them.

Miller: Do you ever blame, and I use that word blame cautiously, the government for not giving you the necessary training to battle the guerilla warfare that you faced.

Butch: They tried. We took courses, we had operations, they tried. As I said before, you can do all the training you want, but nothing beats the real thing when you actually get in there and face real guerrilla warfare. It's hard to defeat. They demoralize you more than you demoralize them, because they hit and run. They booby-trap everything.

Miller: There are accounts of women and children being used as booby-traps. Did you ever come into contact with an instance of where women and children were being used for such circumstances?

Butch: The V.C. used a lot of women and children . . . well, they threatened them. They would kill their husbands, brothers,

sisters, etc., They had no choice. (Reads passage of letter describing an example). The gist of this (the example) is that an old lady and a little boy, about ten years old, they satchel charged this hole, they knew we were there, the V.C. had them primed, they were working for the V.C.. You had this all the time. In this hospital (referring to a news article reporting his unit discovering a V.C. hospital) we found some kids who were forced into doing Vietnamese labor. They booby-trapped little kids. The kids didn't know any better. In Vietnam, the kids respect their elders. Especially when they threatened their parents, and their life. They would satchel charge a little boy and send him into a ground unit, hit the charge, kill him and four or five Americans. He served his purpose. For them to die was glorified. They died for a cause and were glorified. And that happened a lot. You never knew who to trust over there. You didn't know who they were. By day they could have been doing your laundry, by night they could be giving enemy information about mortar attacks.

Miller: Were you ever given any orders to shoot any women or children because they may be V.C.?

Butch: No, I wasn't.

Miller: Were those orders ever given to anyone?

Butch: If we suspected somebody was a V.C., which we did. We had one Sgt. who shot a kid in the back with a shotgun. But the kid was in a free fire zone. We had free fire zones in certain areas. This meant stay out of this area or your legal game. This kid was in there. The kid actually set a booby-trap which exploded and blew a guy's arm off. He was around twelve or thirteen years old. He was shot in the back. It didn't kill him. He got up and started running, then the Sgt. put about fifteen rounds from an M-16 in him and killed him. Now you can say that was murder, because we didn't see him set off the booby-trap, but he was in a free fire zone, he was close to the incident, you can put two and two together. Maybe he was innocent, but in a war, you do not have the chance to review the evidence.

Miller: Because that could have been your arm.

Butch: Right. It could have been my arm, it could have been anyone's arm. Did I like it when I heard it? No. But I was hardened by then, it didn't matter. We made a joke about it.

Miller: How many, if you can roughly estimate, how many conflicts you were involved in?

Butch: My Company, we were in a lot. But then again you could go days just moving around your T.A.O., going back and forth, checking for V.C., for supply lines you could cut off.

Miller: Were you ever wounded in battle?

Butch: No. Boy, was I lucky. I must have had somebody watching over me, because we got mortared one time, and (referring to a picture of some of the men in his unit) he got hit in the back, he got hit in the arm, he got hit in the leg. The mortar came right into the CP group where I was. It injured them, but nothing hit me. It was just the way the shrapnel flew, and boy, was I lucky.

Miller: Were you ever in any operations where you were ordered

to "take no prisoners?"

Butch: We were in an operation where we were told to take no prisoners. India Co. was pinned down by a Company of N.V.A. soldiers, and sometimes you can't believe these estimates, a Company of 35-40 soldiers. The major, the executive officer, came out and wanted to be involved in the operation to get them out. We were brought in behind the N.V.A.. We lined up, the whole company, about five feet apart, and we charged this position, and he said "no prisoners, kill everything in sight." You're talking about one hundred guys firing everything they had straight. I kind of thought I was in a Patton movie. I looked down and saw all these Marines lined up, near the beach, locked and loaded. And this Major, it must have been one of the first times he was out in the bush, says "charge," like a dummy. In retrospect, I never would have done that. We could have lost half our unit. We must have scared them, because they took off, we never saw them. We ran for at least 400 meters, and fired everything we had.

Miller: Were there frequent operations where innocent people, village people were killed?

Butch: Yes. More so than not. That was a problem. Most of the village people are out in the bush. They hated the V.C. and they hated the Americans. All they wanted to do was grow their plants, plant their rice. . . live, leave me alone. A lot of time they ended up in the middle of a fire fight and got caught. I saw a lot of Vietnamese, mostly women and children because the men were never around, they were usually either with the V.C., or the N.V.A., or they were dead, I saw a lot of them killed. And that is the sad thing about guerilla warfare, there's no battle lines. We would go back to the same areas over and over again and dig fox holes, send out search and destroy missions.

Miller: Were you ever in any operations where you were ordered to take a certain position, and in taking that position, Marines died, your friends died. Then, once you controlled that position, you were ordered to move back, ultimately allowing the enemy to take that position again?

Butch: We were involved in an operation in the Que San Mountains. We sent out a listening post at night, and they got ambushed. Five marines got killed. We sent a second squad out to retrieve the bodies, and they were ambushed. Three of them got killed, two were wounded bad. Lt. McAdams at that point (the trapped Marines had no radio operator that could talk on the radio) sent a third unit out. I volunteered to go because they needed somebody who knew how to talk on the radio to call in airstrikes, artillery, to give positions, and they didn't have anyone to do that. He wouldn't allow me to go. Basically, he was saying, "Stay back, we'll call in airstrikes, artillery, etc., from here." But there were still wounded men down there alive. It was an operation, I think, he mishandled. I was so mad, I wanted to shoot him, because there were guys down there who were my friends who were killed. They were dead, I knew they were dead because I was on the radio, trying to talk to them. The person I was talking to, I don't know who it was, had no idea how to use it. The radio operators in both the squads were

killed. They needed help, and he wouldn't let us go down there.

Miller: What did that do to you, being the head radio operator, to hear the men being killed over the radio and not being able to do anything?

Butch: I was so angry. In retrospect I could say that maybe it was the best thing, because we sent down another unit, and we sent 1st Lt. McBride, and he knew how to use the radio. They ended up getting the bodies out of there, but a lot of good Marines got killed, because Lt. McAdams didn't know what was going on. But, I was angry. I guess he thought if I went down and got killed, he would have no one to handle the Company radio. I can understand that, but the point is that they needed somebody with experience to be able to call in the grids, call in the airstrikes, etc.. I was angry. I kind of lost respect for Lt. McAdams. I can still remember. He sat over in his bunker, with his helmet on, holding on to his flak jacket like this (arms crossed over his chest), like he was scared shitless. This rubbed me the wrong way because they needed help, they need experience, there was nobody else around. I had the experience, I wanted to go. Now, the Lt. McBride did go, and did a good job, but after the first ambush, they needed somebody right down there. He sent another inexperienced squad down and got more people killed.

Miller: You said, when you first arrived in Vietnam you supported the effort.

Butch: I think most Marines did.

Miller: So, you went over to Vietnam to stop the spread of communism, to try and protect the South Vietnamese. By the end your time in Vietnam, the objective seemed to switch from stopping Communism to surviving.

Butch: Yes. I think we realized by that point in time that we shouldn't been there. It was a civil war. We should not have been there. It wasn't our fight. It was their right to decide whether or not to become communists. Looking back, and I didn't know this at the time, but Ho Chi Minh never wanted to be a communist. You read all the documentation, all the Pentagon papers, you'll see that Ho Chi Minh did not want to be a communist. He even approached the United States for aid. He wanted to be a nationalist, not a communist. He wanted to unite the North and the South under a nationalist political system. We turned him down. He had no choice, who's he going to go to. He went to Russia and China. He didn't like being a communist, because it didn't give him his nationalistic approach. I saw that over there. All it was, was a North and South battle. He wanted to unite under one flag, let us do our own thing, under our own sovereignty. We saw that. Into my ninth and tenth months there, we were fighting a war . . . I had nothing against those people, I didn't hate those Vietnamese. I didn't even know them. I didn't hate them, I'm sure they didn't hate me. But, I'm there, and we're both pointing guns at each other, we both wanted to survive. We weren't fighting the war for the United States, we were fighting the war for ourselves.

Miller: With the original objective not being accomplished, do you hold a lot of frustration that you lost friends, and part of

your life for nothing?

Butch: Yes. I was down at the wall; it took me ten years after it was built to go down and see it. I just didn't want any part of it. I thought it was a joke. All the men, women, and boys that were killed, all the families that were broken apart . . . and today, they're normalizing relations. What did we accomplish? What did we gain from it? We spent \$110 billion for the war, 55,000 Americans were killed. What did we get? We have guys come back like me that have mental scars that it took years and years to get over. Have dreams about a war, and wondering, why was I there? What if I had been killed? What if I had been shot at 19 years old? I'd be rotting away in a coffin, never having the opportunity to experience life. What did we fight for? So some politician can say we should be there to stop communism? Let them fight it out. Let each people decide what they want. If they want to be communist, that's fine. Why should we send our boys over there to fight . . . for what? And to build a memorial down in Washington for them, for what? Those boys died for nothing! Now they are normalizing relations. It just shows me that they were expendable at any price. We can't let 2,200 M.I.A.s out there and forget about them. That is not right!

Miller: Two semesters ago in college, I had the opportunity to hear a Vietnam Veteran, Col. Hansen, speak on why the war was lost. He spoke of a triangle of relations, between: the government and the soldiers, the soldiers and the citizens at home, and the government and the citizens. During the Vietnam war, all these relations seemed to be severed, is this accurate?

Butch: I would say in the early part of the war, the relations between the government and the soldiers was good. It got bad later on. It was the same with the people. We weren't given the real information, the real truth, so these relations broke down. The government was saying one thing, and that's not what we were reporting. Now, who lied? I don't know. But, if you're going to say something, you better have the documentation to back it up. So yes, the government, soldiers, and the people must support each other.

Miller: As far as the relations at home, when you heard reports of protests, what did that do to you, as well as the other soldiers, psychologically?

Butch: It did two things. First, it boosted the morale of the enemy. They would do more sneak attacks, booby-traps, more American soldiers would die. Second, it reenforced our thoughts about the war. The people at home didn't support us, our government lied to us. Who were we there for? Ourselves. To live. To survive.

Miller: Was there anything, in retrospect, America could have done to achieve it's objective of stopping communism, or was it inevitable that the effort would fall apart?

Butch: I think it was inevitable that it fell apart because they didn't fight the war as if it was a real war. They never gave us the full permission to fight the war. We should have had the ability to invade North Vietnam. However, had the U.S. supported Ho Chi Minh in his request to nationalize, we would

have never had the war. But we never supported him. And that's what turned him.

When your fighting a war . . . sometimes we were told that unless you see black pajamas, and a weapon, you can't shoot. These V.C. were good. They could get through wire fencing like it was nothing, and get to you. A V.C. could be 150 yards away, with a weapon strapped his back, in a free fire zone, but if we couldn't see the weapon, we couldn't shoot. We knew they had weapons on them, but we couldn't shoot. A lot of the things we did, we did on our own. The U.S. tried to fight the war as a nice war. You can't do that. You've got to go in to win. We never went in to win. That shows that the 55,000 Americans that were killed were expendable, and I think the government knew that.

Miller: Did you have family back home?

Butch: Parents, brother, and other relatives.

Miller: Did you write home often?

Butch: Pretty often. There for a while I didn't write, because I didn't feel like it. My mom called Congressman Eshelman, and he arranged to have someone make sure that I wrote home. After that, I wrote home about once a week. After a while, you get tired of saying the same thing, e.g. we were in a battle, Marines got killed, etc.

Miller: Did you try to color-coat what you wrote, so as not to worry your parents about the reality of the danger you were in?

Butch: No. I tried to tell them pretty much what was happening. My dad fought in WWII for 5 years, so he knew what war was like.

Miller: As you were coming home, how did you expect to be received by your family and friends, and how did that differ from actuality?

Butch: Because of the protests at the time, I didn't expect to be treated too well. I knew the silent majority would support us, but they never say anything. My family supported me 100%. My close friends were all x-Marines, so naturally they supported me. My friends from high school, they didn't support me at all. I expected them to be more supportive, but they were caught up in the protests themselves. I talked to some of them, but I'm not close to any of them anymore.

Miller: How do you feel about being victimized and accused about the atrocities that were supposedly committed, when you, if fact, knew what life was like in Vietnam?

Butch: I knew that it was [false]. I'm not saying atrocities weren't committed. But, in a war jungle mentality, there are no rules, there can't be rules. If you lived by the same rules as you did when you were home, you're as good as dead. There are going to be atrocities committed by both sides.

Miller: And there were.

Butch: I went into villages where I saw children with their arms cut off because their parents didn't cooperate with the V.C. That's an atrocity. They are committed. But, I think the problem was that people back home weren't given the real information. The government didn't give the facts.

Miller: Do you think a lot of it was because the government

gave the false information, this made it look as though we should have been winning the war?

Butch: Exactly. I think because they inflated how good we were doing, people were saying, "wait a minute, I thought we were winning the war, what's going on?"

Miller: And that's why things like the Tet offensive was such a blow to the moral?

Butch: Sure. Up to that time, according to the information, there was no way the Tet offensive could have taken place. And back home, you can only support a cause for so long before you stop and say, "wait a minute, something is not right." You talked about the triangle, once that broke down, its over.

Miller: It's been about 24 years since you have come back from Vietnam. How far has the Vietnam Veteran come as far as gaining acceptance and appreciation for what he did in Vietnam, and how far does he have to go?

Butch: The problem is, you can never heal those wounds that people like me have. I never came back and wanted to be placed on a pedestal because I fought the war. Just give some respect, my life was on the line. I lost 3 years of my life, and I can never get them back. While most of my friends were on college campuses, getting jobs, getting married, I was still fighting the war. I just want respect for doing that. All the services to help the Vietnam Veteran are just lip service, just a band aid. You can never heal that wound. I think Vietnam Veterans in general have been treated "ok." I have never expected anything for being a Vietnam Veteran, all I want is some respect, and give me a "thank you" for doing the job that I did. The war might have been wrong, but don't blame it on me. It wasn't my fault.

What should they do in the future? I think just portray everything as factual as possible. The real war, the real issues, the real numbers. You don't have to do anything special for us. But if you're going to ask someone to put their life on the line, you better give them the necessary equipment and support to win, not to lose. We never went into win. Most of the troops realized this. The governments thought the soldiers were stupid, and didn't understand this. It took me a few months, but after a while, we saw it. We weren't fighting in Vietnam for the United States, we were fighting for ourselves. That's all, just treat the veteran with respect.