

Interview With Bob Hughes About the Vietnam War

Le Ann: What is your full name?

Bob: Robert Lee Hughes Jr.

Le Ann: How old are you now?

Bob: 57

Le Ann: Where do you live?

Bob: Dodge City Kansas

Le Ann: What was the first thing you heard about Vietnam?

Bob: In the 60's everyone knew about Vietnam. After Kennedy was killed we came involved in Vietnamese problem. Everybody in the classes between 62-72 knew they were going to be drafted.

Le Ann: How did you feel about the war in the beginning?

Bob: The war was righteous, to stop the communist. The class of 65 we all knew we were going to go to Vietnam, the question was when.

Le Ann: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

Bob: Enlisted, to dodge the draft

Le Ann: What branch of the armed forces did you serve in?

Bob: I was a marine.

Le Ann: Where did you receive your training?

Bob: San Diego MCRD. It was the marine recruit depo. Hollywood marines, is what they called us in those days.

Le Ann: What rank did you achieve?

Bob: Sergeant E5

Le Ann: How old were you when you first sent to Vietnam?

Bob: I was 20

Le Ann: What was your first impression of Vietnam when you landed?

Bob: Stunk

Le Ann: Where in Vietnam were you stationed?

Bob: Icore. Icore covered the northern province from the demilitarized zone (DMZ) down to Da-Nang and a little south of Da-Nang.

Le Ann: What was it like being in the jungle?

Bob: It was very beautiful, very quiet, and very deadly

Le Ann: Did you go on night patrols?

Bob: Day patrols, night patrols

Le Ann: How were they?

Bob: General rule of thumb was over there if you lasted 3 or 4 months over there on patrols without getting killed you would probably make it until the last month you were there. Until you learned how to be a better

enemy then they were it was pretty scary. Once you found out they weren't the master at night you could beat them at their own game.

Le Ann: Describe a typical day there?

Bob: Typical day? I don't think there was such a thing. Always something going on. Typical day. You get up at pre-dawn go down to the mess hall eat go back and if you had a mission that day you shave and get your gear ready and wait for departure time, which could be delayed due to weather. If no mission get up do your normal job at the base area and do your normal jobs.

Le Ann: What are some normal jobs?

Bob: Build power lines, check generators. If I was on day watch I would make sure my generators were going and working.

Le Ann: Did you operate any machinery?

Bob: Generator, front-end loaders, D2 Cat it's a caterpillar, bulldozer.

Le Ann: Once you were over there did your feeling change about the war?

Bob: I went over with the attitude to prove myself that I was capable of combat and capable of doing the job that I was supposed to do. It wasn't about vietnamezation. Nothing but straight up combat. Man to man.

Le Ann: How did you feel about the enemy?

Bob: Somebody to kill. Kill him before he kills you. Kill them first. Kill people is the easiest thing in the world it's what is after you see his face you remember his scream. Even though he's trying to kill you, you remember it for the rest of your life.

Le Ann: What did you do for fun?

Bob: Drink. Partied and got drunk.

Le Ann: Did you have any friends that were wounded or killed?

Bob: 26 of us went over 12 came back

Le Ann: Did you hear any news from the U.S. about protesters? How did you feel about that?

Bob: Yeah, we heard but not so much on the armed forces radio, but we'd hear from the guys who'd rotate out before us about the crap that was going on. I had no clue about how vicious it was until I came home. It's one thing to protest the war. I had no problem with them protesting the war. But they were protesting the wrong people. They were taking kids like, we've done our job, we've been over there instead of going after the politicians they went after the troops. When we landed in San Francisco they wouldn't let us off the plane, because of the protest. So they loaded us up and flew us to an airport just outside of LA, put us on a bus to LA got out there, and they had people there. People were calling us baby killers, spitting at us, and throwing blood at us. Instead of trying to understand them, I you have to understand after years of combat they call it the thin red line. You balance off the line of sanity and insanity. If you fall off the line of sanity you lose all control and you take lives because you want to. If you stay on the sane side, you use some sort of judgment, the thing you don't understand, you develop senses, everybody's got eye but they don't use them, everybody's got ears but they don't use them. They got the sense of smell they don't use it. In the jungle you can smell a man a couple hundred yards away. You can smell his fear for one thing. You can tell what kind of food he ate, if it was American or Vietnamese. You can smell the tobacco. We learned not to smoke in the jungle. You can smell the cigarette smoke and tell if it was an American or Vietnamese cigarette. Those senses those things, your eyes you can scan a jungle wall and pick out a man's face. Vietnamese didn't camouflage their faces like we did. If you see a man's face you can smell him. You can smell the fear. Fear has a smell and taste all of its own. Unless you've been there you wouldn't know. We called it the thin red line. That was the line you walked day in and day out for thirteen months. Once you got home you just couldn't get off the line. Have you ever heard of posttraumatic stress syndrome? It doesn't show its head for a number of months. Thirty or forty symptoms but twelve that are the most deadly. It's pretty scary realizing one day that I am one of those guys, you deny it. I don't have anger, I

don't explode, I'm not violent. Yeah, you are. Your hostile violent, your not the same person you were before you went over.

Le Ann: Did you get letters? How did they make you feel?

Bob: Yeah, my family sent letters. My fiancée did but she Dear Johned me. A bunch of school kids wrote us letters. I had three of them. When I got home I made sure I went to visit everyone of them. The letters kept us sane. It was contact with someone closely involved. It was soothing, real soothing. Contact with home was extremely important.

Le Ann: When you came back how did the people greet you?

Bob: it varied sometimes. People you knew would come up to you say stuff like "Oh, it's good to have you home." But others looked you like you were a real freak. You became weary when the new media wanted to interview you in that particular time.

Le Ann: What were your feelings about the war once it was over?

Bob: I was antiwar as it came. The government made every attempt they could not to win that war. It was politically inconvenient. The war could have been won if they would of fought it like they should of. Instead of prolonging it, keep it going number one readson to keep economy going and number two to make the Russians mad, because it might lead them to war. That's the reason I didn't stay in the marine core. I wasn't going back to that hell hole. After got these voices that talk to you after awhile you learn to live with it and talk to them and make peace with them. Those first 20-25 years was a Son of a Bitch. Once time I came close to shooting my mom. Once she came barging thought my bedroom door one night when I was sleeping. I pulled a gun on her the only reason I didn't kill her was because I pulled the shot.

Le Ann: Have you ever had flashbacks

Bob: Yes

Le Ann: What did you learn about yourself over there?

Bob: I've done everything in the world that makes me sick. But I will survive and I will live. Man does not live by everything that they put out in the news and media is very vicious, nasty animals. Unfortunately, war is one of those things you can't get away from.

Le Ann: Is there anything else you would like to tell about Vietnam?

Bob: I wouldn't trade a million dollars for what I did. I wouldn't take million dollars to do it again. I believe I'm a better man for what I went thought and I hope somewhere somehow I influence kids to understand that you have to fight for what you believe in, sometimes it really sucks to do so. I will always believe, I learned it over. When it's your turn to die it's your turn. You've done what you're supposed to do on this world. Once your purpose is done your done not one second before not one second after. When you job is done your history. God's going to take you back. Until then you'll live. You would out of a bunker one morning and the guy on you right side of you takes one to the head and get nothing there's got to be a reason.

# Release Form

To be completed by the person interviewed:

I, (print name here) Robert L Hughes, give permission for the video/audio tape of my interview to be donated to the Cimarron City Library, to be kept on file, and used for purposes of research at a later date.

I agree that persons doing research may use my name and my statements without further approval on my part.

By giving my permission for this, I also understand that I am not giving up any copyright or performance rights that I may hold.

Accepted and agreed:

Signature: Robert L Hughes Date: 4 9 05  
month/day/year

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