

Interviewer: Alright the date is February 10, 2011 we are conducting an interview with Mr. William Wright of 102 Love Court Clarksville, TN. And Mr. Wright served between 1947 and 1974 service included both Korea and Vietnam. Let me begin by asking sir what is your full name and where and when were you born?

Wright: William Charles Wright Jr. I was born in Quincy Massachusetts 11 August 1930.

Interviewer: And what branch of the service did you serve in?

Wright: Army

Interviewer: And I guess since you had such a long period of service was there, would you consider that there was a primary unit that you served with? One that you identify with more?

Wright: I stayed with the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne for over ten years until it was deactivated.

Interviewer: When was the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne deactivated?

Wright: In September of 1958 in Germany.

Interviewer: September of 1958. Your first memory of the service, number one 1947 is two years after the conclusion of the Second World War were you drafted?

Wright: No, I enlisted.

Interviewer: You enlisted?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: And what was your, what was it that lead you to enlist in the Army?

Wright: Well at that time there was still a big peak of patriotism and then we had people coming back and there were a lot of them returning to school, by that I mean high school, to complete their graduation requirements. So you could see all of the attention went to them. And you were kind of on the outside looking in.

Interviewer: So you actually had people coming to your high school after World War II that had served in combat and actually came back to finish out their?

Wright: Oh yes, yeah some of them graduated in abstention but others came back and served their time and then they went right to college because they lacked that requirement of their high school diploma.

Interviewer: So would you say your primary reason for coming in was just a desire to serve?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Did you come in with any intention of staying for let's see here what is this 37 years?

Wright: Twenty seven

Interviewer: Twenty seven yea. Any idea of that at all?

Wright: No in fact after the three year enlistment and I was thinking when I talked to you earlier. I think you said in conjunction with the 187 returning if we mark 1949 to today, 62 years when we returned from Japan to here, Fort Campbell.

Interviewer: Wow now the first unit that you served with first off there did you do basic training at?

Wright: Fort Dix New Jersey with C Company 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Interviewer: And after you completed basic training where were you assigned?

Wright: Directly to the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne.

Interviewer: Directly to the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne.

Wright: And I was assigned to I Company 511<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment and then they sent us as a platoon to jump school in Omuta Japan. And from their back to our units and we worked as a unit when we went through it.

Interviewer: Where did you do airborne school at?

Wright: Omuta Japan in jump school.

Interviewer: Okay

Wright: And then after that they sent us back for air transportability school. And that was where you learned how to rig and tie things down, fix bundles, and then glider rides. And that completed the air transportability school.

Interviewer: Okay, just a moment let me go grab my coffee. Okay where did they send you to the air transportability school, back stateside?

Wright: No it was in Omuta Japan.

Interviewer: Upon that well let me find out a little bit. What was the army like in the period between World War II and Korea? What was the feeling was there an idea that because World War II had been such a gigantic, huge event that warfare maybe was something that we weren't going to have to think about for a while? Or was the idea that the Soviets as we started having more and more problems with Stalin and with things that were happening in China. Was there an idea that we would be going back to war soon?

Wright: I was just a private.

Interviewer: So you really didn't consider that.

Wright: Everything was brand new. But you could recognize was what was taking place. Is that you lost the preponderance of the force that you once had. I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, we were designated differently than the 187 was because it was a glider infantry. But we had three rifle companies in the headquarters. All of a sudden we found out that, I think the squad that I was in there was three men. There were 12 men squads in those days. When I was in first platoon and I had a staff sergeant as a platoon sergeant that normally should have been tech sergeant. So after a while they realized they were going to have to do something so they brought the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion as far up to strength as they could. Then they took the first and second battalions and reduced them to one officer and one enlisted man in each company and then sent them into the third battalion where they needed them and we were still under strength. Then we had what they call 21 monthly. In no time our tours were up and gone. But if you had three men like the majority were, we had a long haul. So your tour was 36 months and after a while they realized that to retain people on airborne status if they were to come on they had to increase their enlistment for three years if they wanted to stay on airborne status. But we were really understrength but it was a new post in Japan they built for the army. Before they stayed in Japanese Army Camps. But this had been a naval air station and they trained kamikaze pilots there. Well they called them \_\_\_\_\_ bombs and they said a bomb of a jet repulsion system on it they could control it to a certain degree.

Interviewer: Okay so we have a situation there were I guess you could almost call it hallow army. Understrength basically at every level from the squad to battalion headquarters to NCOs. And now at this point with the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne what unit were you serving with? What was the designation of that unit that battalion?

Wright: Tenth battalion I Company 511<sup>th</sup> parachute.

Interviewer: 511<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Okay and the Rockasons were stationed?

Wright: They were one island up, north of us. We were on Honshu and they used to say we were like the foreign legion we were 500 miles from nowhere.

Interviewer: Now you were in occupation status basically. What was the by that time I imagine the occupation had been well underway for two years and there were major changes happening in Japan and Japanese society. How did the Japanese people react to you?

Wright: Well based upon their religion and their culture you were the \_\_\_\_\_. We were the only two countries that had never been conquered, never been defeated in combat. And of course they were defeated and therefore they relinquished themselves but they still had a lot of pride. But they never organized against you. There may have been those hot heads that would have liked to have done so but they didn't do so. Because what they went in and they found military government. Well it was still under military government and our status briefly was to check and see if democracy was working. So they'd send you on what they called patrol jumps to check certain areas prefixes and see if they were voting properly. Now we certainly couldn't read Japanese but if they were going through the procedure then you would have to say that it was working to a certain degree.

Interviewer: When you call them the jump patrols did you actually jump in?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: You would jump into an area I guess it was fairly isolated where you were.

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: And you would jump into the area and what was the reaction when you came in with the parachutes? Did you come near towns, villages? What was the reaction to that from the Japanese?

Wright: You would roll you chute and put it in your kick bag and then move out. And hopefully you were close enough to the railway you could get a ride back to where you were going otherwise you would hoof it back.

Interviewer: So you'd jump in and then hoof it back?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: How many miles would that be?

Wright: It depended where you were going. Hopefully not any great distance. And then there were patrols generally the engineers and the pioneers they had they would send them out and they would disrupt an axillary landing sketch. Because the threat was from Russia coming in and they had yacks that would buzz division headquarters.

Interviewer: Yack aircraft of the Soviet Union.

Wright: Of the Soviet Union.

Interviewer: That would fly over Japanese airspace?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: And just buzz the division headquarters?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Just to let you know that they were there?

Wright: Yea that they were a nuisance.

Interviewer: What was the feeling like towards the Russians among you and your compadres?

Wright: Well we didn't see them we just heard about that.

Interviewer: Did you keep up with the news through Stars and Stripes about what was happening over there and did you ever get a sense between 47 and 1950 that this may not be going in a good direction this relationship?

Wright: The biggest thing was they didn't call them communist in Korea. They called them Korean educators. They may have quit calling them communist but we never have. Then they held elections in 1948 to see which way north and south was going to go. Well the north apparently didn't agree. So we stayed on the airstrip we had trucks lined up for us with all of our equipment and everything there to wait and see how the elections went. And I still remember that when they came back they said alright everybody back to the barracks. It seemed to me like a drill in futility. Why did I load all this stuff and then unload it.

Interviewer: Now you're still stationed in Japan but you were going to Korea?

Wright: Yea we had the drop zones and everything designated for us that we would go into. And I imagine what we would do is have a K Mag representative. See there were leaders that were there and tell us what we had to do or what we had to prepare. It would have been strictly a show of force.

Interviewer: KK Mag what is that?

Wright: Oh that's Korean Military advisory group.

Interviewer: Okay and so you did actually did you actually go to Korea?

Wright: No they called it off.

Interviewer: They called it off.

Wright: At sunset practically. They said you can return to the barracks.

Interviewer: So that was just a show. Now Korea was a country that very little known to most evil you know before the time of the Korean War it was probably considered the way Antarctica is you know to some people today as far as the amount of knowledge about it. As we get closer to 1950 were there any indications that you might actually have to go over there and engage in combat?

Wright: Well if anything

Interviewer: Did it come as a surprise?

Wright: To me I thought it was a surprise. The reason I say that is because they took and deactivated the 6<sup>th</sup> division. They moved the 7<sup>th</sup> division into Japan and they replaced us. We that's in 1949 when they did that but they left the 5<sup>th</sup> regimental combat team there. And that comprised elements of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> division and they formed a regiment which later went to Hawaii and then right back to Korea when they crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. But reducing forces to that degree you would have thought things were much more stable than what they were.

Interviewer: What was the feeling when you first heard about the fact that the Russians had the atomic bomb? Did that had any effect I mean did you read that in the newspaper when that happened? Were you aware of the fact that you know that they had achieved that capability?

Wright: It was a matter of time but the Koreans what they would do they were in the north and they had access to hydroelectricity. Well everything emulated from the north and just to be \_\_\_\_ they'd cut the power.

Interviewer: Most of the hydroelectric capacity well in the north the terrain up there is extremely mountainous very rugged. And all hydroelectric power or most of it going to South Korea was coming from North Korea.

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: And they would just cut the power at various times to let them know.

Wright: Just like the generators and of course they'd say well they're doing this to pay us off you know. And it worked to such a degree but to my way of thinking North Korea was much more better armed and prepared than what South Korea was.

Interviewer: More industry also more capability at that point of course today it's completely flipped around.

Wright: Oh yea but they had an incentive from the Russians. I mean they gave them bombs that were updated they gave them tanks that were updated, they had the T10 tank. The forces in the south to prevent them from being aggressive in going northward they weren't given up the dang tanks.

Interviewer: Is there a way we could wherever that hum is coming form is that coming from the computer?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Alright could we shut the door maybe that will I'm just worried about the

Wright: Does that help?

Interviewer: Oh yea greatly.

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: These gismos tend to pick up that kind of stuff.

Wright: And Syngman Rhee was the president in the south and they thought that he if any of them would have initiated action to regain all of Korea for the tanks he had were walking bulldogs. Nothing with heavy equipment or nothing like that. And as a consequence when they came across the 38<sup>th</sup> they came in forceful and we had tanks that outdid everything.

Interviewer: When that happened when then North Koreans came across South Korea when was the first that you found out about it? How did you find out about it?

Wright: I was out of the military then. When I returned to Fort Campbell here my time was up so I went into civilian life and I was working for a company known as Keystone Camera Factory. They also made

toys this was in Massachusetts. Then I picked up the paper there and read it and it says airborne landing at \_\_\_\_\_. I said what? And I got to reading about it and I said I know the unit even though it was never identified. How many airborne units do you know that can move like that? But I even General MacArthur admitted that if he had retained the 11<sup>th</sup> in Japan he could have stopped everything sooner.

Interviewer: Now where did the 11<sup>th</sup> go?

Wright: Oh I'm sorry, in 1949? I mentioned they moved the 7<sup>th</sup> division to Japan and they relieved us regiment by regiment. The 31<sup>st</sup> went to 187<sup>th</sup> the 32<sup>nd</sup> went to the 511<sup>th</sup> and the areas in there and well the 188<sup>th</sup> they deactivated aboard ship as we were coming back. So that left two regiments the 187<sup>th</sup> and 511<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: And they returned stateside?

Wright: We returned stateside. And I believe they arrived in March or April and we followed right after.

Interviewer: March or April of 49?

Wright: Of 49 yeah. And we an incident there that occurred is that we put 31 days on water they did let us off in Hawaii for a couple of days. Then back through the Panama Canal and up into New Orleans but the mayor justifiably so said nobody can be in the city and that was because of the introduction to the 11<sup>th</sup> by the advanced partier. So apparently they raised heck and he said he didn't want any more reoccurrences.

Interviewer: So your advanced party it couldn't have been that huge.

Wright: No

Interviewer: But the advanced party of the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne basically just made it so the mayor issued a proclamation the rest of you guys weren't going into the city?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: So where did you stay?

Wright: At Camp Leroy Johnson overlooking Lake Pontchartrain.

Interviewer: I bet that was fun.

Wright: Oh yeah well you were all enthused here's the United States.

Interviewer: That's not exactly the United States you know geographically you're there but it's not exactly it.

Wright: We pulled in and it was a weekend so they wouldn't disembark us. But when we sailed out when we left out we could see neon lights realized that had to be a night club or something like that. Lights would shoot up over the levies where the vehicles were going. We said boy we can hardly wait until we get there you know because we're all going to get paid. And the next day they let us know they

said wherever you're going you all have 30 days leave, around the parade field they had all these little folding tables setup field tables and representatives from airlines, buses, trains what have you. I located the one that appeared to be the fastest for me to get out of there.

Interviewer: Now you went on leave at that point when did you actually leave the service?

Wright: Oh when I returned I stayed here until 1950 July and then I was discharged and went to civilian life. One humorous aspect here was none of us knew where we were going we thought we were going to Camp Atterbury Indiana but we wound up at Camp Campbell nobody knew it was there.

Interviewer: So it was still Camp Campbell?

Wright: Camp Campbell yeah.

Interviewer: What was Camp Campbell like when you first got there I mean you've I'm sure you've seen what the post looks like now. When's the last time you were actually on post?

Wright: Last week.

Interviewer: Last week there you go. So you have an absolutely great idea. Did you ever imagine that it would look anything like this?

Wright: No

Interviewer: How small was it back then as far as post proper not the training areas but the

Wright: It pretty much nowhere near the building that it now has. But when I reported in I had to go to the train station and tell them where I was going.

Interviewer: The Clarksville Train Station?

Wright: No no this was in Boston.

Interviewer: Oh in Boston.

Wright: I said I have no idea where I'm going I said but I'm supposed to go to Camp Campbell Kentucky. He said alright and that book they always have he thumbed through and he said alright and he's writing out the ticket and he says you will arrive in Clarksville, Tennessee at 11 p.m. on such and such day. I said no I'm going to Kentucky. He said okay and he looked in the book again and he said I tell you what young man he said I can send you to Hopkinsville, Kentucky if that pleases you. He said that's 25 miles away or I can send you to Clarksville, Tennessee that's seven miles away. Which one do you want?

Interviewer: There you go.

Wright: Send me to Clarksville.

Interviewer: Okay so you're coming from Massachusetts you're still living in Quincy at the time?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Okay so you're coming from Massachusetts and you took the train?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Okay now the Clarksville Train Station was still in operation at the time?

Wright: Yeah full swing yeah.

Interviewer: Full swing? So you come into Clarksville and you come in by the little train station over there and you got off. Did they have a bus to take you to?

Wright: No

Interviewer: No you had to take a taxi?

Wright: The army didn't operate in those days like that.

Interviewer: How did you get from the train station?

Wright: Taxi

Interviewer: Taxi

Wright: The taxi cab came down after the train put everything off the lights went out in the station and that was it until the next one came through I guess. But the cab came up and he said where are y'all going and we said we're going to Camp Campbell. How much would it be? And I think there were four of us I'm not sure and he says would fifty cents apiece be too much? I said no just as long as we got there you know.

Interviewer: Yeah I just want to get a couple of stills here find the right light (taking pictures). We'll just take a look at those. Now the Rockasons when did they come into your life or when did you come into theirs?

Wright: Did I tell you about working in the camera factory?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Wright: Well they had you in a cage and the reason being is because this stuff was sensitive the camera body, the lens, and what have you now that came independent of the camera. So you would take your order your invoice and look at it and figure out the weight and box it. And an order came through for Hawaii and I said gees I know just about where this place is located. I told a man in the gate I said open up the door I'm leaving. He said you can't I said yes I can. He said you can only get out every two hours to have a cigarette. I said I'm going for good find me the door. So I went and reenlisted because I told you about the article I read.

Interviewer: Yeah and you read that article while you were in Massachusetts?

Wright: Uh huh it was in the newspaper.

Interviewer: Okay so your time at Camp Campbell was probably pretty short?

Wright: About a year a little over a year.

Interviewer: Okay at that time who were you stationed with here at Camp Campbell?

Wright: Still the 511.

Interviewer: Still the 511 okay. So they hadn't deactivated.

Wright: No no

Interviewer: Now how much was the whole 11<sup>th</sup> airborne here at Camp Campbell basically their post?

Wright: Two regiment.

Interviewer: K2 regiment

Wright: But then it was one regiment but they had formed the 188<sup>th</sup> and the 503<sup>rd</sup> and they were in their infantry. They had to get replacements and such as that.

Interviewer: Was the manning situation as bad at Camp Campbell as it was in Japan? Were you still as understrength?

Wright: Yes understrength the

Interviewer: What would you estimate the percentage of understrength that you were?

Wright: Oh gosh I don't think we would be combat effective if we were at 66 and two-thirds that they say each combat effective. An incident was that here I was a Staff Sergeant because I didn't lose any rank because I didn't stay out 90 days. And the company commander he says I want you to go to a replacement company and bring back some replacements. There again no bus no truck ankle express all the way.

Interviewer: So the replacement it wasn't a situation where guys would show up at the replacement depot and then be assigned to different places? You could just go and just grab people?

Wright: No what had happened is they had called back in the inactive reserves.

Interviewer: The inactive reserves okay.

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Because of what was happening in Korea?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: So they called in the inactive reserve what was that process like?

Wright: Well what it involved is people that had enough points from World War II and that they want to retain the rank they had so they elected to go to inactive reserve and not active reserve. Well the reason they didn't call active reserve I guess they figured that if people said okay they can take this whole unit intact and deploy them. Well the inactive reserve were just scattered so when they came in that's what I picked up at the replacement depot was the inactive reserve. And I'm a staff sergeant and these people are master sergeants and tech sergeants. God all mighty what am I doing here?

Interviewer: So you had inactive reserve coming they hadn't lost their rank and so you had this large group of people of senior NCOs. Now I guess that cured the NCO problem as far as the understaffing of NCOs. Did these guys maintain their rank throughout or was there adjustment?

Wright: Well what happened is it was transition for them also. Some of them we lost because they were FBI men

But they still had to show up?

Wright: They had they showed up yeah. They followed the letter of the laws and then they realized they were released. The inactive reserves realized the advantages of being regular \_\_\_\_ verses a draftee. You got paid first you got certain benefits, little kudos that they didn't receive. So they induced them into signing up reenlisting. Well they just saw World War II what took place there. Some of them for three to four years so they signed up then come to find out they released them based upon the number of points they had accumulated from World War II, all of them met that requirement. They didn't know that at the time and here they are signing up for three years.

Interviewer: Where as if they had known?

Wright: They would have gone.

Interviewer: They'd have gone.

Wright: They would have only kept that people that didn't have the points.

Interviewer: What you're talking about right now is an aspect of history that is very very little understood. That the period between the end of World War II and the period you know prior to Korea you know even in reading about it it's chaos. The units that appeared and disappeared were reactivated and inactivated, sent here and sent there and movement between the state and Europe and the states and the Pacific Theatre and all of that. It's fascinating that well it's also probably one of the things that lead to Taskforce Smith.

Wright: Yes and that well you know it was a shuttle force that didn't work they weren't backing down because that's when Smith went in there. You may remember the incident of the pianist that played for the president. And come to find out one of the scores that he played while the president of China was there.

Interviewer: No we're talking about the recent Chinese visit yeah \_\_\_\_\_ that visited President Obama and the Chinese pianist who was a US but Chinese born pianist played.

Wright: And that was a propaganda show of how well the Japanese I'm sorry the Chinese did against the American's in Korea.

Interviewer: Do you think they did that on purpose?

Wright: I think he was able to convince \_\_\_\_ of thinking it was a get up and go \_\_\_\_ to please the president. Yeah I think it was an insult myself.

Interviewer: Yeah I'm inclined to agree. So now Camp Campbell was gearing up to go the units there at Camp Campbell were gearing up to go to Korea.

Wright: Yes that's right.

Interviewer: How long did that process take? What time frame are we talking about here from when to when? How long did it take for the elements at Camp Campbell to arrive in Korea? Did they stop in Japan first or?

Wright: The 187 yeah they did go through Japan through the ports and then when you asked about the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion why was it in the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade. Well when that calendar come out when they went from battle groups, are you familiar with battle groups?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Wright: Okay to battalions the training calendar had three battalions of the 327. And General \_\_\_\_ felt that they should be a battalion of the 187, justifiably so because the 187 was the nucleus from the cadre to form the 101<sup>st</sup>. And what battalion should you retain obviously the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion because of its lineage compared to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion. Because it did have a naval presidential citation along with the army \_\_\_\_\_. It deployed and of course the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion went in air land at Kempul as they made the Inchon Landing. Then they put the or it became a regimental combat team it was assigned a regimental combat team. It was still attached in element to the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne division and then somewhere in October or November it was designated as 187<sup>th</sup> airborne regimental combat team. I don't remember who was attached I'd say the 8<sup>th</sup> army but I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Okay so \_\_\_\_ was taken out of the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne?

Wright: Taken out of the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne.

Interviewer: Now here at Camp Campbell you're still with the 511<sup>th</sup> you've come back from Massachusetts.

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay you were called back or you

Wright: No I enlisted.

Interviewer: You enlisted to come back to Camp Campbell and they put you back in your old unit?

Wright: No they were forming the 188<sup>th</sup> so I was assigned to the 188<sup>th</sup> and the reason I was back to the 11<sup>th</sup> is the recruiter said the only way I could get to the 187<sup>th</sup> is to go through the 11<sup>th</sup> because they were providing the replacements. And then there's a catch 22 when you get to a unit and they claim you critical. So I went to the IG and the IG said well he says I sympathize with you I'm trying to get to the 508<sup>th</sup>. Well what can we do so finally he says it's just a matter of time so after a while they said yep you can go to the 187<sup>th</sup>. So I went in as a replacement to the 187<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: But you wanted to go to the 187<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: Well those were the people I knew.

Interviewer: You knew them how from the old

Wright: From the 511<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: From the 511<sup>th</sup> you knew them they were now the 187<sup>th</sup>.

Wright: You want me to tell you how under strength they were?

Interviewer: Yeah

Wright: Well they had to take bodies from everywhere the majority came from the 511<sup>th</sup> into the 187<sup>th</sup> the NCOs that they were lacking most of them came from the 82<sup>nd</sup>.

Interviewer: From the 82<sup>nd</sup>?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: And this is how they formed up the 187<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: The 187<sup>th</sup>

Interviewer: Now at that point was it still just one battalion or was it

Wright: No it was a full regiment.

Interviewer: It was as full regiment by this time okay. Now the process going from Camp Campbell I imagine your training got ramped up?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Things got pretty tough?

Wright: In a six week program I think it's in there if you'd like to look.

Interviewer: Yeah absolutely so they did an intense six week program at what point were you told okay we're ready to go?

Wright: I was out of the army when they were told they were going.

Interviewer: You got back in time before they left?

Wright: No they left.

Interviewer: They had left.

Wright: I read it in the newspaper where they had landed.

Interviewer: So you read about their landing at \_\_\_ while you were still in Massachusetts.

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay so at this point you enlist to come back in

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: And what was the route you took to get to them over there? How did that happen did you have to come back to Camp Campbell first?

Wright: Camp Campbell first yeah.

Interviewer: And then to

Wright: Camp Stowman which they assembled replacements and everybody there put you through POR and various

Interviewer: POR?

Wright: Preparation for overseas replacement.

Interviewer: Replacement okay we called it PONS preparation for overseas movement.

Wright: Yeah you get your shots and various other things. Of course you're going by ship so it's like when one barracks was filled and the second how many barracks required then they put you aboard the ship and then you went to

Interviewer: Where did you impart from? What was your point of deportation here in the United States?

Wright: Camp Stowman at the time was Called Pittsburg California and then we went to San Francisco they take you down by ferryboat and they put you aboard the ship. And then from there you go to I think it was 12 or 14 days there was a place in Japan that we landed I don't remember the name of it.

Interviewer: Was it mainland Japan or

Wright: No it was southern.

Interviewer: Southern okay

Wright: Okio or Kyushu I'm sorry. Then they put us on another ferry and from there we went to Pusan I believe.

Interviewer: Pusan in Korea okay so did they had was the situation on the Pusan perimeter critical at the time that you landed?

Wright: Oh they had pushed out of it by then.

Interviewer: They had already pushed out by that time. Okay so what time frame are we talking about right now in 1950?

Wright: This was May of 51.

Interviewer: Okay so this was May of 51 by the time you got it actually took you quite a bit to get back over there.

Wright: Oh yeah

Interviewer: So this didn't happen in the space of a few weeks this took a long stretch. When did you actually reenlist to come back do you remember the month?

Wright: September

Interviewer: September?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: And do so it took you from September all the way until May?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay now you land in Pusan now you missed the winter of 50 which I'm sure you're probably happy about.

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: Yeah that's not pretty reading there. You missed the winter of 50 got there in spring time of 51 okay. What was the situation as it existed when you first got to Korea? Did you get a briefing like here's where we are this is what the situation is this is what we're doing?

Wright: No they put us on flat cars they moved us north and I believe the towns name was Wonju. And from there we went to we were assigned to our units and I was assigned to the I&R platoon and then that was right around the Inju time and then from there went back to Wonju and from Wonju back on those flat cars again. Then to Inchon in Inchon we delivered ship and then went back to Japan \_\_\_\_\_ camp wood and what have you. And then they put us through a training program and they didn't have the right equipment for airborne operations good old things like chin straps and things like that.

Interviewer: So they basically shuttled you around South Korea on flat cars?

Wright: Yeah

Interviewer: And you didn't get to the unit or you did get to the unit but they were just shuttling you around on flat cars and then sent you back to Japan for training and reequipping?

Wright: Well we stayed there \_\_\_\_\_ yeah there were operations conducted and everything. I'm just saying we went here we went there but it was by flat car and whatever you have. Then they sent us to Japan and then I was squad leader and a man by the name of Childers was a squad leader we were taking over for two squad leaders that were getting ready to rotate. Then when we got to Japan we found out they were two sergeant first classes waiting there as replacements for the two squads we had. So then from there I went to the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. In those days a battalion had two intelligence squads' two three man squads. Like small I&R platoon is what it was. And I stayed with them oh wow until 52 and then they jumped us back into Korea in November I guess maybe it was earlier. But they jumped us on Hon River on a little sand spit that was out there the entire regimental combat team went in. But they flew us out this time and they marched us 27 miles back into Tango.

Interviewer: Okay so they jumped you in and how did they fly you out? From the airfield?

Wright: Yeah Tango Airfield.

Interviewer: So what was the purpose of jumping you in at that point just to?

Wright: To prove to the communist that we could be deployed anywhere at any time.

Interviewer: Okay

Wright: At least that's what I understand. And then they discovered apparently military intelligence by the regimental combat team staying there with the capability to move at any time it required them to keep three cores in reserve. Because of the typical invasion routes that people would follow. And we stayed and we trained we went through a \_\_\_\_\_ known as Maury guess what 27 miles out and 27 miles back. And they wanted to make sure we were well conditions could go that distance. It was good training but that I say became a hodgepodge because what they did do is they broke up the ranger companies they detached them from the units they were assigned to. And they sent them to the 187<sup>th</sup> so the replacements were from there the majority from the 82<sup>nd</sup> the sense of the integrity seemed to be lost.

Interviewer: So at that point there the 187<sup>th</sup> was just patchwork units stitched together ranger companies and part of the 82<sup>nd</sup> and. Now where does the 101<sup>st</sup> airborne come into the picture?

Wright: Oh they don't come in until 1957.

Interviewer: Okay so at this point here there in Korea 1952 you've experienced all of this. Now is the regiment then besides the drop at \_\_\_\_\_ have they had a break in combat during this time you're training you're doing all of this?

Wright: Yeah they were put in reserve.

Interviewer: Put in reserve

Wright: Yeah and that's when they deployed back to Japan.

Interviewer: Okay they deployed back to Japan now were they used again in combat in Korea during that time?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Okay and when did that happen?

Wright: They went back twice it's in the book they attached twice and but what had happened is that you had to have 36 points to rotate. Well 36 actually 36 point in what would have been related to a normal overseas assignment. So you only accumulated a point in Japan depending on where you were in the line you accumulated four or three points. Well just sitting here running through the hills and everything why don't I go back to Korea and get the rest of my points and go home which I did. And I was assigned to the 160<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment.

Interviewer: Now were you with them at the point of 25 May of 51 when they

Wright: That's Ingie

Interviewer: Ingie yes okay. What was that like, you had you basically fought the Chinese you were going up against the Chinese rather than the North Koreans.

Wright: Yea they were pushing them back north yeah.

Interviewer: Okay how many I mean were you significantly outnumbered as far as manpower? Or would you say that the you know that at least the troops that you encountered were somewhat equal equivalent strength to what you had or did they move people into that area quickly to try to augment their

Wright: Well their supplies had been cut off basically. So they had little recourse but to go north.

Interviewer: So you came in behind them

Wright: No pushed them out.

Interviewer: Pushed them out you pushed them out.

Wright: They were going from south to north.

Interviewer: Okay

Wright: Let me see if I can find this.

Interviewer: And you took the Ingie Valley.

Wright: There was a conjunction with marines the 5<sup>th</sup> marines.

Interviewer: Alright 31 May 51 Wonton \_\_\_\_\_ Korea hill 420

Wright: Oh that's what's his name get the Medal of Honor on that?

Interviewer: Hernandez

Wright: Yea Hernandez with E Company.

Interviewer: Okay and then Pusan 187<sup>th</sup> regimental combat team relieved of combat moved by LSTs so you moved by LSTs to Fusion?

Wright: Yeah oh that was the vehicles. We went on a troop ship.

Interviewer: Okay alright and then from July of 51 to May of 52 Fuchu Japan trains at \_\_\_\_\_ and Koshi. Now in 18 May of 52 reenter Korean conflict. Now at that point there had they re-outfitted the unit with the proper things for conducting airborne operations?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Was there a real problem in the early going as far as the chain of supply getting you guys what you needed? Were they just shoving to you like World War II era stuff? Did they start getting you newer equipment, better equipment, better parachutes?

Wright: Some War World II equipment. The field type jacket the old type. Some of them had the right size the brown jump ones that were issued but they had a big they had something stuck on the heels that indicated they were surplus. But what had happened is that when they were pushed back south they destroyed a bunch of the goods they had. You remember the A&B bag?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Wright: Well all of those were destroyed. So when we got to Japan they said we had to be prim and proper we had to have khakis to go into town, well we didn't have khakis. You couldn't go in fatigues they wouldn't allow that so they fooled around until they got the clothing that has been turned in from the 24<sup>th</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> divisions. They laundered it and sent it back to us we got khakis you know that fit within logic and reason. And I remember the shirt I got had indications of the old chevron they used to wear it had the markings of where it had been.

Interviewer: Oh okay yea.

Wright: And but that's all we had what they gave us to go to town.

Interviewer: Alright so you reentered the Korean conflict 18 May of 52 in Pusan moved over water to \_\_\_\_\_.

Wright: That's a prison.

Interviewer: Yeah the POW island. From \_\_\_\_\_ 187<sup>th</sup> smashes compound number 76 clears number 78 and 79 to clear POW riots. That was the situation where the POWs rioted in \_\_\_\_\_ prison. So there's three different compounds now these were all coordinated it seems you know very much so. How tough was that?

Wright: I wasn't there when that took place. I was with another regiment at that time.

Interviewer: Okay so what time did you what regiment did you go to by that time?

Wright: I went to the 160<sup>th</sup> which belonged to the 40<sup>th</sup> infantry division that came from California. And they replaced the 24<sup>th</sup> infantry division which went back to Japan. So I stayed with them up until November 1952 and then rotated from there and came back and was assigned to 506<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: The 506<sup>th</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ when was this that you were assigned to the 506<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: No wait 5030 I went from 505 to 503 to 506<sup>th</sup> I went to first battalion 503

Interviewer: Which was where at this time?

Wright: At Camp Campbell.

Interviewer: At Camp Campbell okay.

Wright: And from there the 503<sup>rd</sup> we jumped in Alaska what was known as \_\_\_\_\_ in 1954 and we were used as the bad guys to test the defenses of the Alaskan defense.

Interviewer: So you were off for that operation?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: And then returned to Campbell?

Wright: Returned to Campbell yes.

Interviewer: At what point did you go with the 506<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: Let me think then I went with the first battalion 503<sup>rd</sup> to Germany when the 11<sup>th</sup> went to Germany. And the amazing thing was I went with the 3<sup>rd</sup> first battalion 503<sup>rd</sup> and then became 502 and then it became the 29<sup>th</sup> infantry all in the same barracks and never moved.

Interviewer: You never moved and you changed units three times. Okay we're going to take a pause here just a quick break and we'll come back to this. That's an easy point to remember to come back to. Alright so getting back just for a moment though to Korea now were the 187<sup>th</sup> already known as the Rakkasans at that point? Was \_\_\_\_\_ it had already been adopted in Japan during the occupation?

Wright: Yea I never noticed it being displayed by the 187 the regiment I was with the 511<sup>th</sup> as I mentioned earlier incorporated the \_\_\_\_\_ into their

Interviewer: Into their insignia?

Wright: Yea the crest

Interviewer: So this is really a carryover from all of those changes?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: From all of those changes now Rakkasan in Japanese means falling down umbrella man. Was that do you think that came about from jumping into these areas to check on the voting procedures and all of that and the Japanese would say Rakkasan.

Wright: Yea there's an explanation in that booklet there from the beginning of it. There it is there.

Interviewer: Yea with the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne yeah during their stay with the 11<sup>th</sup> airborne the division was part of the troops occupying Japan first know the 187<sup>th</sup> flight of the infantry regiment and the 674<sup>th</sup> flight of the field artillery battalion were all grouped under the 11<sup>th</sup> nickname the angels from hell. The Japanese insisted upon calling all paratroopers Rakkasan so after becoming a regimental combat team serving in the Korean War the organization moved to \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ readymade nickname was there was different than the 187<sup>th</sup> adopted name Rakkasan and have used the name since that time.

Wright: That's right

Interviewer: Okay following coming back from Korea. So as a result of all the moving around there were just bits and pieces of other units that came into this.

Wright: Yea but here you asked a question about May, it's right here.

Interviewer: Okay combat of the I&R platoon.

Wright: Which stood for intelligence and reconnaissance.

Interviewer: And this is what you were a part of?

Wright: Yeah it's in that lower portion of that right paragraph it's by date. I don't know how well he did it it's obvious I don't know how he did it because we were forbidden from maintaining diaries.

Interviewer: Yeah that would be interesting to find out how they because this is extremely detailed. I can understand it's an I&R platoon intelligence and reconnaissance it was that kind of platoon a diary of movement and all the rest of that would be not exactly something you would want to come in enemy hands. That's one of the reasons that I maintained a diary in Iraq I had no operational information of any kind no dates locations or anything. Okay yeah this is boy I wish there was a way to get a copy of this.

Wright: A friend of mine gave it to me Sergeant Major Macula he and I served together in the 511<sup>th</sup> and I think yea it does have his label in the back of that. He sent it to me.

Interviewer: Okay now by this time here we're back in Germany. You've been reflagged re-designated numerous times. The plutonic division concept came in in the mid-1950s and what was the difference between that and the way the army was organized before at least as it effected

Wright: You know you had in the regimental system you had your three battalions plus support elements and such as that. The plutonic concept as it indicates five you had five rifle companies, a mortar battery which in essence was an artillery battalion when you got ready to undo it, 4.2 was actually converted to 106 and the artillery batteries were 105s. They in fact most of those people were artillery men they were assigned to it. Then your headquarters company you had an anti-tank section which was 90 millimeters on a track type vehicle low silhouette, you had the recon platoon, the medical platoon, and you had your supply and transportation. So you had everything operational right within that. And everything hinged upon dispersion realizing that if they threw it over you had to have the capability to disperse it so you didn't lose everything.

Interviewer: So by this time you've had a number of years in service I'm sure you were aware of tactical nuclear weapons you had the atomic annies. I bet the atomic annies were just a lot of fun to drive through German towns.

Wright: We yeah well they should have been hinged to get around as big as they were. We had an atomic capability.

Interviewer: The Davy Crockets?

Wright: The Davy Crockets yea.

Interviewer: Okay explain what that system was.

Wright: Well it's a tube launch devise in fact it's that only weapon system I know of that if you launched it you had to take cover before it hit because you could have been a casualty of it.

Interviewer: Yea the Davy Crocket mortar had a matching effective kill radius of 350 meters and a maximum range of 300 meters. And that's it doesn't take very much to put two and two together there and go hold on a second maximum kill radius is 350 meters that's three and half football fields and effective range is 300 meters gee.

Wright: Am I in the kill zone?

Interviewer: Yea now did you ever have the opportunity to see one of those? I mean how did you practice I imagine they had either an earth or just conventional munitions simulations for practicing its range.

Wright: Some of them had pneumatic devises and caliber devises they could use.

Interviewer: Same as the mortar training?

Wright: Mortar training yea they flip it out there you get the same effect except you don't get the fly action. They eventually took them away because like you said the kill zone of it staying away from it

zone or whatever you want to classify it as it didn't do anymore other than physiological than what the four deuces could do. They could put that much volume into that same area and achieve the same thing.

Interviewer: And achieve the same thing.

Wright: And no danger area.

Interviewer: Yep and also a much greater range.

Wright: Yea and what you do you know a nuclear devise when it detonates on ground and its contaminated area. Like the atomic bombs that we dropped were all air burst. Because has they not done than then there would have been residual radiation for 100 years in that immediate area.

Interviewer: So you had experience of these things in training and seeing the you know training to employ tactical nuclear weapons.

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Okay in the 1950s how long did you stay in Germany?

Wright: Three years.

Interviewer: Alright so you stayed there for three years between when and when?

Wright: We were the advanced parties we were there from 1955 until October 1958 and then I returned to Fort Campbell to the 506<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: To the 506<sup>th</sup> at Fort Campbell. Now the 506<sup>th</sup> was there I mean were you aware of the regimental history of the 506<sup>th</sup> when you went there did they teach you guys regimental history back then?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: And so you were aware of all of that and you were at Fort Campbell at that time Fort Campbell was still airborne at this time.

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: How long did you stay at Fort Campbell?

Wright: It was 58 to 64 it was still on the battle of \_\_\_\_\_ and they were getting ready to convert to the battalion concept. And that's when I told you about the training calendar that came out that had three battalions in the 327 and General Westmore said no we're going to keep the 187<sup>th</sup> logically you know why. He not only had commanded it but he thought it was necessary. How do you form a nucleus and do dissolve it and say it never existed.

Interviewer: So because the 187<sup>th</sup> was so important to General Westmore it was he basically kept the regiment alive?

Wright: Sure

Interviewer: Alright

Wright: The same things happened to the 506<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: Now what was the primary mission of Fort Campbell if you had to deploy at that point where was Fort Campbell were they expected to be able to go anywhere at any time for anything?

Wright: I could not live off post well I could but I had to be within 30 minutes.

Interviewer: Within 30 minutes recall?

Wright: Yea because I went with the first immediate ready force every time that the 506<sup>th</sup> was on division ready force.

Interviewer: Now you're airborne infantry you're on a 30 minute recall was the training during that time had we gone back after Korea to a hollow army or was this by this time was the back at Fort Campbell were you full strength mission capable ready to go?

Wright: Yes just about.

Interviewer: Okay so you're back at Campbell it's 1958 until when? When was your next duty assignment?

Wright: In 64 I went to the 509<sup>th</sup> in Germany.

Interviewer: Okay so in 1963 when President Kennedy was shot was there an alert?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Okay there was an alert during that time?

Wright: Uh huh

Interviewer: Do you remember that day? How did you find out?

Wright: I was talking to \_\_\_\_ and he mentioned it at that time we were on duty when it took place. And it wasn't a ridged stand sown but it was be prepared be ready. But we stayed in that mode all the time it seemed like.

Interviewer: Previously October of 1962 the Cuban Missal Crises what was that like for you?

Wright: Thirty minutes under the wing.

Interviewer: Did you think it was going to happen?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Yea I remember the drills in school.

Wright: They told us well the estimated casualty figures at least 10 percent. If and they didn't know at that time

Interviewer: This is 10 percent nationwide?

Wright: Yes well no going into the island.

Interviewer: Okay going into the island so you were estimating you were going to take 10 percent casualties going into Cuba?

Wright: Yea and the Russian commanders on the ground I don't think they knew this but they had orders they could release any nuclear weapons on their own recognizes. So that being the case if we came over and they released a nuclear weapon the suspension lines would have melted from the heat. So if the heat didn't get you the fall would have.

Interviewer: And this is a point where at that age and with that situation you felt that this was a real possibility?

Wright: Oh very much so. Well we moved people to Florida and every other thing just to prepare for the whole things of it.

Interviewer: So you had moved down to Florida at this point?

Wright: I did not. We had forces there. We were here ready to go at a moment's notice that's why I said 30 minutes under the wing.

Interviewer: Everything was packed everything was ready.

Wright: Oh everything

Interviewer: Just ready to load and go.

Wright: POR completed.

Interviewer: POR was already completed so you had it all ready.

Wright: Uh huh

Interviewer: So 1964 you went back to Germany 509<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: 509<sup>th</sup>

Interviewer: You're still airborne now by this time was Vietnam being talked about among people or was it still kind of a not very well known situation? Were you aware of that?

Wright: I was aware of it. The reason I was aware of it is because well can I give you a lead into what's taken place?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Wright: I spent nine years as an E6 and the reason for that being the reduction in force in the military. And in doing so those who had the most ranks E7s mainly because we didn't have 8s and 9s at that time. In fact they didn't come out with 8s and 9s until April 1958 when I was in Germany. And I would say this \_\_\_\_\_ did the right thing they said you cannot be promoted to E8 unless you're a first sergeant holding that position for no less than six months. Because that stopped all the club managers and various other things in that you know from running in and saying I want to get promoted and then \_\_\_\_\_ the rank you know.

Interviewer: And that shortly would have happened.

Wright: It would have happed sure.

Interviewer: Now did it happen elsewhere other than the 7<sup>th</sup> army?

Wright: I don't know what happened here but I would think that some people would have used the discretion and figured out we can't have this. Because there were too many platoon sergeants to be promoted because somebody was in the 789 club the officer's club boy a job had to be done but nobody had made provisions for it. So later on they came out with the H identifier identifying these people club managers and what have you. But no \_\_\_\_\_ of organization you just said rank and material I guess.

Interviewer: So during by 1964 I imagine you didn't find much different a situation than you had if anything the tensions were as great or greater than the 1950s.

Wright: The reason that I knew about Vietnam was because I came out of orders for Vietnam but it was for an E7. Because they still hadn't caught up with the 8 and 9 program so when I made 8 it just went from 7 to 8 to boom boom boom. I'd been doing the jobs all the time but there were no slots. Technically everything was filled but not where they were working in them.

Interviewer: Yea

Wright: I knew that Vietnam was getting hot and heavy because of the position that I was going to be assigned to that had a passport had to go to language school everything you name it. Then they canceled they said you're an 8 you can't go too much rank. So they sent me to Germany to the 509<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: Okay how long did you stay with the 509<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: I stayed with the 509<sup>th</sup> up until

Interviewer: The 509<sup>th</sup> where were they at was that \_\_\_\_\_?

Wright: No \_\_\_\_\_ was 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces. We were at Mites and industrial city in fact if you have time here. Mites was destroyed seven times in its existence. The last time was during World War II and the reason it was destroyed as much as it was destroyed is because some farmers had captured some crew

members that had been shot down when they were going in on the run to Frankfort the big industrial \_\_\_\_\_. And Mites was industrial also. So they virtually killed the crewmen. How I don't know but there was a saying the circulated to the degree that save one for Mites. So when they made their run on Frankfort they dropped on Mites also.

Interviewer: Wow

Wright: So Mites was just across the Rhine River from the name just eluded me. But anyway the air force determined that was going to be their headquarters so they never bombed it.

Interviewer: Wow see I want to see where we are at right now. So when did you end up going to Vietnam?

Wright: Right from Mites to Fort Campbell and formed the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion 506<sup>th</sup>. Now when the first brigade deployed from Fort Campbell they deployed with three battalions. Then it became evident that they needed more than three battalions operating in this \_\_\_\_\_ of combat insurgents that they were confronted with. So who is the commander of the first brigade? I'm losing it, General Matheson who is an original member of E Company during World War II 506<sup>th</sup> and the Brothers. So he said I want the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion because the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade with the 3<sup>rd</sup> 187<sup>th</sup>. So we formed there and deployed to Vietnam and joined the first brigade.

Interviewer: Okay so I wasn't to get this exactly straight. Okay so you had gone back to Fort Campbell by this time?

Wright: Yes

Interviewer: Okay you had gone back about what time?

Wright: March or April 22, 2017

Interviewer: Of 67?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Okay and so you're with the 506<sup>th</sup>

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Okay and how did the 506<sup>th</sup> get put together with the 187<sup>th</sup> again?

Wright: We were in that area that they were stationed but they gave us \_\_\_\_\_ of people of people that had deployed and the first brigade needed a battalion. So did the 173<sup>rd</sup>. So the 173<sup>rd</sup> received the first battalion of the 501 and re-designated the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion 503<sup>rd</sup>. And that gives them 1, 2, 4 and later the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion that they needed went on a ship with us to Vietnam. And they were formed at Brag so the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion was the original 501 and they were called the Geronimo's. But they just changed backgrounds they had moved on.

Interviewer: Okay so alright I'm trying to keep all the moving pieces straight in my head here so we're okay now you were with the 506<sup>th</sup> and they put a battalion or a battalion in the 506<sup>th</sup>? Which battalion was this again?

Wright: Third battalion

Interviewer: Third battalion the 506<sup>th</sup> and they put it together with the 187<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: No

Interviewer: No okay

Wright: They drew from the division.

Interviewer: From the 101<sup>st</sup> air borne division.

Wright: Right volunteers mainly volunteers. The advantage it had was a lot of the NCOs had already completed their first tour.

Interviewer: Their first tour in Vietnam.

Wright: And they wanted to go back.

Interviewer: Wanted to go back?

Wright: Yea they mostly for promotional they were looking for positions they could be promoted in. So we deployed at 110 percent.

Interviewer: This is the 506<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: 506<sup>th</sup>

Interviewer: Okay and you deployed with now did you deploy as a brigade?

Wright: No as a battalion.

Interviewer: Just as a battalion by yourself?

Wright: Yea

Interviewer: Okay so the 506<sup>th</sup> deploys as a battalion not under a brigade just deploys as a battalion to Vietnam?

Wright: The 3<sup>rd</sup>

Interviewer: What was the 187<sup>th</sup> doing at this time?

Wright: The 187<sup>th</sup> later got orders the division received orders they were deployed. So they were preparing for deployment as we were leaving.

Interviewer: As you were leaving?

Wright: Yea so we deployed in September they deployed in January the following year.

Interviewer: In January 68?

Wright: 68

Interviewer: Okay alright now the 101<sup>st</sup> air borne were they all together now in Vietnam or were there still units back at Campbell?

Wright: The first brigade remained its identity separate because of where the division went in.

Interviewer: Were they still 327?

Wright: Oh yea

Interviewer: Okay the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade was the 50 duece part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade then?

Wright: Yes the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade is the 187 3187 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 506<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: Okay 3187 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 506<sup>th</sup>. And that was done for what reason that they had the two regiments together under the same brigade because of General Westmorland or? Was there only one battalion of the 187<sup>th</sup> at that time?

Wright: That's all when we went down there yea the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion.

Interviewer: Okay it's just amazing trying to keep all this together. But you deployed with the 506<sup>th</sup> with the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 506<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: That's right.

Interviewer: And you arrived in Vietnam in September of 67. Okay and at this point here hang on just a moment let me take a look at this. Alright I just want to make sure how much time we have left here. Alright okay I think we're still good at least for the one devise. Okay so you arrived in Vietnam where did you first arrive at was there an in processing place?

Wright: No we were ready.

Interviewer: You were ready and you came over by ship.

Wright: Went over by ship we dropped off certain units up the peninsula.

Interviewer: How did those units get from the ship to the shore?

Wright: Well most of them would go on landing craft move in. If there was a dock we'd go to the dock and disembark. We went up to Camron Bay which was a bay that was taken care of built basically by the United States and it was a deep water port so we pulled in and left the ship on a gang plank what have you. They put us on trucks and shipped us into the brigade holding area basically a camp site. And then the 506<sup>th</sup> was designed to make to combat jumps scheduled to. Things later on concluded and I don't know how truthful this is but we got ready for one jump and they had me go coordinate the support group there see what supplies they could give us, support basically. We would need trucks to get us to the airfield and various other things and such and we'd need \_\_\_\_ support. But other than that we were ready. And then they start sending in reporters. We got a French reporter and an American what have you. And then we prepared sand tables briefing and every other thing. Anyway we'd fly out and come back and drop down by the 25<sup>th</sup> division Song Bay I believe the name of it. But they said there was one area there they had saturated with persistent CS. So when we hit the ground we'd kick up and activate the chemical.

Interviewer: CS caps?

Wright: Yea we had gas masks to put on.

Interviewer: Okay you had the gas masks to pull on because if you'd had basically all the mucus in your system would have been, yea I know CS gas well. Okay we are going to pause here just for a moment and I am going to switch tape and pause this system here. Okay at this point what was your rank and what was your duty position?

Wright: I was an E8 I was a battalion operations sergeant.

Interviewer: Battalion operation sergeant for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 506<sup>th</sup>?

Wright: Right and we knew it was a no go when the reporters left.

Interviewer: So they no goed the drop?

Wright: Yea I don't know how valid this is but they said a liaison in the Saigon area had left his attaché case in the jeep with the plan. They didn't know if it were compromised or not.

Interviewer: Where were you supposed to drop?

Wright: Right there in the 25<sup>th</sup> division circle right by the parrots peak and through that area there where \_\_\_\_ and Cambodia come together.

Interviewer: So with the drop being compromised and halted how did they move you guys into combat from that point?

Wright: They withdrew us from there to do this from combat then they sent us to a new sector. Then when we got there they said what we are going to do we'll keep you all intact so they sent us to a town that was known as \_\_\_\_ on the coast line. We relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> Calvary well infantry at the time. The \_\_\_\_ unit okay. They moved them north in \_\_\_\_ I'm not sure of that either and we occupied that area there. Well when they left there with their scouts and everything we're going to need helicopters. We receive the 194<sup>th</sup> I believe helicopter unit in so we had a battalion of helicopters to work with and

had guns also but we didn't have the scout capability. Later on they did develop that we had a 300 mile area to take care of. QL1 the main highway that ran through Vietnam ran through the city. The city was the responsibility of the Vietnamese and other areas. So it's search and destroy whatever you came across. And they came across any number of training sites but obviously you'd setup you know like little bleacher and that and fabricated that when you come through. Of course they got the word someway and they left. But then there would be run-ins and the people that we encountered in that had new weapons they still had \_\_\_\_\_. They weren't in depth to clean them. Then all of a sudden we knew Tet was coming to them the New Year is equivalent to Christmas to us. It extends that many days anyway. So I'd go into town and check with the Vietnamese a little port there they had lieutenant two and lieutenant tray. Tray was in two and two was \_\_\_\_\_. But it was just the way it worked out you know. And it was Sunday and I went in and there was one bridge that I was always leery of it was like a steel truss bridge and you had no latitude but to go straight right away. And it was always crowded with people pulling this or that or some other thing. And you would have been an easy target if you just went by they could drop anything in your vehicle. But that goodness that never happened. But we checked with them every day and I soon found out they didn't work on Sundays. There was nobody there its Sunday nobody works on Sunday I said okay. Then Tet hit so that left us.

Interviewer: Now you were anticipating during Tet was the general anticipation okay we're coming into an area here where you know they're going to stand down and we're not going to have to deal with or a whole lot or did you have indications that there was a major offensive being planned? Was there intelligence about that at the time?

Wright: Yea the what had happened is the approach had been to push everything to the boarders clear everything out so that the interior would be free of everything. They realized that where are our forces to the West. They maintained a deportation line north and south. So what do they do, they infiltrated them. And when they did they hit their key targets. They wanted \_\_\_\_\_ and the reason for being there it was in \_\_\_\_\_ capital. Not a big distinction \_\_\_\_\_ is a sauce that's made for pouring water over fish and you get various degrees of it. But \_\_\_\_\_ had been educated there so they thought that was a prime target and it was a prudential capital. And I guess general \_\_\_\_\_ figured if he \_\_\_\_\_ the prudential capitals he'd have control of all the people. Well it didn't quite work that way things had to be repositioned and everything. Then they attacked us from three sides north, south, west and east by sea by sea yea they used their little junks and what have you to come in. But we had an organization here that we had naval support and they had swift boats so it was obvious when they hit the city and burned the city and everything like that the people fled by sea to the east. Anything coming west had to be a bad guy so they just moved in and took care of all of them eliminated that aspect of it. And then the hospital was manned by doctors and nurses from Taiwan and when they came in that's what they wanted the hospital. And the other things the wanted was the soccer field so that was a point of contact for them and they needed medical supplies. So they came in and they took the hospital because the Vietnamese had left they all wanted to leave. They left what they call the white mice the police with white shirts. Well they were no opposition I'm not saying their courage or anything wasn't there but there's a point.

Interviewer: There's a point yea.

Wright: So troops had to go in and take that back had to clear out the soccer field and everything like that and then move out they pushed the rest of them out.

Interviewer: I imagine as an operation sergeant you didn't get a whole lot of sleep during that time.

Wright: You don't get none.

Interviewer: Zero

Wright: Yea we had people flying night hunger missions. And what it meant is that the crew came in they'd take a slick and put six men in there with M14s and skylight scopes then you'd have the scout ship I'm sorry that was the scout ship nobody could take off and move out. They'd spot a target they let them know what you had when you opened fire you had all tracers to mark it so then the flare ship would come over drop flares then the guns would follow and they just kept them going. Like I said we had naval support also and we had a sergeant from the marine core he was are you familiar with an angle code team?

Interviewer: Angle code yes.

Wright: Okay

Interviewer: An army, navy, gun liaison officer. Yea okay

Wright: Well he was the spotter.

Interviewer: So they brought in naval gun fire?

Wright: We had the spotters off the coast they brought two of them in.

Interviewer: Five inchers and eight inchers?

Wright: Yea so he was a spy in the sky and he directed the fire which augmented what we had. But we had a duster unit. Well a duster unit consisted of twin forties quad fifties. Primarily they were designed for antiaircraft defense. But here they ran the roads.

Interviewer: That's some bad stuff.

Wright: Oh it's terrible stuff when they cut loose.

Interviewer: Yea that's some bad stuff I've seen what 50 caliber people would not believe you see it on tv you know some of these old combat tv stuff. Fifty cal a guy doesn't just fall literally it's a path mist and gee I wonder what that was.

Wright: Well you know you got tracers you've got armor piercing you have \_\_\_\_\_ and then you have detonated.

Interviewer: Yep

Wright: But anyway we had all of this and we were protected in the airfield. One day we moved everything in that we could to protect we moved in 155s the Vietnamese they brought in their ammunition so fast their powder charges and their rounds and everything had no prevention to protect them. And they knew what they were going to do because the next thing you knew boom boom

boom here come the mortars. And they hit the powder trains when they hit the powder trains everything went.

Interviewer: So they hit the powder trains. I'm just trying to picture all of this. At this point here you're did you ever feel like you were losing control of the situation? Did you feel like your troops had everything well at hand did you have faith in your leadership?

Wright: Oh yes

Interviewer: Faith that this not something that's beyond us.

Wright: When all that stuff is going on then there's mortar rounds also. Most of them weren't fused but they are flying through the air and every other things could happen though. You just feel stuff off of the little buildings that were there. And the people are in the AO at the time they were calling wanting to know who was going to take command of the battalion because it looked like the whole airfield was going up. Then it calmed down the next morning and its back to search and destroy operations. But it was quite intensive what they ran into. Then finally the Vietnamese came in well we got \_\_\_\_ force companies out of \_\_\_\_ these are mountain yards they were mercenaries.

Interviewer: Now what were your feelings about the mountain yards were they a group that you trusted?

Wright: Yea they you couldn't communicate with them but the Special Forces that were with them, we had an Australian sergeant major when he was in country they gave him a \_\_\_\_ rank of warrant officer. So he came into one company and he has an NCO with him and then the second company came in well they get paid for what they kill what they capture and various other

Interviewer: What was the opinion of them as troops as far as effectiveness?

Wright: Oh very effective. They were going through the city house to house and you know the Vietnamese looked down on them even though they were the \_\_\_\_\_ of the peninsula.

Interviewer: They looked down on them the same way maybe people look at hillbillies.

Wright: Well that's a name the French gave them \_\_\_\_\_ people of the mountains. But the things that was difficult was determining distance, numbers, many \_\_\_\_ so many moves. But they worked well. Their bodies had to be recovered and sent back home which they abided by all the way. And they were going through house to house fighting and the Vietnamese army wasn't there and they called in and said that what forces they had there were stealing everything they had. An \_\_\_\_\_ took it they just made a pile there and the \_\_\_\_ chief called back and said shoot them. He had no time to play.

Interviewer: So did you do multiple tours in Vietnam?

Wright: No just one.

Interviewer: Just the one. And where did you go to from there? When you went back stateside?

Wright: The \_\_\_\_\_ command \_\_\_\_\_ sergeant major program. I made sergeant major while in Vietnam. What had happened is after Tet subsided they called a program project infusion and what it was intended to do is not deplete a unit completely. They would take short timers and long timers and switch from one unit to another unit. And that way you would eventually have your same base reestablished and you didn't lose everything at one time at least that's \_\_\_\_\_. So I went to the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade and became the operations sergeant major there and then filled as the sergeant major back and forth. Then we went into the \_\_\_\_\_ Valley and that's when the first \_\_\_ came through and relieved the marines at \_\_\_\_\_ then swung south and came down the Valley. Then we moved it was 30 miles from Way to Kason and it was 300 casualties later. But the design was that they would meet up in the valley. Well they had the valley basically covered with 20 and 30 millimeter aircraft guns right out of control. And the air force did a wonderful job neutralizing them otherwise they'd just take them ships out. But what they wanted to do and I guess this was to build up the morale of the civilian population is to show that the Vietnamese were reconstituting and that they were fighting and they were with the \_\_\_\_\_. So they took a battalion of air borne they took a battalion of had an infantry battalion that had a designation of Red Devil I believe and General Westmorland had the unit been fighting \_\_\_\_\_ hold up and not join with the cad but send these two units in. And the Vietnamese and the Americans joined in the \_\_\_\_\_ valley. It was the morale wasn't too good for the people that fought all the way but I think they realized after a while it was for the best to show that something was taking place. One thing about the Vietnamese air borne is they were good troops. But they could move they moved them all over. With the other forces like the rangers and them they were regional they didn't move them to other areas. And then from there I redeployed home and I was gonna go to I forget the name of the camp.

Interviewer: Well we have four minutes of capability left here.

Wright: So I went in very all dressed up and General Matheson who was a two star general then.

Interviewer: And he was one of the original E Company right?

Wright: Yea that's ole Matheson he's dead now he just died recently.

Interviewer: Yea I heard.

Wright: He was a good man and I didn't even have to ask.

Interviewer: So your history really with the as far as units with the 101<sup>st</sup> was primarily 187<sup>th</sup> 506<sup>th</sup> and really your combat history a great great part of it is Vietnam.

Wright: Yea there was a lot in Korea also.

Interviewer: Yea well you know 506 the 4<sup>th</sup> brigade combat they are the last ones you know that are going to be coming out of Afghanistan and Bill I'm I tell you this is an aspect of history as they are going to be trying to put together the periods in between the wars. This is the kind of stuff in order to fit all the pieces together for historians to understand what happened. What was the army like during that period and the rest of that? This is a valuable contribution and I thank you number one I thank you for your service sir and I thank you for this has been a long interview but it was because there was so much complexity to it. And I thank you for filling in a lot of the blanks and putting it a lot of this in perspective.

Wright: You know the 29<sup>th</sup> infantry I told you about?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Wright: They were stationed in Okinawa when Korea broke out paper wise they never left Okinawa. They left as battalions to fill in as replacements.

Tape ended