

Harold Hoss

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Bradach: Hello. Today is March 7, 2019, we're at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library here in Chicago, Illinois. My name is Eric Bradach and I am an oral historian. I am here with Harold Hoss. Thank you for being here today.

Hoss: I'm sorry?

Bradach: Thank you for being here today.

Hoss: Thank you.

Bradach: How we like to start these oral histories, is going into your career with the military, your time in the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam, but also like to start from the basics. First question, of course, when and where were you born?

Hoss: I was born Dodge City, Kansas. Raised on a farm north of there about an hour. When I got out... out of high school I went to... went to the farm mechanic school for two years because at that time, about everybody was having to do something, you know, in order to stay out of the military. And that put me right in... about the worst time I think [Laughter] because I went right into the worst of the fighting in Vietnam.

Bradach: Yeah. We'll definitely get back into that, but just going back a little bit on your time growing up. What was it like growing up in your hometown? Did you have any brothers or sister?

Hoss: Yeah. I'm the oldest of eight.

Bradach: Oh, wow.

Hoss: Eight kids and... So I knew it wouldn't be enough, you know, enough farm for— work for all of us so I planned on, you know, leaving the farm and going on to something else. So I went to mechanics school and then after that I got drafted.

Bradach: What did your parents do... of course, you grew up on a farm so I'm assuming your parents worked on the farm?

Hoss: Yeah. My dad was a farmer. He was also a veteran from World War II. He had spent three years on the... on the destroyer, Buchanan, in the Pacific [Theater]. His ship was next to the [USS] Missouri when they signed the peace treaty at the end of the war. So he had a front row seat on that historic event.

Bradach: Did he discuss that experience often with you and your siblings?

Hoss: I got papers of his at home. Got them on display in my office where it shows... a letter that he wrote... telling about that day of when they signed that peace treaty and... and it was, you know, pretty interesting, you know. So...

Bradach: Yeah, I'd imagine. Did you have any other family members that served in the military as well?

Hoss: No. well, I had an uncle that was in World War II. He was an officer and a pilot in... Europe. And I guess I did have a couple other uncles that were in the service, too.

Bradach: Okay. Going back again, what was your childhood like? Other than – of course, you said, you grew up on the farm, did you help your father out as well?

Hoss: Yes. We worked on the farm, you know, every day for... several years. And then I got into school and went to... moved away from home. Once I went to... the trade school, I was pretty much gone after that. It was trade school, right at the end of that I got drafted into the [US] Army.

Bradach: Did you enjoy doing the farm work as a kid or was it...?

Hoss: Yeah. I—I actually eventually went back to farming, and I am farming now.

Bradach: What kind of crops did you grow?

Hoss: We grew wheat and grain sorghum...and... today, we raise grain sorghum, corn and wheat... Things have changed immensely from back then, you know.

Bradach: What were you like in school? Did you go to a public school and what kind of student were you?

Hoss: Yeah, I went to public school. It was a small town, there was only... probably around nine hundred in the town or a thousand or something like that. And I

went to high school there, and after I got back from Vietnam, I made up my mind, I was going to take advantage of the GI Bill and went to college and finished—graduated from Emporia State [University], teachers' college.

Bradach: We'll definitely get back to that towards, in the latter part, of course. So, after you finished high school, you decide to go to the trade school and study farm mechanics, then you were there for two years, and after that you drafted. Correct? What year was that?

Hoss: I was drafted in September of '67 and did my basic training in Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri.

Bradach: What was that like?

Hoss: Oh, it was kind of tough. [Laughter] I had a company that had a lot of... quite a few people that weren't physically... up to it. So our company was not very good. But when we finished that training, I was shipped right to Fort Polk in Louisiana. And when I got down there, the company I was in, was outstanding people. There was hardly anybody that wasn't able to physically able to do it. We had a record braking company at the time. They broke all kinds of records for the post and stuff. Our... the results of our tests were really high.

Bradach: So back in basic training, though, you said there were several recruits who—just weren't up to the task. Was it just too physically demanding or was it psychologically...?

Hoss: Some of those guys were just... you know, not very physically fit. They were overweight, some of them, and they just—when do a march they'd be falling back and falling out. They just couldn't make it, you know. And at that time, it was... Things that went on at night sometimes, some the NCOs [non-commissioned officers] got in trouble. In fact, they got busted. There was some NCOs that got busted for blanket parties, you know. The guys that weren't being taken care of got beat up, they'd throw a blanket over him and beat him up.

Bradach: And that would happen at nighttime?

Hoss: Usually, yeah. And they put a screeching halt to most of that. That doesn't go on anymore. But at that time, it was still going on. They were pretty tough.

Bradach: Did you witness any of that?

Hoss: No. I didn't witness any of it, but in knew it was going on, you know.

Bradach: Was it just rumors and stuff you heard from others?

Hoss: Well, it was [Laughter]... those guys wouldn't have gotten busted if it wasn't going on, you know. It was a couple of NCOs who got brought down to private or corporal and reassigned to a different place, you know.

Bradach: Then you said that went to... advanced infantry training. And where was that again?

Hoss: Fort Polk in Louisiana. It was, you know, it was pretty tough training, but it was good because it made... you ended up learning what you needed to learn, you know. It was—it was hard training, but it was good.

Bradach: And what did you specialize in?

Hoss: Well, in the infantry, you have to learn—everybody has to learn and qualify on every weapon you carry. So, you know, from M16 all the way up to machine gun, 45, grenade launchers—you had to qualify on every one of those. And in the case of that, I mean, the reason for that is, is that if somebody gets hit, the next guy can pick it up and go on and be able to use that weapon without any problems.

Bradach: I just want to go back, a little back. I can't believe I glanced over this, but when you were drafted into the military, what was your reaction to that?

Hoss: Well, I really kind of expected it because at the time everybody was gonna have to go—you had a choice. You could either enlist and be in for three years or more or get drafted and go in for two years. I just figured, "I wanted to get it over with." So I took the gamble and went ahead and did the two-year thing. But I ended up right in a middle of stuff.

Bradach: What was your family's reaction?

Hoss: Oh, it was kind of tough on my folks and... you know, when I went—I had never even really rode in an airplane until I left for Vietnam. I know the other kids told me that dad was crying, and I didn't see it, but that was the only time they noticed he was crying.

Bradach: What was your mother's reaction?

Hoss: Yeah, it was pretty tough on her.

Bradach: Did any of—were any of your sibling drafted, as well?

Hoss: No. I was the oldest one and when I come back, I had a couple of brothers that were of age. I told them to stay in school and make sure that they kept up their grades, and they did. So none of them had served. And then, at that time too, they start with the lottery system, too, but these guys, my brothers were all in college and didn't have to go. By that time, the war had started to tone down.

Bradach: And you said you have... you're the oldest of eight children. Was it a mixture of brothers and sisters?

Hoss: Yeah. It was five boys and three girls.

Bradach: Okay. So going back to advanced infantry training, what was your... of course, can you tell us a bit more about that. You said the company you were with were of high-quality men.

Hoss: In the AIT, they were... I think we must have had 250 people in the company because they were trying to get a lot of people to send overseas, you know. So it was, they were big companies. They trained a lot of guys to go. But I think it was at least 250 guys 'cause we had like three barracks and each one held at least ninety guys. So it was—every morning, they get you up a four o'clock in the morning and make you run for ten or fifteen miles, then you'd have breakfast, and do calisthenics and just one thing after another. And then you'd have to do classes in the afternoon, training classes where they'd teach you about weapons or several different things, you know. They'd have guys—they'd have NCOs walking around, if anyone fell asleep, you'd be out and have to do pushups.
[Laughter]

Bradach: Did that ever happen to you?

Hoss: Oh, it probably did. [Laughter]

Bradach: It sounds fairly stressful and sounds like it'd be somewhat mentally stressful. Did you ever find at any time during the training that this is just too overbearing?

Hoss: Well, I think that's part of it. They want to get you... knock you down physically and [mentally] -- then pick you back up to where you're confident enough to be a good soldier, you know.

Bradach: Do you think that they did a fairly good job with the training? Was it a good balance of breaking you down but also trying to build you back up?

Hoss: Oh, yeah. I think so. They would... a lot of times, if you come in, they'd have formation in the afternoon. I remember the officers of the company would be out there leading, you know, they'd be saying stuff and we were supposed to answer back. They'd be screaming their heads off. You could have heard us hollering several miles away I think, you know.

Bradach: Okay. You were drafted in '67, went to basic training, then you finished AIT, afterwards... when were you sent to Vietnam?

Hoss: I finished AIT in, must have been... right around Christmas time or a little after... yeah, it was right around Christmas time. Maybe I did go back for a little bit. Anyways, I had thirty days leave after AIT and then I was sent over to Vietnam, and it was like... well, in March, but we had a years' tour of duty over there. So it was a full year, so I left on March 7th and got back on March 7th. Fifty years ago, today. [Laughter]

Bradach: Wow. Nice coincidence, I guess. [Laughter] So you're there in March of '68, you arrive in Vietnam; did you go on a ship there or by plane or combination?

Hoss: They flew us over. I flew to—from Garden City to Denver, [Colorado]; to San Francisco, [California]—Travis Air Force Base, I think, they got us together. All the people that were—a lot of the people that went through AIT were there, and you just get your orders in a few at the time, and then you get—it was a bit passenger plane that we went over on. And I think we landed in Wake Island—I was in Hawaii for an hour at midnight, one time. So I had my vacation, I guess. [Laughter]

Bradach: Ever been back to Hawaii since then?

Hoss: No. [Laughter] That's the one time I've been to Hawaii.

Bradach: Well, that's once more than I've been. [Laughter]

Hoss: But anyway, and then we flew from there and think we stopped to refuel at Wake Island, and then on into Saigon or... there's an airport north of Saigon. The name is Tân Sơn Nhất. The 101st Airborne actually has a base right there too that helps guard that perimeter of that airport. But we landed in Vietnam—it was crazy because they had really good looking stewardesses on the planes and they were being real nice to us and...[they tell us], "Good luck," as we got off the plane there, and I wonder how many of those guys didn't make it back because

there was a lot of them, I'm sure. But it was unreal when you got off the plane, just immediately step out and the heat and humidity just really hits you.

Bradach: Something you've never really felt before?

Hoss: No, and it was... the whole attitude of the whole area was like something wrong, you know, because everybody was in a hurry. The airport -- we got in -- was hit by rockets several times, you know, before we landed. And so, they didn't want to keep those planes sitting there very long. We got off and took our duffel bags of stuff and they loaded us on buses. Well, all those buses had iron mesh windows, there was no glass windows, but the iron mesh screens on all the window to keep people from throwing grenades in there. So, then they took us to an induction camp where—I think I spent one day there and we just were waiting on orders for what company or what unit you went to, and I was assigned to the 101st Airborne and so they took us from there, I guess Biên Hòa was the name of the, camp where the 101st Airborne has around Tân Sơn Nhất [US] Air Force base, Tân Sơn Nhất. Anyways, while we were there, they kept us there for about a week and did more training in the country to get kind of help get us acclimatized and get us used to the heat and everything. So I was, got acquainted with a couple of guys that were going... we all were going up north up to around Huế and it was two of us, of the guys I was bunking with all the time in the training. Then we got separated and ended up going—when we got to our company—and that one guy was from Kansas. He was the only guy that that I hadn't known that was from Kansas. He was one of the first guys in my company that got killed. So he stepped on a... a mine or booby trap. We didn't think he was hurt all that bad, but he had shrapnel in his back or something... he went into shock and died. They couldn't—weren't able to do anything for him. That was a real shocker to me.

Bradach: Where was this at?

Hoss: That would've been around Huế, you know. When I flew up to Huế, I got separated from the guys I'd been training with, so I was by myself. We flew off and landed. I flew up in a C31, one of those four engine planes. And even that wasn't normal. They'd fly in and go... [into a steep dive and land. It wouldn't...be a nice gentle landing. It'll be like this, you know. And then land and they would get the heck out of there. We landed at Phu Bai which is pretty close to Huế, and I was met there by a guy on a deuce and a half truck. He was supposed to take me back to Camp Sally on the other side of Huế, so that guy... he'd drove like he'd been shot at, [Laughter] just had the peddle to the metal, and going

through villages and those huts and houses were right up the edge of the road, you know. You were just flying through them, and were like, "Holy cow." Well, I got to Sally, and the day that I got there, there were eight guys that I'd been with, that had gone out to the company, which is out in the field. That night...the company got hit real hard and eight guys were killed. I said, "Oh, my God." You know, I thought it was those same guys that went out that got killed, but it wasn't them. It was—when they went out, they would have went to different platoons and it was 2nd platoon that got hit real hard and it killed those guys.

Bradach: How many men are in a platoon?

Hoss: There's usually forty-five or fifty. The next day, I was gonna be going out the next day. I was like, "Oh, my God." I was... I walked out to the perimeter and it looks like, Jeez, there's nowhere to go, except to go do what I was supposed to do. So, the next morning, when I got on the chopper, there were eight bodies on the chopper pad. So I got on the chopper and went on out and... reported to the company commander and they were out on this mountain that we called, "T-bone." It was kind of in the shape of a T, we ended up being on that same mountain lots of times, you know. But anyways... we had... we stopped, went to the CO [commanding officer], he sent me to the 3rd platoon. As they were taking me to where the 3rd platoon was, there was an airstrike going on in the distance. When the pilot of that plane got done with his air strike, his mission, he come flying in...like he's attacking us. [Laughter] Guys were diving for cover, then he took off and just did several flips, you know, in the air. It was his last mission and I thought it was really ironic because here it was my first day and it was his last day. [Laughter] But anyway, then I got on to the 3rd platoon and they assigned me to 1st squad, and then to a machine gun team. And... I kind of objected to that because I didn't think I was big enough to be carrying a machine gun. They said, "Oh, don't worry. You're the third man, you won't have to worry about that." Well, it wasn't... [sixty days before I was gunner] there'd been sixty guys that went into that company at one time, so we were—about half the company was pretty green. So they took us to an area that was fairly...secure, but there was still stuff goin' and we just ran patrols every day to get us working as teams. We did that for about a month, and then... that's when that guy from Kansas got killed. Then they shipped us in closer to Hué, and we're doing patrols along this river and right then, that's when my machine gunner stepped on a mine and was killed. So that made me assistant [Laughter]... assistant machine gunner became the gunner and I became the assistant. Then after that way, we started moving

in... and we'd go into... we'd go into an area and do search and destroy during the daytime and at nighttime, we normally do ambushes.

Bradach: I'd like to go back and get into that a little bit more. But just so I'm clear on everything—after you arrive in Vietnam, then you do a bit of training, get accumulated to the heat and climate; you said you were stationed at Camp Sally, then?

Hoss: Well, that was our company's basecamp. But once I left Sally, I never got back to it for six months. I mean, I was—we'd either be out in the field. Or sometimes, they'd take us out of the field and let us guard a bridge or that would be our down time, actually. It wouldn't be in the rear area or nothin' but it was still better than being—climbing around in a jungle or in mountains. So we'd guard a bridge for two or three days then go out on another mission, you know.

Bradach: So it was just constant hopping around?

Hoss: Yeah. We had hardly any downtime. We would guard a bridge or go to a firebase for maybe two or three days and then we'd be going back out for another, you know, our missions would be like—fifteen days or three weeks. We'd take all the supplies we could with us and then they'd drop them off by chopper as we went... So, after I left Sally, I didn't get back there for six months. That one letter I had—I was describing how I hadn't been to Sally for six months... By the time they sent us back, they had all kinds of beer and stuff for us, you know, and everybody got bombed. [Laughter]

Bradach: Probably just huge... took a huge load off, I bet, for everyone. Just a huge sigh of relief when...

Hoss: I'm sorry?

Bradach: It probably took a huge load off and huge sigh of relief...

Hoss: Oh, yeah.

Bradach: So tell us a little bit about your daily operation. You'd be guarding bridge and then you'd be moved out on patrols—could you just describe a little bit about what those daily operations were like?

Hoss: Oh, okay. Well, when we first started out, we were in the area around Huế. We were trying to get the VC [Viet Cong] and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] out of the area because Huế had been overrun during the Tet Offensive. And see,

that was the last of January and first part of February of '68 and I got there in March, so that's one of the reasons why everyone was so spooky. They had—and they had killed a lot of people and the Marines had actually, you know, fought to control the city—the imperial city of Huế and take it back. Our companies... [were involved in] that' why they lost so many people, too. In fact, I was in Charlie Company... and in Bravo Company, there was—one of the guys in Bravo Company had earned the Medal of Honor in that operation. And I'm not sure what his name is but I read about him a couple books that I've read. Anyways, our company was part of that, you know, but then we went in and would go in and start searching and stuff. When we first—first started out that way, we went into this one village where they told us there wasn't supposed to be anyone there. Well, we go into one of the huts and the houses, there would be food on the table. There wasn't nobody around, it was specky quiet. They ordered us to start burning it, you know. Well... So we spent that day burning everything. The next day, we took turns walking point. Next day was my turn to walk point. I wasn't looking forward to that very much, you know. But anyways, the next day, we went out and...[and] we see somebody running, so we started following him, and they led us around...We probably went about a mile, circled back around. We came to a canal, you know, there was a canal, there, irrigation canal, and a cement walk-over bridge; it was about three foot wide. It was pretty nice, you know. On the other side, the trees lining the canal and then to the front of us... rice paddies, and to the right of us, there's a village, starting over there. Well, I went across that bridge and I stopped. The two guys behind me—when I think back on it, they probably saved my life that day because I come up there and stop and they come up and started hitting this trail. Well, the guys were sitting there, waiting on us and [when they saw those guys go down that trail they got] nervous and opened up... when the two guys headed down that trail, those guys must have gotten nervous and must have opened up on us and threw a grenade. Well, I can still remember I stopped and looked, turned [to my right to see where]... those two guys were and that's when they opened up on us and I can still see Hill, you know... it was Jones and Hill and I can still remember Hill diving into the bushes. I headed for the nearest rice paddy [dike], which was off to the left and dove behind that. And Jones came over to where I was, but he had gotten... he had picked up some shrapnel in his back end. One of the bullets had hit his M16, the shroud on it¹ he had splinters of plastic all over him. But he had gotten hit a little bit, so we stayed there for a little bit. And then we pulled

¹ Hoss later explained that an M-16 has a plastic shroud that covers part of the barrel. A bullet hits the shroud and so it shattered.

back -- I jumped—we got across the trail and jumped into the canal and waited for a while because we didn't know what happened to Hill. We probably stayed there for half an hour. Finally, Hill come... come crawling down through the bush and came over to where I was. They pulled us back and... and the next day they sent like—or the same day I guess, they brought another platoon up there. There were three or four guys who got shot up real bad in that same spot. You know, I never did hear whether they died or not, but they said there was a couple of them who had chest wounds, something really serious. So... but anyways, whenever we would make contact like that, then they would bring in all the other companies and try to surround it. And that's what they did. They surrounded that whole area and they started bringing fire and artillery into it and bringing all kinds of gunships in and then brought in airstrikes. We were there for three days on that deal, and... and...there were just so many different airstrikes...At night, there would be a plane flying over and dropping flares, so you'd have light on the area, you know. And that lasted for three days, and then we moved on. The next day, we had... went to another area and I think our platoon—or my squad went on an ambush that one night. The next morning, we sprang that ambush, you know, it was crazy. Whenever we'd set up an ambush, we always planned everything out for [how] things were going [to happen] ... and it never ever happened exactly how you planned it, you know. So what happened, we found this... bamboo bridge—it wasn't really—just a couple of poles that stuck over this canal. We set an ambush on that, and while on this trail going along the... parallel with canal. Well, the next morning, we were... we were getting ready to pick up our stuff and leave, you know, and we looked up and there two guys in a sand pan in that canal. And they come up to that bridge and they had to duck down to get under it. That's when we see them and that's when they see us. They were as shocked as we were and we try to get them to come to us, called them to come to us, and they were having none of it. We ended up having to shoot them, you know. One of them managed—it was crazy because there were about five or six of us shooting but none of us were really aiming. We were just shooting, [Laughter] you know, and one of them, we hit and the other took off. I can remember... when he was running, it was just like running; holy cow, just like a jackrabbit, just dodging back and forth. [Laughter] And there was another guy that came down along the path and they shot him, but then, we moved from that position and had to catch up with the platoon, which had already moved out. So we ran, we had to run really hard to catch up with them and it was probably at noon that we were about to catch up with them and they were coming up on another tree line, a little village. They opened

up on the point man and killed the point man. I could remember when that happened. I was kind of on the back end of the platoon. So I dove into a... these rice patties were dry, and the rice wasn't very good—about that [four feet] tall. I dove into a crater of an artillery round and hid there for a little bit. We moved up then and got to that canal—irrigation canal, we were all along the edge of it, and we lined up along that to shoot into the village...The one guy that was point man who had been shot—I don't know if he was dead yet—but they kept shooting at him and he was carrying an anti-tank weapon. One of the bullets hit that and it went off, so it killed him. But then, we pulled back and moved us over to the left side—they brought up second platoon... well, I don't know who it was... the battalion commander, or who it was, flying over in the chopper back and forth and telling us to get in there, you know... I was close enough to the radio that I heard him. He was ordering second platoon to get up and get into that tree line. Well, they did, and four guys got killed and seventeen wounded. They just opened up on them. It was a really bad deal... But then after that, we stayed... we got into that tree line and surrounded that and stayed there for a couple of days. [Coughing] But they never... that was... morale was pretty low at the time 'cause they never even bothered to pick up those bodies, they were laid out there for three days, and we had like five bodies out there.

Bradach: Was it because it was too dangerous to go out and retrieve them?

Hoss: No. They just didn't bother to pick them up until we were getting ready to move out. And that didn't help our morale, not at all because our officers didn't seem to care whether... what happened. It was just an afterthought to get them picked up and sent out.

Bradach: What was your morale like at this point? Was it like everyone else?

Hoss: It was pretty low, just like everybody else's. It was not a good thing, but anyways... after that, the 2nd platoon was half gone, you know. So we went on another patrol the next couple of days, and then we ran into... our point man ran and got hit. They opened up on him and he got shot. He wasn't killed 'cause I could remember hearing him, he was—he got hit in the arm and I could hear him hollering, "Oh, my arm! My arm!" You know. They come up behind him and shot him in the head... So then they took off. They didn't ever usually stick around very long, you know. They took off, and we... we went and got him. Well then, instead of bringing a chopper in and evacuate him, we had to carry him for about a half a mile with his gear and everything else. That didn't really help with morale much either, you know.

Bradach: How heavy in total was all the gear and equipment?

Hoss: Well, we usually carried at least three days of supplies, depending on the flat lands. We probably had eighty or ninety pounds of gear... your food and water and all your ammunition and grenades and stuff. But anyways, we... after that...they took us to a little firebase on Highway 1, and we ran patrols out of there for about a month

Bradach: With the previous engagement that we were just discussing, how many days in total was that?

Hoss: How many days in a row?

Bradach: Yeah.

Hoss: I think this is one of the times when we had about sixteen days of contact with the enemy every day. We also had... let's see, we had... Well, before we got to Camp Pinky, it was Firebase Pinky is what it was... I think a few, 105 artillery pieces they had there, we surrounded it and run patrols. But before we got there, we were on another squad size ambush. We set that off. We killed one during that. The Vietnamese were bringing in—the NVA were coming in, they'd come in from the mountains and come to the village and take their rice and take it back up. That's what we were trying to stop, and we set up a plan for that ambush for that night. There was a little [water way] that we set up right where the path went down through it. We were planning on them coming this way. During the night as it turns out, they came from the other way. [Laughter] Totally surprised us... The guy in position to my left had the [M18A1] Claymore [mine] set up. And I was in the machine gun position, so we were ready to shoot down in there, but they came from the other way, and he'd seen them and... he clicked the clicker for the Claymore mine, and it didn't go off. He clicked it again and it didn't go off. [Laughter] He clicked it a third time and it went off, and it killed one of the guys that was... he thought there were six or seven of them, then they took off. When we set that off; we had made plans that if you set it off then you'd move to another spot—we did that and spend the rest of the night. We did that. We came back and our platoon leader, officer—2nd lieutenant was—was pretty gung-ho, he was Airborne... previous to that, he had been talking about maybe we'd wait until they walk through then we'd capture one of them for interrogation. And he was talking pretty serious about that. And I thought, "Oh, God. This guy is crazy." So I didn't want any part of that. Well, we came back to where this guy we killed was laying and... he was probably six-foot tall

and was just muscle from head to toe. He looked like a body builder and after that... [there was] ... no more [talk]...[Laughter] nothing more about capturing anybody. That's the last we heard of that. [Laughter]

Bradach: It just wasn't the typical build of Vietnamese soldier then?

Hoss: Well, he looked like he was Chinese. He definitely—he didn't look Vietnamese, he looked total Chinese. I mean, he was a big guy. Muscles from one end to another. So, I'm sure that he wasn't Vietnamese, he had to be Chinese.

Bradach: How do you think that happened with... how was there Chinese...?

Hoss: Well, I think maybe the Chinese were sending people down once in a while, helping out. I believe that's what that was. And I'd heard other people, other reports, where guys, once they were killed, were Chinese instead of Vietnamese.

Bradach: This situation happened while you were near Camp Pinky?

Hoss: No. This is before we got there. And shortly after that ambush was set off, my machine gunner triggered a booby trap and he got... he wasn't killed, but he was injured pretty good. So he was sent home and I had the machine gun, then. So we went to Camp Pinky then and ran patrols there for about a month, I think, three weeks or a month that we were running patrols out of there. We would go—oh, I think, ten or fifteen miles one way and back. That's when I got I started carrying the machine gun at that time.

Bradach: How heavy was the machine gun you were carrying?

Hoss: The machine gun weighs thirty pounds, and you're usually carrying about three-hundred rounds of ammo, that's another twenty-four pounds. Plus, your grenades, water, and what food you had. Everybody carried a lot, but a machine gunner was... you know, that was extra, seems like. While we were at Pinky doing patrols, we never had too much contact during that time.

Bradach: Why is that? Was it just a low area? Not as many--

Hoss: Well, it was a firebase on Highway 1, and that's what we were doing, is trying to clear all the NVAs [North Vietnamese Army] out of those villages and stuff. Evidently, they were moving out of the area. That whole time we were there, we didn't have any more contact for that month. At that time, they were started to talking about sending us into the mountains, you know. They... they actually... well, they were gonna bring us into the mountains and drop us off. Well, they

thought it was going to be a hot LZ [landing zone], so they told us they were gonna bring us in and hover and we would just jump out. They would hover ten or fifteen feet off the ground. Well, we were all a little bit gung-ho about it, too. They had us jumping off of bunkers and showing us how to land and stuff, and all that. Well, it came time to do it and we went in – they hovered about ten or fifteen off the ground and we jumped out, and boy, I never had the wind knocked out of me as bad as I did that day. [Laughter] Hit that ground and it just really knocked the wind out of me. I could hardly move and finally got going. We went on and was able to get going, but it was...

Bradach: How long do you think you were immobile?

Hoss: Well, it wasn't very long. I laid there for a little bit but had to get going, so I got off, you know. Got over with the other guys, but holy cow—don't want to do that very often. [Laughter]

Bradach: So, this was up towards the mountains?

Hoss: That's when we went into the mountains...The mountains aren't that far from Huế, probably ten or fifteen miles from Huế. Anyways, we went in and did patrols in the mountains, and the stuff that we were finding was mainly—we'd find bunkers and stuff that had been used but haven't been used recently. They would—I think they'd been there before the Tet Offensive, that's where they'd come from. But we'd find lots of bunkers and stuff and actually found several caches of weapons and stuff, too, but we didn't have too much contact at that time.

Bradach: So, it was fairly all abandoned by this point, then?

Hoss: Pretty much, you know. That was kind of during the summer of '68, and... we kept going back farther into the mountains. Then we were sent into the A Shau Valley and there was... they had two firebases. One was Birmingham and the farthest one out was—they called Bastogne. It was kind of fitting name for it because it was kind of surrounded by a ridge of mountains that went all the way around and it was getting fired at from those mountains a lot. We worked out of Bastogne a lot... that summer and fall in '68...

Bradach: Was it just more patrols there?

Hoss: Well, we would go out... Sometimes we'd walk out there but other times they'd chopper out to a place, probably in a river valley somewhere they could land

them. We'd go from there and just go until you could find some contact, well then, you'd – we'd bring in all the other companies and would go toward them and try to get it stopped. We'd had... our 2nd platoon got hit again. One of those missions we were out—I remember, we were out in the mountains and the jungle was pretty thick in those mountains. We heard the firing and heard it going. They...walked into an ambush and we headed towards them. By the time we got to there, it was over, and they killed four of them. Killed four of our guys, and then they just...they fired for a little while then they took off. We didn't get any of them...so actually that was the third time that the 2nd platoon had gotten shot up pretty bad while I was there. Anyway, they got hit up pretty hard. We would usually go out for, you know, two weeks or three weeks and on different missions. And one of—the second time is one of them missions they choppered us in—we started in the flatlands and moved into the mountains. It was...a ridged line, just on up. It took us every day, when we first started in the mountains, that first day, they fired a bunch of mortar rounds at us and missed us. We kept on. The next day, they fired at the point man. Every day they'd fire up and something would happen. We just continued up that ridge line, and that went on for I think, must have been sixteen days or so—every day. That one day...my squad was on the backside. Well, their point man got hit, so my squad was moved up. We got up there and I remember one of the other guys, right where they guy had gotten hit. It was kind of a clearing where artillery had blasted away all the foliage and he could kind of see. One of the guys—he was being like a John Wayne. He had a grenade and pulled the pin on it. He was gonna throw it and dropped it right in front of him. [Laughter] There happened to be a crater there from an artillery round and he jumped into that crater and that crater and the grenade went off—nobody got hurt. [Laughter] But I'd seen it happen because I was sitting back behind him with a machine gun, watching him. He did that and... it went off and [Laughter] thankfully, nobody got hurt.

Bradach: [Laughter] What was going through your head when you saw that?

Hoss: I hollered, "Get down! Grenade!" And everyone got down and the grenade went off and we went on. [Laughter] But we went on and the next couple of days after that, my squad—it was our turn to walk point. We went on it and sure enough, they fired at us and our point man got shot up. I was probably... fourth guy back or so because I was carrying the machine gun. They fired—he got shot and we moved up and just starting firing both ways. It was a ridge line and we fired both sides and to the front. We killed one VC [Viet Cong] there and moved on up to the high ground. There were a few little bunkers there and that was it

for that night. We had a perimeter around that spot, and at the time, they were starting to send out NCOs to take care of, you know, and we got a couple of new instant NCOs. They went to training at home and come back and they'd come in and were supposed to be our squad leaders and stuff. We got a couple of them in our platoon at the time. That night... We had a perimeter around that place and... one NCO got up and walked in front of the perimeter to go to the bathroom. One of the other guys didn't know about it, seen him out there and fired a three-round burst with an M16. It hit him in the shoulder—in the arm and broke his arm, but one of those bullets hit the Claymore mine that was in a tree right next to his head—it didn't go off. The blasting cap was actually bare. [Laughter] That instant NCO was one lucky guy, that night. He didn't get killed—that Claymore mine didn't go off, and he got sent home. [Laughter]

Bradach: It's an interesting trade off: Do I stay here? Do I get shot in the Army, I could get out of here?

Hoss: Yeah. Well, that was a deal to, you know. We had guys that actually shoot themselves in the foot just so they could get out of there.

Bradach: Really?

Hoss: Yeah.

Bradach: How many would you say...?

Hoss: Well, just one or two, you know, but that was going on. But I had a guy in my squad who did that...it was at a bad time that he did it. We were clear down in foliage all the... like three levels of foliage and we were in heavy weeds and he shot himself in the foot, and we had to drag his ass out of there [Laughter] and haul him to where he could be choppered out. But, anyways, that was... not good.

Bradach: You mentioned how, speaking via email with our Oral History Director [Manager] Leah Cohen, how the company had quite a few casualties. It was close to around fifty percent. Just by knowing that, do you think that's a fairly -- did you get a sense of that while you were there in Vietnam? That the casualty numbers were that high?

Hoss: Well, at that time... Around the Tet Offensive, that's really where they lost the worst. And when we were cleaning things up around Huế, that's when we got hit. We lost the most guys at that time, too. I think I counted up—I think we lost

over twenty guys that were in our company that were killed. I'm not sure, you know, some of them may not have made it. I don't know. I didn't hear about them after they were shot. But it's crazy things that happened. That one fire fight where our platoon point man got hit. I remember that one day when one of the guys went out to get him back, and he got shot through the earlobe. The bullet come out like that and hit his ear and took part of his ear off. He just bled – I mean he was bleeding like crazy, but he went to the rear and, you know, about a month later, he was back, but his ear was all crunched up. [Laughter]

Bradach: You'd also mentioned a story involving a helicopter that was shot down.

Hoss: Well, that's when we were at Bastogne. I remember that one period, we were guarding—we had come in from the Boonies and were at Bastogne and were just on perimeter guard. Well, I remember seeing that—the chopper had come in—chopper pads were off to the left. It took off -- taking supplies out to our sister companies, and I remember it flew by right in front of me and it was close enough to where the gunner did this [peace sign gesture] and I did that to him went like this to him [peace sign gesture] and it went on out. They got up to that ridge line and the chopper went down and exploded and everybody was killed. It was four guys on that.

Bradach: Just after making the peace sign to each other?

Hoss: Yeah. Yeah. It was a bad deal. Made you feel about half sick, but you could see the smoke from that chopper burning for miles and miles away, you know.

Bradach: Did you happen to know anyone who was on that chopper?

Hoss: No. I didn't know them. But there's two—usually two warrant officers and two gunners on each one... Bad deal.

Bradach: One thing I wanted to ask about. Of course, the Vietnam War has been depicted by media, by movies, and television shows; when you see those, do you feel they give an accurate depiction of what was happening in the war or do you think they give a very false sense of what it was like there?

Hoss: Yeah. Those first couple of movies like that one, "The Platoon," that was terrible. They depicted us as being druggies and killers. It's not that way. The people we were with—working there, were really good and trying to do the best they could, you know. That just didn't happen. There was some drug stuff going on, a little bit. But if you went to a real area, or a base, where you were guarding a base

camp, there was a little bit of marijuana being smoked around but it wasn't—we would never take it out in the field with us. That was—we just didn't do that, and the guys that we were with, they were good people. I had tried—I thought about the one guy that was in my squad the whole time—him and I were together—we were good friends. He had, actually, when I got home, sent me an invitation to his wedding. It was in California and I was in Alabama at the time. I didn't think I could afford to do that, so I didn't, and I lost contact with him but in the last four or five years, I started to look for some of these guys. I finally found him, but it was two months too late. He had passed away... It was kind of a sad deal. Should have started sooner, I guess.

Bradach: So, as you said earlier, you said you spent one year in Vietnam from March 7 of '68 to March of '69; what was it like leading up to those final days, those final weeks of your terms?

Hoss: Okay. Well, there was only five of us in the platoon at the time that had been together most of the time. When it was three weeks—I think it was three weeks we had left in the country, they were going back out on another mission and we had gotten new people in and stuff. We talked to the lieutenant, the platoon leader into letting us stay back [Laughter]. So we did, and we went into Camp Sally. While they were getting ready for an IG inspection, they didn't want us around [Laughter]. They shipped us out to Biên Hòa, and we got down to Biên Hòa, and that place—all of those camps had grown so much -- you just couldn't believe it -- in the year that I was there. They actually had a swimming pool there, and we went swimming on the last few days that we were in the country. But they didn't want us around at Sally because they were afraid that we'd mess things up for them, you know. They sent us down to Biên Hòa and we just took it easy and kind of stayed out of sight until it was time to move out or fly home.

Bradach: So those last few weeks were probably the most relaxing of, your time there, I would assume...

Hoss: It was the last week or two. It was the last two weeks. The last two weeks we were down in Biên Hòa and we didn't do much of anything, just stayed out of sight and went swimming. Took it easy, you know. It was just unreal. You're getting ready to fly home, and I couldn't sleep. I was thinking about coming home and everything. I think I went-- it was a couple of days before I flew out, I hadn't slept any and got on the plane and still couldn't hardly sleep, you know. We flew all the way home to San Francisco. We were coming into San Francisco and the pilot got on and said, "We're are approaching San Francisco to land.

Welcome back to the United States.” Nobody said a word. It was dead silence. There were a couple of stewardesses that went, “What’s wrong with you guys? You’re coming home.” It was like, “Okay.” It’s like a bad dream, you know. What else is gonna happen? So nobody said a word. We come in and landed and we were supposed to have—they were supposed to have a steak dinner for us but myself and the other guys wanted to get home, so we just, got a ride out to the airport... That was like seven o’clock in the evening. Wasn’t no planes leaving until the next morning, so I spent the night at the airport. Just sit and watched people walk on by [Laughter] One of the things I wanted to do was to get hamburger and a malt, so I found a restaurant, there, in the airport—had my uniform on and everything. There was a couple of guys—business guys, there, who asked if I was just coming home. I said, “Yes.” Well, they paid for my dinner.

Bradach: Oh, wow. Did you expect that? Or was it--

Hoss: No. I didn’t expect that. In fact, there was a lot of people who were treated a lot worse when they came home. I know you’ve heard that, but I didn’t’ run into that that much. Those guys were good to me, and I flew on home. I flew to Denver, [Colorado]... or no, there was a snowstorm going on in Denver, so I flew into Kansas City. Well, got into Kansas City, [Missouri], and that same snowstorm was coming in there. Well, I flew into Wichita, [Kansas], and that’s when they grounded everything, and I took a bus from Wichita to Dodge [City]. My dad met me there, then

Bradach: Yeah. I’d definitely want to go back to that. But just going back a little bit, with how you were having trouble sleeping towards the last couple of weeks because you were excited about going home; I also want to ask, “What was it like trying to sleep... because you were hopping form place to place, quite often, while you were in Vietnam, never quite staying at a base for a particularly long period of time; what was the sleeping situation?

Hoss: Well, we didn’t have any trouble sleeping because they pushed us so hard that we were exhausted, most of the time and we didn’t sleep [much]. We slept on the ground the whole time. I mean, we didn’t have any trouble sleeping—you’re just so tired. You kinda got acclimated to it, you know, if you had... We always had to have a perimeter and each position had to have one guy alert at all times. So if you’re in a two-man position, you didn’t get so much sleep, but if you’re in a three-man position, that wasn’t too bad. You could sleep for three hours and be on duty for three hours. You kinda got—after you were doing it for a while, you kinda got used to it, and you could function pretty well. I actually liked it in the

mountains better than the flatlands because it was a little bit cooler, and you could find fresh water. In the flatlands, you're getting water out of a ditch or... you know, out of a rice paddy. Some of it wasn't so good. I remember spitting out a leach a time or two and that-- So you didn't want to take a big gulp.
[Laughter]

Bradach: [Laughter] Just little slips and always checking?

Hoss: Yeah. I actually spit out a leach a time or two. But that was another thing, you know, leaches and stuff and mosquitoes. At night, we learned to—we had poncho liners—a real thin blanket—you could put that over your head, and you could breathe through it. And that way you can keep mosquitoes away. You could hear them buzzing around your head, but they couldn't bite through that, so you could sleep, you know, for an hour or so, and be all right. And the leaches were just unreal. That one mission where we were getting ready to head to get into the mountains, they landed us, and we were in water up to our chest. I see something... moving in the water, looked down, and there were leaches in the water. They were this long, [eight to ten inches] swimming around there. They were just all over, I mean, just all over. Oh my! [Laughter] That was creepy as all get out. But finally got out of there and on up—those leaches, if you get one on you would usually have some mosquito repellent on us, we'd pour some on them and they'd come right off. You'd end up with sores on you, and that's one reason, too, they'd send us—if you're out in the jungle for three weeks, you'd get sores on you wherever you would have a scratch on you, you'd get jungle rot. So they took us to a place called China Beach, it was along the shore, it was a [US] Navy deal, and we would spend two or three days there, we'd get in the salt water in the ocean and that would clean that up like you wouldn't believe. Those sores and stuff would heal up like nothing, in no time at all. So I think that's in part why they sent us there—to get cleaned up. And then we'd go back out again. But on that one mission, when we first went into the mountain, at one time I was walking point, I was being real quiet going down a trail. It was at a time when we weren't finding a whole lot of active stuff going on, but we were finding lots of bunkers and stuff. I moved along and thought I'd seen something move. I stopped, was nothing, and I moved again and hadn't noticed—there was leaches on the ground -- they were as thick as leaves. Whenever you'd move, they'd start moving toward you [Laughter]. So I passed word back that we were gonna have to run through, and we did. That whole area, we ran through there for a hundred yards or so come to a bomb crater, and everybody stripped down and picked the leaches off of them. [Laughter]

Bradach: [Laughter] Oh, jeez.

Hoss: They were bad.

Bradach: You were probably thinking you were in a whole other world?

Hoss: Oh, yeah. It was like a moonscape or something.

Bradach: So, just going back -- So, you served your year in Vietnam and you go through your trip home; you said your father came to pick you up over in Wichita?

Hoss: Dodge City.

Bradach: What was it like seeing your father after being away at war for a year?

Hoss: Oh, it was great, you know. It was just good to be home. I had it in my mind that I was just gonna—I wasn't gonna tell him and just show up on his doorstep, but that didn't work out [Laughter]. Anyway, it was... you know, a tough—a tough year. We lost a lot of good people and I was able to go on a trip to Washington, DC, when on an electric board. We had meetings in Washington, DC, one year. You didn't come that year, but Julie—your sister went [speaking to his son, Neal, in the room]. When we got to—went to the Lincoln Memorial and at that time, it just got really emotional. I look over and see the wall and think of all the—all the guys on there had at one time been on a football field somewhere and saluting... like it should be. But it was tough.

Bradach: So after you met up with your father and he takes you home; what was it like seeing the rest of your family? Your mother, brothers, and sisters?

Hoss: Yeah, it was real good. I think my mom was at... my sister's in-laws. Her mother-in-law, she was standing there was waiting for dad there, we got there and really hugged me hard [Laughter]. Yeah, and it was good. Then we got home and that's when I told my younger brothers to make sure they stayed in school and got their work done right, and I think they did. But it was sure good to be home.

Bradach: So afterwards, you said, you mentioned previously how you returned to school to finish up your farm mechanics [education]; where did you return to college then?

Hoss: I went to junior college at Dodge City. I went to two years there and then transferred to Emporia State [University], teachers' college, and I spent two years there.

Bradach: What did you get your degree in?

Hoss: It was in Elementary Ed [education] and I also—special ed. I taught school for three years and was farming also at the same time... I guess farming won out [Laughter].

Bradach: Did you enjoy teaching, though?

Hoss: Yeah, it was good. I had special ed kids in Ness City and at Ransom, too. I would drive back and forth, you know, and do that. But it was good.

Bradach: It just happened to be that farming was more of your calling?

Hoss: Yeah. I would be at school and I'd end up thinking about stuff I should or could be doing at home at the farm, so I decided I'd go for that, you know. It was good.

Bradach: So then afterwards when you returned; when did you meet your wife?

Hoss: Oh, when I was going to school at Dodge City, I met her there, and then we got married. Then, we moved to Emporia together.

Bradach: Of course, you have your son Neal with us here. Do you have any other children?

Hoss: I have a daughter, and she lives in Scott City, [Kansas], and has four kids. Neal has three.

Bradach: So seven grandchildren?

Hoss: Yup.

Bradach: So you did return home and meet your wife and have kids, did you often discuss your time in Vietnam with them or was it...?

Hoss: Well, not that much. I don't know, I never really felt like... you know, I didn't know whether people really wanted to hear about it or not, you know. So, I hadn't really said too much. I was asked to... come to the grade school one time, and I think it was like 3rd graders. I talked about it a bit. I don't know... They were probably a little too young to be hearing about some of that stuff, you know. They never asked me back. [Laughter] So, I don't know!

Bradach: [Laughter] Yeah, that's eight or nine years old, that's fairly young to be discussing that topic.

Hoss: Yeah. I don't know if that was a good thing, actually. It should have maybe gone to an older group, maybe high school or something.

Bradach: What was it like accumulating [i.e. acculturating] back too civilian life after being in Vietnam?

Hoss: It was different because here you'd been gone for a whole year and things; society and stuff had changed some. You missed out on some stuff that was going on, you know.

(1:24:20 – 1:24:40 noise interruption)

Bradach: Sorry about that. So, you were saying how it was somewhat difficult to accumulate [i.e. acculturate] back to civilian life, how things have changed just being away for a year. What was it like reconnecting with friends?

Hoss: Oh, it wasn't hard but still a little different because you'd been through a lot in that year of time. I'd think, probably, I'd changed some too, you know.

Bradach: Did they try to discuss – Did they ask about your time in Vietnam or did they respect your [privacy and kept their distance]?

Hoss: They didn't ask me too much about it, you know. I would talk about it some once in a while, but we never discussed it a lot. I know when my dad was getting older in his years, I'd go up there and visit with him. Him and I kinda had a connection there because he had spent time in World War II on the destroyer, you know. We talked a lot back and forth about stuff that we'd been through, you know. That was good, good for him and good for me both.

Bradach: Of course, when you had your children; did you happen to serve as well? [Asked to Neal Hoss]

Neal Hoss: No. I didn't. I remember when I was a junior or senior and was trying to figure out what I was gonna do and talked about the military a little bit. My dad was like, "I think you need to go to college." [Laughter] So that's the path I took.

Hoss: [Laughter] Yeah.

Bradach: [Laughter] So you told him to choose something else other than the military?

Hoss: Well, the military today is different today because it's voluntary. The people that are out there, they want to be there, and that's a good thing because the guys that are just being drafted, some of them just don't want to be there. I did it

because I had to do it and wanted to make the best of what I did. It's better if people... and my training wasn't probably not as good—you know, they guys that go out now, some of them guys had gone through a couple of years at least of training before they get into it. When I went in, I was—in six months, I was in Vietnam. That's not really long, actually, when you think about it. The training... well, could've been more I think. The fact that I got into a unit that did some training there and also ran patrols to get us to work as a team really helped. By the time we really started to get into combat, we worked as a unit pretty well. We could handle it.

Bradach: So you'd say the training was fairly quick but they did a fairly good job or preparing you guys and making sure that--

Hoss: Yeah, for what we did, but the thing is, it's a whole different deal once you get into actual combat. You just don't know what's gonna happen. The fact that we were in country and did some training that first week then once we got to the company and ran patrols for a month, that helped, I think, because we were able to work together as a team a lot better. Once we got into the real shooting, we were able to react fairly well, you know.

Bradach: You did mention one person you tried to reconnect with when you returned home; unfortunately, it was too late. Did you stay in contact with any other people you served with when you returned?

Hoss: Yeah, I hadn't really—I did contact one other guy. It was one of those days when we were on patrol—I remember, it was a really nice day and we came to this village and came across this school there. This village was a small village, and there's kids and women running around. They were gonna let us take a break for a while, so we took our shoes off and were just sitting there, taking it easy. All at once, some automatic weapon fire starts going off to the south of the village, and boy, the women and kids and were running like in hysteria, so we put our shoes back on and we headed to the edge of the village. It was like a hundred yards down to the river. Well, two of our guys had gone down to the river to wash their socks. There were some VC on the other side of the river, seen them, and they shot them up. They killed one of them and the other was shot up really bad. He came running, hobbling across that hundred-yard opening, and he had a compound fracture of his leg, his arm; he was shot up pretty bad. It was amazing that he was able to hobble across that hundred yards in that shape, but it just goes to show you what fear could do to you.

Bradach: Yeah, all the adrenaline and everything?

Hoss: Yeah. And he got back to us and we choppered him out. He was from Lincoln, Nebraska, and I was up there at a meeting once and I looked him up and talked to him for a while. That was kind of interesting.

Bradach: You also said that, you mentioned you were in a couple of veteran's groups.

Hoss: Yeah. I'm a member of the [American] Legion and also the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. But I really haven't been that active with them. I haven't really been to very many meetings, but I like to stay in the group.

Bradach: Were you more active earlier [in your life] or just have stopped being as involved today?

Hoss: I'm really... I'm not that active with it. I did go to... let's see. Last year they did have... they had a trip that they sent guys to Washington, DC, for... what do they call it—Honor Flight. I went on that. It was really good. One of the guys from Dighton which is about thirty miles from Ness, had been in Vietnam, too and stepped on a mine and lost his legs way up high. And he was on that same flight and it was good to meet him and be with him because he's a really good guy.

Bradach: Looking back throughout your career and everything—one thing I wanted to ask is if you weren't drafted—of course you've learned and grew from that and changed from the military experience—but if you had not gone to Vietnam at that time and you weren't drafted; what do you think you would've ended up doing? Would you have gone straight to farming, afterwards?

Hoss: You know, I'm not sure [Laughter] I don't know that I would've because I don't think we had enough farm ground at the time. I had started... actually, I went to that trade school, I went to work at a farming machinery implement dealer and was working as a mechanic there when I was drafted. I could've went back and done that but thought I'd make good use of the GI Bill and, hey, go ahead and go to school and do that.

Bradach: Looking back on your military career and just reflecting on it; how do you make of it? Is it something that you're proud of? Is there any sort of sense of wishing that it ended up differently? What is your sense of it?

Hoss: Yeah. I'm proud that I did what I did and was able to make it through it in one piece. I would've... I was pretty lucky I think to make it back without getting shot up or hurt, you know. We had a lot of... I had a lot of... I can maybe say it like

this: I wouldn't take a million dollars to go and do it again but am I'm glad I did it and I'm glad that I went through it. It was really something.

Bradach: Given your experience with that; young men and women who are considering a military career or are maybe hesitant about that; what is one of the best lessons you can bring –your advice you can give to them? People who are considering, maybe, military career--

Hoss: Well, I think... you got to work as a team, you know. Do their studies and work hard at what they're doing and try to do the best they can... Anyways, the guys that are going in the service now, you know, it's a good thing for them. It's good that we have people that are interested in doing that. This country would be in sad way if we didn't... Kind of a sad way, anyways. [Laughter]

Bradach: [Laughter] Yeah, that's another topic-- [for another conversation].

Hoss: [Laughter] Right.

Bradach: Here at the Pritzker Military Museum, we do a lot of research and develop programs with a focus on the citizen soldier; what does that mean to you when you hear that term, citizen soldier? What is your reaction to that, your thoughts on that?

Hoss: Well, that's kinda been the way it's been over the whole country. It started out that way. When they first started the country, it was the citizen soldier who was able to get the country started. It's continued from then on, that's been good, you know. In the Revolutionary War, those guys were part of the... military; they'd be on their farm or something and if they got a notice to go, they had to drop everything and go. And that was just the way it was. I think it's good. Today, there's so many more people and stuff that... to do it, it's more of a professional thing now, you know, to go into the military.

Bradach: Is there anything, in particular, that you wanted to discuss that we are missing here in regards to your story with the military?

Hoss: I think we pretty much covered it; I believe. You know, it's been... the reason I know there was sixty guys that went into my company at the time, I had a set of orders that when we got our combat infantry badge; once you go into combat for real, they'll give you a combat infantry badge. Well, that set of orders had over sixty names on it. For some reason, I managed to keep that. It's got that list of names, their social security number and their service number on it. That's how

I was able to start looking and finding some of these guys. I had a friend who does that anyways. He went through them and found addresses that I could call, and I found out that there was a couple that passed away, too, to, you know. But that's why I know there's that many of them. I didn't know until I didn't realize and went through that list and there was over sixty names on there.

Bradach: Well, that's all the questions I had for you. On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, thank you for your service and also thank you for coming in to speak with us and sharing your story today.

Hoss: Very good. Thank you.