

A Veterans Oral History
Charles Berg
[2007]

Heritage Education Commission
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In 2000, Bev Paulson, Heritage Education Commission member, developed a plan to record Veterans' oral histories, starting with WW II Veterans. Bev made a significant personal donation to start our Veterans' oral history project which was supplemented by other concerned individuals, we have recorded 65 oral histories of WWII veterans plus a few Korean War and Vietnam War Veteran. The project is ongoing.

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Interviewee: Charles Berg (CB)

Interviewer: Linda Jenson (LJ)

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Transcription:

CB: My name is Charles Berg. I live in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota.

LJ: Where were you born?

CB: I was born in Pelican Rapids.

LJ: Who are your parents?

CB: My mother was Inez Berg and my father is Norman Berg.

LJ: What did they do for a living?

CB: My father worked at the Ampí Creamery for 45 years in Pelican Rapids.

LJ: Was your mom a homemaker?

CB: My mother was a homemaker.

LJ: Did you go to school in Pelican Rapids?

CB: I went to school in Pelican Rapids.

LJ: Graduated?

CB: Graduated.

LJ: What year?

CB: 1967.

LJ: Did you go on to college?

CB: No.

LJ: Were you drafted?

CB: I signed up for the draft or registered for the draft. They told me my chances of not going to Vietnam were better if you did that, but it didn't work out that way.

LJ: It didn't help you? What branch of the service did you serve?

CB: In the Army.

LJ: Where did you go for military training?

CB: Fort Lewis, Washington.

LJ: How long were you there?

CB: Six months.

LJ: What was that like? What was training like?

CB: It was different. They pretty much stripped you of your personality and made you a believer in what they wanted you to believe in and sent you off to fight the war.

LJ: What did you do during training? How were you trained?

CB: I was trained basically in mortar, shooting of those. That was my advanced infantry training which was the last three months of training. My MOS was IIC. The infantry was IIB. So it's pretty close to the same MOS.

LJ: Any special memories during that training time?

CB: Got to meet some people, good friends that I wish I could find now sometime, but it was a good experience to get away and be on your own a little bit.

LJ: After your six months of training in Washington, where did you go?

CB: I came home for a three-week furlough. That's when my wife and I got engaged on New Year's Eve, and they sent me off to Vietnam on January 21, 1969.

LJ: What was it like once you got over there?

CB: Scary. I thought the minute that we got off the plane we should have been handed a weapon and they didn't. They pretty much just had us sign into the country, get assigned units and clothes and material that we would need.

LJ: What was the next step after that?

CB: It was to be assigned to a company. I guess they kind of put us all in an area and we were supposed to be assigned and I was assigned to Charlie Company 1st Infantry or Division of the 5th or 8th Battalion. As I was waiting there I was tired and I fell asleep because it was in the evening. Well I awoke the next day and everybody was gone so I stuck around and was reassigned to another company. Later on, that

same year, I found out that this Charlie Company of the 1st to the 8th had been almost overrun and only like five or six people had survived that, so fate would have it that I maybe fell asleep that night.

LJ: Can you tell us about some of the people that you served with?

CB: **Martin McZeal [?] was a good friend that came into the country at the same time that I did. He seemed to know a little bit more than everybody else did. We were assigned to the same company on the same day. We were mortared the first day that we were brought out into the jungle.**

LJ: What does that mean, mortared?

CB: **We were attacked by mortars that the NVA was shooting off at us. They are just a rocket that they shoot off in a round tube and explodes and shrapnel comes out of it and I guess Martin was also, I didn't really find out his name until we got hooked up into this Internet system and I had started putting dates together and times and that's when I found out his actual name was Martin McZeal [?], and it wasn't until just this last winter that I was able to do that. Everybody just kind of had nicknames and we went by those and that was pretty much all you knew people by.**

LJ: Do you have any special stories that you wanted to share?

CB: **I guess just that about Zeke and also our base camp was called LZ Ike. We would spend like three weeks out in the jungle and then one week we would come and spend in this base camp and kind of be the security for that base camp and we were hit our first night that we were there and that was when Zeke was killed. Our company commander was also killed that same night and later I would find out as I joined the 1st Air Cavalry Division that his daughter was looking for people that had served with his company at the same time. In my first issue of this magazine that I got she had wrote an entry in that, seeking information about people that had served with her dad.**

LJ: How old do you think she was when her father "___"?

CB: **She said she was five years old. I have been in contact with her for about two years now on the Internet and talking back and forth. It's ironic because her dad was killed on Father's Day in 1969. So she would really like to have me come to the Wall and meet her there someday, which the wife and I are trying to plan a trip to do that.**

LJ: So where is she living now?

CB: **She lives in New York. So she has just been going through all this stuff out there that has been happening with that, too, and I got on the Internet right away and emailed her to find out if she was all right through all that. She said she lived about a mile from the Towers there so she kind of witnessed all that stuff going on, too. She said that she put her dad's flag out the window to help give support to some of the firefighters and policemen there which made her feel good, too.**

LJ: I bet it was a great relief for her to find you, to hear back from you?

CB: It was. She has been very supportive. It's been nice, she's wrote quite a few letters to me telling me about how grateful she is.

LJ: I understand that you were awarded two Purple Hearts?

CB: Two Purple Hearts.

LJ: Can you tell us about that?

CB: The first one was we found a cache of weapons along a trail in the jungle and it was our platoon that found them so we were told that we were able to keep the weapons. We dug them out of the ground. We cleaned and polished them all that night. Well, apparently the NVA were also in the same area and they knew that we had them so they mortared us that night also and I was struck in the upper part of the leg. I crawled over to the foxhole and the foxhole was plumb full of people. I laid there on the side of the ground and another mortar round landed just on the other side of the foxhole and covered us all with dirt. Then we crawled over and got our mortars and started shooting them back at, you know, the NVA and finally the rounds stopped firing. Our platoon sergeant was also killed that day, too. Sergeant James Hilliard.

LJ: What does that do to the morale of the company when your platoon sergeant is gone?

CB: It's devastating. I mean you were a close-knit group. It's a different type of thing. You don't explain. You don't have the words to explain it. You're young.

LJ: Sheer terror?

CB: Uh-huh.

LJ: So you earned your first Purple Heart for that?

CB: For that. The second Purple Heart was awarded when our LZ Ike was overrun. Caught a piece of shrapnel in the shoulder on that event.

LJ: Where did you go once that was over?

CB: The first attack we were medevac'd back to Tay Ninh. I spent about three weeks there trying to recover, doing light-duty assignments there. The second time I was also sent back to Tay Ninh and spent a couple of weeks that time there and then I was back reassigned to the company again. From there we were pretty much stationed around the Tay Ninh area. It was an area that not many American GI's had been into that area before we got there as the 1st Air Cavalry Unit. From there we went down to Cu Chi and spent about a month down in that area which is where all the tunnels were built and the NVA lived in those things quite a bit so it was a completely different area. It wasn't so jungle-like but it was still scary.

LJ: How long were you in Vietnam?

CB: One year.

LJ: When did you find out that you could go home?

CB: Well, I think every day we sat there and we'd cross a day off on our calendars.

LJ: Okay, so it was a one-year guarantee?

CB: Right, right. As you'd get closer to your zero date as your date of departure, you knew that you'd be leaving the field soon, but they never really told you exactly what day it was going to happen. One day we were just getting resupplied out in the jungle and the captain called and said, "Berg, get on the plane you're out of here." Your heart, just "Boom," you know. Here I am, I'm going home, finally! It was kind of an unrealistic thing until, I mean, one minute you're laying in the jungle getting shot at and the next minute you're sitting at home.

LJ: Was there any transition?

CB: None whatsoever.

LJ: Just from one day in the jungle to the next day at home?

CB: Right. Not so much just the one day but I mean they took you back to the base camp and you had to get assigned out of country just like you came back in, you know. You had to get all your equipment and your personal belongings that you took with you over there. You had to get them back.

LJ: Any debriefing?

CB: No.

LJ: Just pick up your things and get on the plane and go home?

CB: Right, right.

LJ: And, you went home to your fiancée.

CB: Came home to my fiancée. She met me at the airport with my other two brothers, which was like going to heaven! We got married that February 14th on Valentine's Day. We spent about two weeks in Pelican, here, and then I had six months left to serve in Fort Lewis, Washington. So we drove out there as kind of our little honeymoon.

LJ: So you were in for four years?

CB: Two years.

LJ: What did you do after you got done with your six months out in Washington?

CB: We drove down to California to see her sister. I applied for a job in a mobile home plant in Sacramento. I didn't get that so we decided to come back home and I got a job at a mobile home plant in Pelican Rapids.

LJ: Are you still working there?

CB: No. I worked there for six years and then I went to work for a carpet cleaning industry in Pelican. I've been doing that ever since.

LJ: Do you have any final thoughts about what you went through while serving your country?

CB: I think the important thing is that maybe everybody should, to a certain degree. I'd like to see the kids at least maybe have to go through basic and AIT training. I think it would teach them something about loyalty to the country and respect and find out what there is out there.

LJ: Since I last talked to you Chuck, we had the tragic day of September 11 [2001]. What are your thoughts about that situation?

CB: It's sad to see people calling themselves whatever they call themselves. I don't know what you call people like that. They call them terrorists. It is hard to imagine people killing innocent people. I never imagined that this would happen. I love to see the country flying the flags and being as loyal as they are to the country right now. It just bursts my heart to see that.

LJ: Chuck, how would you like to be remembered?

CB: As a faithful husband, a good father, -- devoted to my country, -- friendly, -- and smiley.

LJ: The best you can be.

CB: That's all I ask.

LJ: Any final thoughts?

CB: That should do it.

LJ: Thank you very much, Chuck.

CB: Thank you.