

Interviewee: Roger Bauer
Interviewer: Adam Shoemaker
Date of interview: March 10, 2006
Category: Vietnam
Use restriction: Open
Tape location: Box #53

Shoemaker: Today is Friday, March 10, 2006 and here we go — are you — do we have your permission to record you?

Bauer: Yes.

Shoemaker: Are you aware you're being recorded?

Bauer: Yes.

Shoemaker: Ok, ummm I guess we could just start by introducing yourself and talking a bit about your life before any involvement in Vietnam.

Bauer: Ok, my name is Roger Bauer — I was born in a suburb of Chicago in 1942 and — my family moved to Iowa when I was in the third grade and I went through the Iowa school system, going to the University of Iowa, getting an undergraduate bachelor of arts degree there and also going to law school there and getting a JD degree, graduating in 1966. Then after I worked briefly in Chicago, Illinois and from there I entered the army in the fall of 1967 at the request of my draft board [laughter].

Shoemaker: When did you first begin hearing about Vietnam and what did you know of it before getting involved?

Bauer: I suppose I first heard about it reading the *Weekly Reader* when the French were there and uh, when we were kids in grade school but never thought too much about it till the American involvement and I was in college at that time and I recall thinking uh, in the mid '60s, uh '64 or '65 when we were getting involved there well, my goodness when I get out of school the war will be long over — [laughter].

Shoemaker: Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Bauer: Actually I volunteered, because I would have been drafted —

Shoemaker: Ok.

Bauer: Yeah, so I volunteered.

Shoemaker: Yeah that's what my next question I guess would be, why did you volunteer just — because you would have been drafted, regardless like being able —

Bauer: I was eligible for the draft and at that time this was pre-the lottery that occurred later on so it was pretty inevitable that I would've been drafted and by enlisting I would have, a little more choice in my fate.

Shoemaker: Where did you train at?

Bauer: Uh, initially trained at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and then on graduating from basic training I was transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which was advanced training for the artillery.

Shoemaker: What was your training like, in general?

Bauer: Well basic training is traditional, lots of physical exercise, basics in weapon usages, and first aid — but primarily a lot of physical activity. Once went to — I went to Fort Sill we focused on artillery and I was assigned to the Fire Direction Control Center as a Fire Direction Control operator — it seemed the logical choice for the army since I had the least education in mathematics and that's what fire direction control is all about. So rather than use my law degree at that point, I was using mathematics which I had a limited education in and was the fire direction control.

Shoemaker: And did you decide, so you decided to do that, you could decided what —

Bauer: Not really, basically what was open, what actually I had initially thought I'd be able to use my law degree and I, indicated interest in JAG — Judge Advocate General's core —but this was prior to the change in the military code of justice and at that time they were using the code that was drafted in the early '50s and they did not use many lawyers — so they indicated that they would be interested in me if I would volunteer for five years and I was not interested in being in the army for 5 years. So I went for, I thought I had an option as a — to take officer training in the artillery which is when I went to Fort Sill, the Judge Advocate General's office at Fort Sill contacted me, noticed that I was a lawyer, asked me if I would be interested in staying at Fort Sill as a legal clerk and said, ya know I thought well gee that would mean that I would have a comparatively relatively short period of service but not be going to Vietnam and indicated interest in it. As it turned out, the orders for the Judge Advocate General's office went to a guy with a similar name who had no legal background and my orders were for Vietnam (laughter).

Shoemaker: What was that like, as far as training, the physical aspect of it, was that hard to, had you had any like experience —

Bauer: The physical and it was pretty tough, and the drill sergeants were very rough and it was not, when I get the impression of today's army, where they try to be, try to get you more into the spirit of it — the drill sergeants were — you were more like, felt more like prisoners of war, then

one on the same team — it was very rough — I pulled a groin muscle at one point which made it difficult but managed to keep up, but it was tough at times and the physical end of it once I was in the artillery training wasn't quite as severe but again, you did long runs and you did them several miles and miles every day and lots of pushups and lots of pull ups and that sort of thing and it was a lot.

Shoemaker: Did you — talk about any men or officers you remember from training, anybody in particular?

Bauer: In training, you know they were borderline abusive I'd say, ya know, I was lucky, I don't think they, I didn't feel that I was picked on but they would pick on people, particularly those who were a little inept and uh, we had one, I remember maybe two attempted suicides in the company I was in. It was, for some, for people who were mama's boys or were physically overweight or things like that, it was very rough for them. And these training, non-commissioned officers were really rough on them.

Shoemaker: Did you feel that your training prepared you for Vietnam, in any way?

Bauer: To a limited degree, ya know the type of hand to hand combat they trained your for, I don't think anybody encounters that anymore, civil war-type training, in terms of the weapons yes, you learned how your particular weapon the —16, we learned hand grenade usage, and that, and certainly once I got to advanced individual training with handling the howitzers yes, we were trained very effectively in those types of weapons.

Shoemaker: Did you know anyone that you went over to Vietnam with from before, like from uh, friend from school or hometown, before you enlisted, did you know anybody?

Bauer: I knew a few people who were in Vietnam, unlike in previous wars where units were called up from communities and people went over uh, with their friends and neighbors, Vietnam wasn't like that, at least not when I went in. Basically we were called up, we did not serve with units from our home states or anything like that. Anyone that you knew over there from home was coincidence.

Shoemaker: Explain how you came to Vietnam and your first impressions of the country itself.

Bauer: I remember the flight into uh, Long Xuyen was the base that I flew into, and I remember we were flying in and you could see some explosions on the ground below and I having been trained in the artillery I realized that these explosions could be a fair distance away and still be seen so I wasn't too concerned when we came in, I know a number of people on the plane were a little surprised that we had been in this country for so long and yet, yet these explosions were so close to where we were coming in and uh, but when we landed I was surprised at how close they were (laughter). We were fired on, on the, we were on buses that were, the floorboards were lined with sandbags to absorb any explosions from the road way and that sort of thing. When we

were in our barracks these were the, I believe, it was the 92nd replacement brigade or something like that. Uh, we slept in barracks, the bedding was all covered in red clay and dirt and uh, people who went to the latrine, ya know, there was sniper fire out by the latrines it was, it was surprising that this close in, in an area that we've supposedly been involved in for so many years, was that it lacked the security that it did and uh, so I was yeah, I was surprised at how little control we seemed to have.

Shoemaker: What city was it, were you stationed near?

Bauer: I was initially came into Long Xuyen, which was outside of Saigon, and then later on, I was — someone must have read the paperwork or something and saw that I was a lawyer and I was transferred over to the signal core in a beautiful seaside village called Nha Trang and I remember coming in there and it reminded me of happy valley, it was this beautiful little village with a lot of French influence right on a beautiful sand beach and I came into the airport there and they had a row of phones on the wall and you'd call your unit and someone would come and pick you up in a jeep and so various guys, I came in on a flight with a bunch of people and various vehicles were coming up and picking up these people for the various military units in the area and then the one came in for me and all the other vehicles were kina this vehicle, was covered with dirt and dust, had two big whip antennas on the back and an M-16 machine gun mounted on the back and the two guys in this vehicle looked like they'd been in that war from the beginning. Their uniforms were so faded from the sun and the washing that they weren't green anymore, their boots didn't have any uh, black leather on them anymore, they were all leather, never having been maintained and then we drove down the beach and were picked up at the airport, the compound where I was assigned was on the beach and the beach was filled with GI's but you could hear all the gunfire and the explosions and the chatter of small arms fire in the distance and this was during the Tet Offensive and was that, ummm, so was there a heightened sense of security and just, when you got in since that was going on, while it was —

Shoemaker: Umm, if you could — describe your first combat experience.

Bauer: Well, I mean its hard to find some, when you're on the receiving end I don't know if its — the first combat where you really realize you could get killed was just incoming artillery or mortar fire from the enemy and we would retreat to bunkers where we would hunker down but then, then we would go out and, I recall, it was raining, and it was raining heavily and we went out to our perimeters to make sure that it wasn't penetrated and again, you weren't prepared, there were no officers, there were no senior non-commissioned officers that just, back (laughter) in the bunker some one says that you gotta get out there and all our officers and senior non-comms disappeared and I remember thinking hmm, this isn't quite the way we were taught, so I'd just hunker down in a protected area and waited to see who came through after us and fortunately no one did at that point. Later on, we got better, the commanding officer was replaced and we had better leadership but that first part, it was pretty bad. (Laughter)

Shoemaker: Did you ever have any experience, combat experiences, like either hand to hand or

something up close with uh —

Bauer: Uhhh, I never physically laid a hand on any of them in combat uh, certainly got within rifle range of them and fired a rifle and of course, we did hit them with the artillery we laid a lot of fire on them and then, in the mornings well what initially with the artillery units, the 105 howitzer units, we'd go out, we were to provide artillery fire for an airborne unit and we were dropped in and our perimeter was supposed to be guarded by our local militia, Vietnamese, South Vietnamese militia but they kinda disappeared during the night so our cannoneers dropped the barrels of their guns and they put in what they called these beehive rounds and they're like these fish hooks that come out when they lay the gun barrel as flat as it will go and when someone come to get ya, you'd fire these into them and next morning you'll find them sticking to the trees and , stuff like that but — I was never, I was not, fortunately I was never in a battery that was overrun and , when I was in the signal core it was, we got hit but uh, no one ever came through our line — we got hit a lot but no one ever got, individually ever came through.

Shoemaker: And in your experience over there did you ever end up having to kill any North Vietnamese, like Viet Cong or any enemy forces?

Bauer: Oh I'm sure we killed plenty but in artillery where we would have done the most damage you don't see who you hit normally. So we did see, in the morning on the trees, but again, I was Fire Direction control so I would merely give the directions to the gun and somebody else pull the lanyard. (Laughter)

Shoemaker: Umm, say what equipment did you use over there, as far as your artillery that you would —

Bauer: Artillery, I was with 105, which was one of the smaller field artillery pieces, and then of course you have your M-16 carbine and your, if I would, — I used to do, — I'd be appointed, because I did have a law degree, enlisted men would sometimes ask me to be mutual counsel when they were being court-martialed, when I go to court martials then I'd be carrying a 45-caliber, — pistol — automatic pistol.

Shoemaker: How did you feel like in combat situations like that, were you scared or nervous or is there any —?

Bauer: Well I think you feel a certain degree of anxiety and , I don't know, it's, I guess it's scared but it's more, it's anxiety, it's a level of awareness — I don't think you'd, at least I don't think I'd feared that I was going to get killed and I mean maybe at that age when you're not, that's not your big concern, but you're anxious, that's for sure.

Shoemaker: How did you feel when not in combat, were there, were you any —

Bauer: Well, most people are you know, they didn't want to be there, if they didn't want to be

— if they had — there were certainly a number of people who would volunteered to be there but the morale was pretty poor, most people who, if they had wanted to go there initially weren't too thrilled after they were there for a while, most people wanted to go home, they were lonely — many people were draftees, many people — most people were not planning to make the military a career and they were anxious to go home — and most of us were at an age where we wanted to get on with our lives — and , so — we were — anxious to get home but you know, you didn't necessarily have much control over that.

Shoemaker: What were your impressions of the country itself, like landscapes, surroundings?

Bauer: It was quite pretty, I liked it — tropical, beautiful beaches, the people were very nice, well at least the ones that weren't shooting at you (laughter). But they were very, very nice people I liked them — the countryside in a large measure was beautiful although when you'd fly over those areas where we had defoliated the landscape it looked maybe the face of the moon but , those areas where there were populated in the cities and — I got to see much of the country from the Macong Delta up to the DMZ and , I thought it was very nice.

Shoemaker: What was the weather like there?

Bauer: Well, very hot most of the year, you know very rainy summer season, but I like hot weather so I thought it was not too bad.

Shoemaker: What did you do to relax when not on active duty?

Bauer: , they had a lot of NCO clubs and we had access to the town and I had a jeep that I could get around in after curfew and that sort of thing so we would go to the various clubs that the military provided, there were USO shows, there were lots of Vietnamese bars and restaurants and were some good French cooking in some of these restaurants that were there and French bakeries and umm, it was an interesting place, a beautiful, beautiful beach and that was very popular to spend the days on the beach if you could get away and that was the bulk of the entertainment, there was a lot of beer drinking.

Shoemaker: How often did you have when you weren't on active duty, how many, what was the time period you had to be no leave to, how often did that kind of stuff like going into the city or go — ?

Bauer: Well you generally had a 12-hour work day, 10 to 12 hours was your work day, assuming nothing extraordinary had occurred, that you weren't being attacked or — now we didn't because of — when I was in the signal core we basically held these mountain tops where we would have our signal equipment and we would bounce signals to the top of the mountain and that, generally we were only able to secure the top of the mountain and uh — but uhhh — and they, the VC normally didn't bother those sites that much because they used our equipment to bounce their signals off our equipment for their own use so, uhhh — we would be — and I

normally was not on a mountain top, I was normally in Nha Trang or some other city but occasionally we would mount what they'd call a reactionary patrol and we'd go out and make our presence known but that was normally left to infantry units or in the case when I did arrive in Vietnam and the city was under siege the MP's took the lead on that and backed up the MP's — the MP's would be basically pushing them out of building to building and then we would come in behind them and make sure that the area remained secure once they had taken it.

Shoemaker: And did you send them signals back to the, I guess the headquarters, for, was it like reconnaissance?

Bauer: Well I mean it would be all sorts of messaging, from ya know, any type of messaging, you know its just like any operation, I mean basically, they had radio equipment that would be short distances but basically the signal core would take care of the long distance communications. I remember on time Bob Hope was there for a show and someone mentioned over one of the telephone lines that, something about the show, where it was going to be, what time they were gonna try to get over to it, and that broke security because they didn't want Bob Hope obviously to — not that anyone trying to find out about it wouldn't have found out anyway but these, our lines were not necessarily secure, we did have some secure lines but open lines like that carried all sorts of communications, everyone from — back then, of course, it was very difficult to talk to your parents or family in the states, unlike what apparently they can do in Iraq now, but there was some of that, where emergency family communications but the signal core took care of all of that — if I wanted to, the, ya know, the commanding officer of the unit I was with wanted to find out something he might ask me to get through it in the various levels of — access — ya know, field grade officers, communications would be better than , lieutenants, ya know.

Shoemaker: Talk about some of the men you served with, was there any — ?

Bauer: Well you become pretty close to your colleagues, — we lived — when I first arrived, I lived in a tent and when I was eventually up in Na trang I was lucky enough to get in an old French barracks, it was pretty nice and we had almost little individual stalls in there and once you get a little rank and that, and that's where you primarily lived, you had a bunk in there and a locker and — it was relatively comfortable, cot — that's how you lived.

Shoemaker: Talk about some fo your superior officers, like what were they like, what was their leadership style like?

Bauer: They ranged — the — I remember one lieutenant, he was a Catholic, a very religious person, he thought that, when he was in personnel, and he would — he thought that anyone who came in and on their military records they were an atheist or an agnostic or something like that, he thought they should go to the area of high combat since they should die (laughter) — and , I was kidded him, I said well my goodness, they should be the ones to live, the religious ones have a place to go (laughter) – so you had to that type and then eh, we had all kinds, we had very conscientious — very good thinkers and very concerned about their men and we had those who

thought only of themselves, its just like any other aspect of life, some were good, some were not so hot — but then pretty much all, from all the various grades, I mean — those with a lot of rank weren't necessarily that much better but — ya know, I'd say many of them were very good and a lot of them weren't too good. (Laughter)

Shoemaker: Umm, I guess uh if you could talk some more about some of your memorable, any other memorable combat experiences or what would be in your situation artillery combat, ya know —?

Bauer: Well, its — you know I was very fortunate in that, I did not have to do what the average infantrymen over there had to do, be out in the field all the time — I mean I did travel all over the country, I got to see a lot, fortunately most nights, had a bed — most of the time had decent food — uh, that wasn't the case for everybody but I was lucky that way — and uh, I think a lot of what you saw over there, what was the plight of the people, uh, ya know many of these people were peasants and didn't have any more say about what was going on than I did but I remember many of our GI's were very nice to them and good to them and then we had our share of people that uh, ugly Americans — I remember one time being in a convoy going through one of the cities and uh, the guy sitting on the passenger seat of the deuce and a half truck we were in opened the door into the face of a bicycle rider traveling by and probably severely hurt them although we didn't stop, and I said what the hell did you do that for? Well, you know just the anger and hostility and took it out on this guy — I remember a guy shooting a mama-san who was trying to relieve herself on a rice field at the edge of the road one time — uh, just dumb stuff, that didn't happen, that type of thing like that — ya know, people were angry, they were angry at being shot at — uh, then again you'd see people doing all sorts of good things for the local people, trying to help them and uh — so it was a mixed bag but I could certainly understand how some locals wouldn't have liked us.

Shoemaker: How did they, in general how did the locals respond to you guys?

Bauer: I think they were pretty good, I mean, uh — we hired a lot of people, we had what we'd call Civic Action Funds, we hired them to do a lot of the routine junk of filling sandbags and digging ditches and cleaning and these sort of things — , those people appreciated getting some money and uh, like I say, probably I'd guess ninety percent of us treated them pretty well but you know you got that ten percent and who do you remember? (Laughter) The one who treated you good or the one who treated you rotten? Probably the one that treated you rotten because you're afraid of them — and uh, so that as unfortunate — and it wasn't because the military didn't do anything about it, they would if they could, if the right people saw it, too many people unfortunately were just stuck there and just felt it was unfortunate situation and feel they could do much about anything anyway.

Shoemaker: Were most of the people looking right at you guys not out of fear but more just —ummm — casual interest I guess?

Bauer: Well I'm sure — I remember, you know, one time I was walking, and I walked into a little fishing village and they started throwing stuff at me, fortunately not bullets, but they were — they obviously didn't like Americans — I don't know what had happened there before that created that, I got the hell out of there — uh, and I'm sure that people had bad incidents with, you know, like I say it probably only takes one bad egg to form the opinion in these people that we're not very good people and uh — so, but I'd say on the average, particularly where they had a lot of contact with us, you know, most of them were pretty nice — and I remember Vietnamese, South Vietnamese soldiers coming and being very proud that they were with us.

Shoemaker: That's actually my next question, did you work with the south Vietnamese at all, the ARVN?

Bauer: Ah, to some degree, not a great deal — uh, there was an ARVN, the ARVN air force academy was in the next compound over, so we'd see a lot of them but normally, not so much — we had some contact with what we called the ROKS, the Republic of Korea Soldiers, we worked with them quite a bit — umm — but uh, on a routine basis not that much with the ARVN's.

Shoemaker: What were they, from the little experience you had with the ARVN's, what were they like compared to the American soldiers, in terms of soldiers, you know...?

Bauer: You know, in not speaking the language, you didn't get to know them very well — now we did get to know the civilians because we hired a lot of them and we had a lot of uh, of uh civilians who had been around Americans enough that you could communicate fairly well with them — but uh, the ARVN soldiers, you know, they seemed to be conscientious, did their jobs, as far as I could see — ummm, I never saw them uh, cower — now I'll have to say that their, what they call their militia men would sometimes cut out at night and go home but that's because — that'd been fighting an endless war and they wanted to see their family, I don't think it's because they were trying to duck anything, they just wanted to see their family and maybe didn't understand we would, we like a little protection (laughter).

Shoemaker: When you were over there did you eat U.S. rations or Vietnamese food?

Bauer: Both, both — I'd say primarily I ate U.S. food but we ate on the economy a lot and we were a little concerned, I know of, some of the guys I know that ate a lot of it, you'd get worms and stuff — but uh, you know, if you went to some of the places you could trust the food was very good, they had French influence was there in their cooking and it made wonderful bread, although it was kind of funny, I went to one of their bakeries and the bread smelled wonderful and looked good but you could see over, rats and rat dung (laughter), kind of made you think maybe it wasn't so good but (laughter), maybe they added to the flavor, I don't know — it was great bread! (Laughter)

Shoemaker: So what would you say, what would you say in general then about the Vietnamese food?

Bauer: Very good, I liked it, I liked it — now they had a beer called Mami-Ba, which was beer 343, and uh, it was good beer but uh, we had been cautioned not to buy it, that or Coca-Cola's that came in capped bottles because they would frequently be sabotaged with lye or something and uh, although uh, guys would still drink the beer but uh, umm I'd heard of a number of people that had their throats scorched from that — I'd met one in the hospital that had swallowed some, I think he got out of a bottle of Coke that had been tampered with.

Shoemaker: Wow. What were the general living conditions like as far as bathroom, bed?

Bauer: Uh, it depended where you were — generally you know, if you were in the field you used a trench or a cat hole or something, if you were in a base area they would have latrines and usually outside of any barrack there would be just a, like a large funnel in the ground for urinating and then they'd have uh, a latrine where they had these barrels, 55 gallon drums that were cut off, that they would use and then they would (laughter), if you were unfortunate enough to have that duty where you had to burn these barrels they would pour diesel fuel on the dung and burn it off but uh — and then at the place where I was at in Na Trang we were very fortunate because it had been an old French military base we actually had real latrines, now over the years the Vietnamese had broken off some of the pipes in that so, not everything was hooked up but if you knew which ones to use — I remember one time we had a visiting general come in and he didn't know which one to use so he was using the urinal and nobody, for some reason, told him that that one the pipe was missing at the bottom and the urinal drained out onto his leg (laughter) uh, he was not a happy pup (laughter) but the, underneath the building was what they called the Honey Pot, it was like a cesspool, and the truck came in and pumped it out every once in a while — and we had the only hot running water so I was a little surprised when I first arrived there and I went to the latrine to take a shower and I opened the door and here were all these Vietnamese women taking a shower and I go Whoops! And there were two of them so I went to the next one and same thing, said Whoops!, so I asked the guy, I said when can you get a shower here? And he said anytime and I said it's all full of women and he said yeah, ain't it great? (Laughter)

Shoemaker: Did you ever get sick when you were over there at all?

Bauer: Ah, not really —

[PAUSE]

Shoemaker: Alright, part 2 — ummm, so did you ever get sick when you were over there?

Bauer: Ah, nothing of significance, I think I had a bout of the, some kind of flu or virus at one time but nothing serious.

Shoemaker: Now did that — was it harder to get umm — to get better, being in that situation?

Bauer: Not really, uh — you know, it's, I think the only thing you don't hat uh — you get this

foot fungus over there that you never get rid of but that's about it.

Shoemaker: How did your feelings change about the war while you were serving, if at all?

Bauer: Well, as you know, there was a lot of anti-war sentiment at the time — I think uh, in the age group of people who basically fought the war there was a tremendous amount of anti-war feeling more, that built — you know, before I went there was anti-war feeling and it seemed to have intensified significantly during the time I was over there — while I was over there you had the Tet offensive and the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and I think the general dissatisfaction with the way the war was conducted because most of us over there felt that if you really let loose that you could easily win, but of course it was complicated by the fact that the president was afraid of drawing the Chinese and maybe even the Russians into this, so we basically fought a war of attrition and we knew that we were the ones that were being attrited (laughter) and we didn't care for it — and uh, and then on top of it you had the fact that uh, you knew that if you could get through your tour of duty you would probably be done over there, so it caused a lot of people not to really do as much as they might have if it were a cause they really believed in — ah, I don't think there was much confidence in the strategy — ah, we certainly knew we were being wasted, it all was very demoralizing and I remember when uh, when I guess it was the Ling was assassinated and the rioting was — we were told of the rioting back here and I remember we had just been hit pretty hard and it was raining and uh, we came back from the reactionary patrol and uh, we were told that King had been assassinated and that there was rioting in the U.S. and we really kind of were concerned, My God, could the U.S. fall apart and we might be stuck here, you know, I mean could it get so bad that they wouldn't be able to bring us back — and uh, morale was terrible and uh ---- no one felt uh, well not no one, but most people did not feel that the war was being prosecuted in a way worthy of us and worthy of our sacrifice — I don't think, I mean a lot of people were not anxious to see communism spread but I don't think it was viewed in those terms, it was viewed in terms of the government wasn't willing to do what it needed to do when and so we were stuck over there and apparently, as it played out, President Johnson didn't know what to do and so he just kept escalating in the hopes that somehow fate would intervene and some good would come of it.

Shoemaker: Um, that leads to my next question was umm, what do you think the main thing could have been done differently to make the U.S. war effort more effective?

Bauer: Well it was, it would be, it was very difficult unless you could draw the communist China or Soviet Union into a more friendly relationship with us and one where they were not supplying the Viet Cong, if we had been able to exploit the historical difference between the Viet Cong and China, we might have fared better but as it was, uh, it wasn't successfully done and as a result, uh — we had a dragged out, endless, on-going way in which the participants felt they were being wasted and used and losing their youth at it.

Shoemaker: Um, when the — I'm going to digress for a minute — when the uh, assassination of King happened did that affect any, how did that affect the men stationed over there, like between

the African-American soldiers and then, like was there any tension?

Bauer: No I don't think there was any racial — I mean there were racial issues that were there but that particular incident, uh, I think the greater concern was what was happening over here — uh, it didn't trigger any problems among out troops over there at least — where I was, what I saw.

Shoemaker: How long were you in country actually?

Bauer: 13 months.

Shoemaker: Um, when and how did your tour end and how many did you actually serve?

Bauer: My tour ended in April of 1969 and they just eh — uh, you had a 12 month tour but they offered if you'd stay an extra month, they would give you a five month early out — if you had less than five months — the way it worked, if you had less than five months service when you came back to the states they would let you out early if you'd extend in Vietnam, in my case it worked that I only had to stay for one more month and then I'd get five months early out so I felt it was worth it.

Shoemaker: How did you feel when, like at the end of your tour, when they told you were going home, you knew it was—?

Bauer: Oh it was great, you came back — I mean again, you know, I came back through uh, I left and I came in through Long Xuyen but I left through Cam Ranh bay and uh, came into Fort Louis, Washington — and then they kept us overnight because they had to issue us a brand new dress uniform so we could fly home on a plane (laughter) — I mean, nowadays you see the Iraq veterans or servicemen, they travel in their fatigues, but back then that wasn't — so they wasted, whatever money a uniform cost for that trip.

Shoemaker: When you came back home how did you feel about uh, like the anti-war demonstrators and people like that?

Bauer: Well I didn't think they were, I mean I was — I didn't think they were helping — uh, I remember a friend of mine who came back a little later than I did, visiting me in Washington and uh, they had a lot of troops on the streets —

[PAUSE]

Bauer: So anyway this friend of mine who was in Vietnam with me and visited me in Washington and because of the anti-war protests that were going on, they had a lot of troops on the, on almost every street corner downtown where I lived and uh — so he would give them a bunch of flak and I'd say What are you doing?, I said They were, 2 months ago we were in that

boat you know, I mean it's not right, that's not this guy's fault and uh you know, I mean — I had mixed feelings because when I was in the service you know, my feeling was that you can't pick and choose your wars, even though this is one I wouldn't pick but you know, I was not happy with it but I didn't feel we could pick and choose and I certainly never felt that it was the servicemen's fault and I was, you know, I've read since that you know, these incidents of people being spit on and all that were, are a figment of someone's imagination, well it's not — it happened to me and I remember going to the beach with an old friend from college days and going to a beach house and being asked to leave because I had been in Vietnam, uh and — so — you know, I'd — I remember how rough it was and it disturbed me that my friend would change his position so quickly.

Shoemaker: This kind of goes into my next question too —

[PAUSE}]

Shoemaker: My next question was how was your welcome back in the state?

Bauer: Well family and friends of course was great and I would say the average person but there were incidents uh, basically by people you either didn't know very well or total stranger — uh, I mentioned the incident at the beach house and then — and uh, I remember there was an area that was a favorite among anti-war activists and a friend of mine, when I first moved to Washington, D.C., we were walking across this park area, I think he, knowing that I wasn't particularly familiar with Washington at that point, was trying to get a reaction from me cause he had, walking through all these anti-war demonstrators and he kept asking me if I was uncomfortable and uh — well, not uncomfortable in the sense that for what I did or where I was, I mean I didn't particularly want to do that or be there but I didn't feel that it was proper to not answer your country's call, you know — and uh, at the same time I knew that some of this hostility was directed at the people who actually served there, so I knew that if they were aware that I had been there you know I might be the subject of some abuse but — uh — and again, you know, if you got into with a group of people and they started talking about the war, they somehow would often get the attitude that if you had been there that somehow you were guilty of all the downside parts of it, the abuse of the people and the, and the uh, flawed doctrine and that sort of thing — uh, it was a mixed bag, some people were great and some were not.

Shoemaker: Did you have any lingering physical or mental effects from the war?

Bauer: I don't think so, uh — you know, I guess you always have memories, I guess I still have some, occasionally have bad dreams from things you saw or whatever but in terms of overall, no, not really.

Shoemaker: So did you stay in the service or did you retire?

Bauer: No, I did my nineteen months total service and I was out (laughter).

Shoemaker: How has the war influenced your life experiences since then?

Bauer: Dramatically — dramatically — changed my whole life, in many ways for the better — I think the discipline that was incurred by military service was good for me at that time, uh when I came back to the states and I had been working in Chicago but I had visited Washington, D.C., before going in the service and like it and went out here and uh, I was able to get interviews with a number of people in government and uh — I'd initially thought I would just stay and get a government job for a few months while I looked for something in the private sector, maybe not even in Washington but, as it turned out, the secretary of Veteran's Affairs, then the administrator of Veteran's Affairs, uh — happened to be from Iowa and he, I got a direct interview with him and he wanted me to come to the A because they were looking for people with Vietnam experience and what turned out to be, what I thought would be a few months, wound up being an entire career (laughs) — and I was a staff attorney there, at the, on the board of Veteran's Appeals and then when President Nixon was in office they were, all the board members, which are Veteran's law judges, uh — were at that time — they had no Vietnam veterans, most you normally didn't normally get to be appointed to the board cause it was an appointment that had to be approved by the president — uh, most people were at least middle-aged by the time they would get these appointments but they wanted someone with Vietnam background and I fit the bill and I was there! (Laughter) So President Nixon's staff initially tapped me but he got — he resigned prior to his getting to my paperwork and — but President Ford did appoint me to the board and later President Reagan appointed me to vice chairman over the chief judge of the board, so — it changed my life.

Shoemaker: Well when you were enlisted what was your original plan that you wanted to do with your life, like life plan, career-wise?

Bauer: Well I had, you know, I had a law degree and I planned to practice some form of law, wasn't exactly sure what it would be — I had worked in probate and state work — uh, when I had graduated from law school I was one of the few that was young enough that I still had a uh, enough ahead of me where I would be drafted, most people had passed over the age limit which was 26, but I was only 24 when I graduated from law school, so I had two years of draft eligibility and when I graduated from law school most private firms would not hire you if you had a military obligation left to do — uh, basically because under the soldier and sailor civil rights act, they would have obligations that most of them didn't want to have to perform — so, I was hired by a major bank in Chicago where they felt it was a patriotic thing to do and so I was with them for about a year and then my draft board was, had renewed interest in me (laughter) — so, and I still would have had a year of draft eligibility left so that's when I went in the service.

Shoemaker: Do you have any regrets at all about—?

Bauer: I certainly had regrets at the time, uh, you know — I felt it was a big chunk out of my youth, even though I was going to be two — well it was officer candidate's school had I gone on to that it would have been three years, had I taken a JAG commission it would have been five

years, I thought it was an awful lot of time, and two years at that point in time seemed as — as it turned out it had a significant impact on my life and like I say, for the better — I've worked with Veterans, Veteran's groups from then on and they're great people and uh — I enjoyed it, uh — I, in retrospect you know, it's one of those things where you really think it's going to be terrible and it turned out to be probably one of the best things that could have ever happened to me.

Shoemaker: How do you feel about the war effort in hindsight?

Bauer: Well, much as I felt then — I — I did support the idea of uh, stalling communism but at the same time, this particular effort wasn't a very effective way of doing it and particularly the way the war was executed — um, secretary of defense at the time was Robert McNamara, he was apparently a very intelligent man uh but he — he was interested in everything was numbers, you know kill rations, uh all down to every little thing, it was all numbers and that, it clearly didn't work — years later, Mr. McNamara used to walk across the street at a point where I used to stop at a red light and I remember thinking as he walked in front of my car (laughter) — ahhh, it was my turn to get him — just kidding! (Laughter) — but he, I just remember how, I mean he just uh — he and President Johnson just — it was such a fouled up mess and a worthy objective in terms of wanting to stall communism but not the right way to do it.

Shoemaker: Do you ever have any thoughts about going back as a civilian to visit the country?

Bauer: Yeah, I — in fact I did go back to Thailand where I had been briefly while over there, uh Vietnam being communist now is not, maybe although a lot of people do go back, but it, it's not as open I guess as, as uh — but I like the people of Southeast Asia, I liked the Vietnamese and the Thais and the others, uh — it's certainly a beautiful part of the world and in general they're pretty nice people.

Shoemaker: Do you have any final thoughts you would like to add?

Bauer: Ah, not really, I mean it's uh — it's very interesting because I've worked with veterans not only from Vietnam but World War II, I've had the good fortune of meeting many of the heroes of World War II before they died and although there's a few left — it's very interesting, you're in a fraternity when you're a veteran and uh, I certainly didn't realize it before — no one in my family that I knew, uh — at least my immediate family, my dad hadn't been in the military so I didn't have much familiarity with it — but uh, once you've been through this experience there's a bond, and even in the lesser roles, a lot of people wonder why these veterans who basically might've been a cook stateside for their tour of service but everybody served, everybody ran a certain risk, it's very hard to evaluate who contributed more — obviously there are people who suffered and went through a great deal more than I did and there are people who did a great deal less, but — so it's very hard to say who should get what and all that, although we certainly have an obligation to those who've lost body parts and that sort of thing and we do, we do a tremendous job and I don't know if the general public really is aware of all that is done for veterans and they deserve it and it's a very large umbrella and sometimes people get upset

because the umbrella takes in a lot of people they, they may not feel totally warrant it but better to give a little extra to those who may questionably done their service than to miss those who truly deserve.

Shoemaker: Ok, well thank you very much then and we gotta do that little check again so, you were aware that you were recorded?

Bauer: Yes, yes.

Shoemaker: And do you give your permission to be recorded?

Bauer: Sure, sure.

Shoemaker: Alright thank you.

Bauer: Ok.

END