

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

“Interview with Charlie Gibson”

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Interview Type: Oral History: Charlie Gibson, Vietnam Swift Boat Veteran

Field Researcher: Stan Prager

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Abstract: This is Stan Prager. I am a student at American Public University pursuing my Public History Master’s Degree, and I am interviewing Charlie Gibson here in Longmeadow about his experiences in Vietnam. Most Americans have never heard of Swift Boats, and since then, the term “Swift Boating” has entered the political lexicon as a pejorative. Yet most Americans still know very little about the Patrol Craft Fast (PCF) and the role it played in the conflict. I am speaking here with Charlie today to try to get a greater insight into the Swift Boat experience, as well as the Vietnam experience, so I am going to ask him some questions and he is going to tell us about his experience.

Part 1

SP: Charlie, thank you very much for doing this. I appreciate it. Please state your name, town, and state of residence, branch of service, ranks, and date of service.

CG: My name is Charles R. Gibson. I live in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. I am a veteran of the United States Navy Reserve. When I got out of the Navy I was a Lieutenant. Actually my dates of service from the beginning: I started Officer Candidate School in May of 1966. I served on active duty from that point until February 10, 1970. I flew into Vietnam on February 15, 1969 and got out of town on the 18th or the 20th of January of 1970.

SP: How did you end up serving in the military, Charlie? Did you volunteer, or were you drafted?

CG: I probably was going to be a good candidate for the draft, so I volunteered. I pretty much had always wanted to go to sea; anyway, I had a real affinity for it. I joined the Navy because pretty much, family history dictated that. I had three uncles in the Navy in World War II, and the fourth uncle was a Marine and I thought it was much better and safer to be in the Navy *[laughing]*.

SP: Did you have strong feelings about the war one way or the other when you entered the Service?

CG: You know, I can’t remember. I don’t believe I had strong feelings either way. It was pretty much- it was there, we knew it was there, we knew that is why the draft was very active, but I

certainly wasn't beating the drum for the war, nor was I marching against it or burning draft cards. I didn't burn my brassiere, either. So, actually, I was kind of aware of it, not totally against it. The only time I remember expressing an opinion, was before I was going on active duty. I had written a letter to my godmother and I expressed the opinion that the people of South Vietnam were pretty much fighting for what we took for granted. That's the only time I ever remember expressing an opinion.

SP: That's interesting. Can you tell me something about what your training was like? You said you were in Officer Candidate School. What was training like?

CG: For Officer Candidate School or for the Swifts?

SP: For both.

CG: Well, the Officer Candidate School was a four-month program in Newport, Rhode Island, pretty much learning the military, learning the Navy. It was a compact introduction, really, four months- what can you learn about the Navy? It was a bit of a boot camp, but it prepared you pretty well for going aboard a ship and knowing you didn't know anything about it *[laughing]*. That's when the real learning started. The Swift Boat training was in San Diego, Coronado Island, Coronado Peninsula, just south of San Diego [meant south of Hotel Del Coronado]. It was a nine-week course. You were spending your time learning everything about the boats, learning a little about what was going on. It was really coastal training. It was training to search junks, a little gunfire support for any actions along the coast. It was geared to market time patrols, which were coastal patrols. I went there, let's see, the 18th of November when the course started. In late October, a fellow named Mike Brown had driven one of them into a river down South, Coastal Division 11, and from then on, this operation "Sea Lords" began. So while we were training for coastal patrols, the odds were, if you went to either Cat Lo or An Thoi, as far south as you could get in the country, you weren't going to see many coastal patrols. So what we were training for was possibly not what we were going to do.

SP: Interesting.

CG: There were five divisions; two were down south, and they were the ones most active in the rivers. The northern-most one was at Da Nang and they had some river ops that they were going to start a little later on. Cam Ranh Bay and Qui Nhon were fairly peaceful; there weren't many rivers around there. So the odds were, three out of five, you were going to get some river action. Two out of five you were going to get a lot of river action. Two of them were peaceful, so it was a lottery. I never win the lottery *[chuckle]*. That was pretty much what they would do in training. The first thing you did was learn the boats and learn to operate them. There were four training boats in Coronado, so a class convenes; there is usually four crews. There was a class convening every week, so it was continual through there. We would have weapons training up at Camp Pendleton with the Marines. We would have SERE training, which is Search, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape, that is, jungle training survival school. We would have that either at Whidbey Island in Washington, or up in the hills in Pendleton, which I missed because our class missed it completely because it was Thanksgiving week, *Thank you very much!* We had Vietnamese language training, very little of it, not enough, and culture training. We never

learned the culture of the countries that we were going to go into, so that didn't mean very much. That's pretty much what we were doing for nine weeks. It would culminate with, towards the end we would take the boats down off the Mexican coast for gunnery. There was one full night of training in San Diego harbor where they had a few Vietnamese junks, and they would dress up as natives and we would search the junks and they would give us a lot of baloney. I missed that because when we were coming back from Mexico the seas were a little heavy and the fathometer transponder on the bottom of the boat started leaking so they had to pull the boat out of the water. So I watched that from a park bench over at a restaurant in San Diego harbor [*laughing*]. I missed all the good stuff.

SP: Did you choose the Swift Boat as part of an opt to do, or was that just assigned to you?

CG: No, everybody in the Swift Boat program was a volunteer. I had seen a few that claimed that they had put in for shore duty or something in Vietnam and they ended up on Swift Boats and they didn't know how, because that didn't seem like shore duty. Everybody was pretty much a volunteer.

Part 2

SP: Okay, let's resume then. Can you describe what it was like the first day you arrived in Vietnam?

CG: There were three or four of the officers from the Swift Boats who flew in together to Cam Ranh Bay on February 15, 1969. We flew charter, so it was a decent trip. The base itself was enormous and it is the headquarters for all of the Swift Squadron. There is one Swift Squadron and there are five divisions, so this was headquarters for the base. There was kind of a real interesting situation because it was just tons of sand and really not much of seeing Vietnam as much as seeing a typical military base. We flew in there and our crews had got in before us. They weren't sent to Cam Ranh. They probably flew into Saigon and then were dispersed to the bases we were assigned to. We did train as a crew, so we went as a crew. They got to An Thoi before we did. We spent two days in Cam Ranh Bay, being briefed, learning something about what was going on, just meeting the staff and the squadron and things like that. On the 17th we had gotten our orders. Two of us were going to An Thoi, one was going to Cat Lo, so the three out of four were going to be immediate river patrol-type things, probably. I flew down to Saigon and stayed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base waiting for a ride down to Phu Quoc Island, and our base at An Thoi, which is at the southern tip of the island. The island is actually closer to Cambodia than it is to the Vietnam mainland.

SP: Is it shown on any of these maps that we have here, or not?

CG: Yes, let's see.

SP: Point one out or just circle it if you can find, or a reasonable approximation.

CG: [*pointing*] That's it.

SP: Oh, okay.

CG: They have it colored as Cambodia; that's very interesting [*laughing*] because it's actually Vietnamese.

SP: Is it? Okay.

CG: This is Ha Tien here, so it is about eight and one-half miles north to the Cambodian shore from the northern edge, and we were down at the southern tip.

SP: And what's the name of that island again?

CG: The island is Phu Quoc.

SP: Phu Quoc, okay, thank you.

CG: We were at the southern tip, and that is An Thoi, and that's headquarters for Coastal Division 11. So waiting at Tan Son Nhut the first night. We were at a little place that they called "Camp Alpha." All it is, is a transient camp. If you're going somewhere in the country waiting for a plane, this is where you billet. They are nothing more than, I would call it a temporary, permanent building [*laughing*], mostly screened. They had bunks in them that were three high. First night pretty much hard to sleep because it is such a new environment. We did not get out the next day, so on the evening of the 18th, the second night we were there, I woke up and there was a B-52 strike off in the distance. It was the first introduction to the war zone because Cam Ranh Bay was very peaceful, so all of a sudden the bunk is shaking and there is a B-52 saturation strike going on somewhere out in the boondocks.

SP: So that was the first time...

CG: That was the first time I heard loud gunfire. The night before supposedly somewhere on Tan Son Nhut Base had been mortared, but I never heard it. It is also a huge base, so it is possible you wouldn't hear that sort of thing. But that was pretty much the "*Holy cow!*" you know. So on the 19th, we were able to get a flight and we flew down across the delta. The thing that jumped right out at you when you were in the southern part of the delta was, you saw a lot of round swimming pools [*laughing*] which did not turn out to be swimming pools. They were bomb craters. What had happened after the '68 Tet offensive was the Ca Mau Peninsula and especially Nam Can city, which was a city of about 4,000 on the Cua Lon River. It was all enemy territory pretty much. The Viet Cong had taken over and the NVA had taken over Nam Can city, so what the military had done, was they got all the civilians out of that area and then they saturation bombed the area. Pretty much now it was still enemy territory and there was no Nam Can city.

SP: Where is that on here?

CG: Nam Can city, it doesn't show here.

SP: But it is somewhere in that vicinity.

CG: It's right in here [*pointing*].

SP: Okay. Just so we have a sense.

CG: You had that river, and that river, that's the Cua Lon, and that's the Bay Hap. Nam Can city was along the Cua Lon. So all you saw, we had created a swimming pool for each hooch in the country down there, nice round swimming pool; they were all full of water, of course, it was that type of mangrove swamp area. So that was another eye opener flying over. Flying into An Thoi was a very small air strip, hard to get into in the good weather and almost impossible to get into in the monsoon season when the winds are blowing and stuff. It was an interesting first four days in country, culturally, and mind boggling. We reported in at An Thoi and we were living on a barracks ship off the coast. There was a small base at An Thoi and the country was divided into four military corps, Roman numeral I was called "Eye" Corps because it is a "1" and looks like [the letter] "I". That was in the northern part of the country, Da Nang. II Corps was north of Saigon. III Corps was just above Saigon and a little below it and the delta was IV Corps. IV Corps was the maritime end of it. The market time patrolling was, the boss was the Coast Guard commander or captain, commander at the time. That one was run by the Coast Guard. We were actually under the Coast Guard commander at that base. The division was Navy. They also had a Coast Guard division, which had 82-foot WPB Coast Guard cutters. A lot of people don't know it, but they actually ended up in the rivers, too. So the Coast Guard was patrolling in the rivers in Vietnam and IV Corps, as well.

SP: Really? That's interesting.

CG: Yeah, a lot of people don't know it.

SP: I wasn't aware of that at all.

CG: So they don't get a lot of credit for it, and they should. We were jealous of their boats because they had an air conditioned cabin [*laughing*] so in the hot weather they had a good feel. They were also bigger targets so it all weighed in, I guess.

SP: Was there a large amount of military personnel in that area when you came in?

CG: No, just beyond us, just north of the base. Phu Quoc Island was about 30 miles long, 16 miles wide at the north end, but about a mile and one-half wide towards the southern tip. We were at the southern tip. We had a small base there. Just over the hill was the largest prisoner of war camp, the South Vietnamese operated. The interesting thing was my cousin, who lives in Connecticut, was over there about a year before me with the Army Engineers. He was on the same island I was [*chuckling*] and he helped build the prisoner of war camp.

SP: Wow, that's interesting. Did you visit the camp at all when you were there?

CG: Just kind of looked over the hill-type thing, but we kept to ourselves pretty much. It was a beautiful area, the beaches were fantastic, you know, the minute you saw this island you knew that they should have nice resort areas, and now there are about 20 resorts on the island.

SP: Really? Wow.

CG: Yeah. They are mostly partly up on the western shore.

SP: Okay.

CG: There was a little village there, well it is a large village, called Duong Dong and there was a World War II Japanese air strip that serviced that.

SP: Mmmh.

CG: And that's where most of the resorts are. It was a pretty nice little setup, a small air strip, the only ones that would fly in in the windy season were the Australians, because they were crazy enough to try to land on that airstrip [*laughing*]. It was the only way we got mail sometimes [*laughing*]. They had a larger air strip at Duong Dong, sometimes the airplanes would get into there when they couldn't get into ours and we would get our mail delivered by the Navy. They'd go up and get it and bring it back.

SP: Had the boats been operating out of here for a while when you came in, or was this---

CG: They operated out of An Thoi since 1965. The first Swift Boats to get into the country were the 3-boat and the 5-boat and they were at An Thoi.

SP: Interesting.

CG: So that's pretty much from the earliest, from the first Swift Boats ever to come in the country, An Thoi was in service.

SP: So you were coming into something that was pretty well established and there were pretty good rules of the road as far as how to go about this.

CG: Yes, absolutely.

SP: And you trained for it, so here you were.

CG: We trained for the coastal stuff.

SP: Right, okay.

CG: We had two coastal patrols, one the day after I got into An Thoi, and that was accompanied by a veteran Swift Boat officer; that was to make sure we knew what we were doing. We had a patrol area at the top of the island. We did a patrol up there, and then he took us over to Ha Tien

along the Cambodian border just to show us how to get into the harbor and what it was like. Then we came back. Then after that the crew and I got our indoctrination in the river patrol, so we went down south, down to the Cua Lon and the Bay Hap, which is at the southern tip of the country and we did six days down there.

SP: That's interesting.

CG: That was on Kerry's boat, when we were doing the indoctrination PCF-94, so that was our introduction to the rivers. We'll get into that, I'm sure, as we go along.

SP: Just as we go forward, just as an aside, was he [John Kerry] on the boat at that time?

CG: He had just gotten the 94 boat a couple of weeks before.

SP: Okay.

CG: Actually, he took it over from a fellow named Ted Peck, and Ted Peck had been seriously wounded and so had his gunner's mate been wounded. Kerry took over that boat probably about ten days before I got into the country on the 15th.

SP: Okay.

CG: My gunner's mate took the place of the gunner's mate that had been wounded. His name was David Alston, had been wounded, so Fred Short, my gunner's mate, served prior to me getting in the country and served on Kerry's boat for about a week.

SP: Hmm, interesting. So I was originally going to ask you about the geography, but you have done a great job already of showing me really where the current operations area and just feel free to point to the map---

CG: Geography pretty much in the southern part of the country?

SP: Yeah.

CG: It was just canals, rivers and mangrove swamps; it was jungle. It was defined by one of the rivers we operated on here at the Song Ong Doc, the Ong Doc River. That was the southern border of the U Minh Forest, everybody's heard about the U Minh Forest; it was just total enemy territory, and that went up to the Rach Gia area up in here, so that was all Forest. Then you got the Cambodian border. It was all low country. You get in mountains along the inland part of the country, but the shore areas, low country.

SP: So no training in California could possibly have prepared you for that geography, right?

CG: That's true. They did eventually move some of the Swift Boat training up to Mare Island, top of San Francisco Bay.

SP: Yes.

CG: They got some river experience up there in that training program.

SP: Oh, good.

CG: It was well after we had gotten in the country. So they did shift the training.

SP: Yes, so I guess what I want to hear about is the boats themselves, because I think that is an area people hear about, they see a picture that has been featured in an ad or something or something. So tell me about the boats, you know, what they were like, how many people were on them.

CG: The Swift Boat, the first group of Swift Boats, called the Mark I Swift Boat, there were about 80 of them; 50-foot long, 13-1/2-feet wide, quarter-inch aluminum plate, which means you can open it up with a can opener. They had twin 12-cylinder GM Detroit marine diesels. The horsepower rating for each engine, it was turbocharged, was 480 horse with twin screws. They supposedly were capable rated for 32 knots. Probably the most you could get out of them was 28 because you had a load, ammunition load, and you have 828 gallons of diesel fuel aboard and your screws have already been chewed up a little getting in the rivers and maneuvering in them, so I think the best you could hope for on them was 28 knots, and it would decrease the more you were serving in the rivers because your screws would get a little shorter each time you went in.

SP: Could you define “screws” for us non-nautical people.

CG: Yes, the propellers.

SP: Ah, okay, thank you!

CG: They would get worn because you’re bumping into stuff and you’re digging through mud and things like that. So 28 knots was probably the optimal and you were usually pretty much full bore in the rivers if it was a daytime patrol. If you knew there were villages up there you slowed down because you didn’t want to swamp everything. The armament above the pilot house; there was a twin .50 caliber Browning machine gun. It was in a manually operated rotating swivel mount. Up on the bow you had an M60 machine gunner; an M60 is fairly portable, just 7.62 mm round, pretty much a .30 caliber. On the rear deck you had an 81 mm mortar, and above it a .50 caliber machine gun, it was an over/under setup. The 81 mm mortar was a Naval mortar, which means you could trigger fire it, or you could dump fire it. You also had an M60 machine gun on the stern, the back end, the rear deck of the boat. You had personal weapons, you had M16’s aboard. You had a shotgun. You had a .38 caliber pistol, and a .45 caliber pistol aboard. You had hand grenades. You had white phosphorus hand grenades. You had concussion grenades. You had the typical splatter grenade with the shrapnel and you had some smoke grenades. You had about 120 rounds of mortar aboard for the mortar usually about 80 rounds of it would be high explosive point detonating. You had white phosphorus, probably about 15-20 rounds of that. You had flare rounds for lighting up a battlefield at night. You had a flare gun. You had pop flares.

You had all kinds of stuff, you know. You had an M79 grenade launcher; hand-held grenade M79. So it was very well armed.

SP: And that contributed a great deal to the weight you had to carry, which slowed the boat, of course.

CG: Oh yes, yes.

SP: How far did you go? You said you had 800-and something gallons of fuel.

CG: 828 when it was topped off. It depends of course on the speed.

CP: Right.

CG: And it depends if you're out on the ocean it depends on the state of the seas.

SP: Right.

CG: If you were going 2000 RPM and that would be about, oh, let's say, 23.5 knots, you could probably go about 450 nautical miles, about 11 hours. If you cut it down to 17.5 knots, which is 1600 RPM's, you could probably get, oh, about 800-and something miles out of it, you know, 22 hours' worth.

SP: How far away did you operate from the base typically?

CG: If we were down in the southern tip and we would have responsibility for the rivers, both sides, both the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea. Down there was probably, we were about 100 miles south of Saigon, it was probably about, I would say 80 or 90 nautical miles. It was about a three to four-hour trip down south.

SP: So fuel wasn't a problem as far as getting back to base typically.

CG: Fuel wasn't a problem because we had either an LST or a Coast Guard cutter off the coast down where we operated. We just had to get down there. Something we'll talk about later is Sea Float, which was brought into the river at the Cua Lon River and was a base. All you had to do was get down there and you would have refueling, you would have re-ammunition. You had all your supplies down there, as well.

SP: So relatively a small boat could move pretty fast when you needed it to.

CG: It was not faster than a speeding bullet.

SP: Yes.

CG: But it was quick.

SP: But it was quick and you had a lot of armaments on there so you get some strong military might and you could go a certain distance. Give me a sense of how it was staffed; how many people on the boat, typically.

CG: We would have one officer and five enlisted men. Usually you had the fellow that drove the boat, which was usually a boatswain's mate or a quartermaster; we had a boatswain's mate, second class boatswain's mate. He was the leading petty officer, leader of the enlisted men. We had always had a gunner's mate for obvious reasons. Always had either a radioman or a radar-man because we had the electronics. Then the other two could be pretty much whatever. When we had our training crew, we did not have an engineman. We had two gunner's mates, two radar-men and our boatswain's mate, and myself. We got into Vietnam we had to get an engineman so we lost a good guy to another boat, we lost one of our gunner's mates in a swap for an engineman. We never really had a regular engineman. We had kind of a, they would fill in, so we kind of had an "engineman of the month club" going. All good guys. All did their job. But the crew we had trained for, there were only four of us [five counting me] in the end rather than the five [six counting me] that had trained together. We operated with the fellow that we lost to the 9 boat. We operated with them quite a bit, so he was still considered one of our guys, you know.

SP: You were the officer then.

CG: I was the officer, yes. I was a Lieutenant [jg] when I went over, that's an O-2.

SP: Was that typical rank of people on the boats for the most part?

CG: It was, they started to get ensigns in there, too, younger guys, but I don't know if they were shooting us up too much or what, but [*laughing*] but there were some ensigns foolish enough to want to do that. They were good guys.

SP: Okay, let's see, you have answered a lot of the questions I was going to ask you on this, but that's fine.

CG: We can expand on them.

SP: So was it always called a Swift Boat? That's the other question I wanted to ask you. . .

CG: It was designated a PCF [Patrol Craft Fast]. They were actually designed and used as crew boats in the Gulf of Mexico for the oil derricks and stuff.

SP: Oh.

CG: The off-sea oil. They were modified, obviously.

SP: Right.

CG: So it was a boat that already existed in civilian life, they just had to change them a bit and make them acceptable for the military. It was built by a company called Sewart Seacraft in Berwick, Louisiana.

SP: Hmm.

CG: So it wasn't a scratch-built boat.

SP: Right, it had a history. You said it was modified but obviously it wasn't armored, right?

CG: No, there's no armor on it.

SP: Right.

CG: It's all aluminum.

SP: All aluminum, yes.

CG: We would hang flak jackets around the gun tub and stuff, that hopefully mitigate some of that.

SP: Some of that, okay, that's interesting. So tell me a little bit about what kind of the daily sights, smells and sounds were like, I get a good sense of what the boat was like.

CG: That's one that I thought about. Sights and smells- the only smells you remember are the acrid smell of combat when you're having a firefight, you know, the cordite and all of the weapon smells and the explosives and stuff like that. The only other smells that I could think of was if you were patrolling a river and you were going by a known village at dinnertime you might smell them cooking. Down south in that area one of the economy drivers was the charcoal business, so there were a lot of wood cutters, and you would smell the kilns sometimes making charcoal. The island itself that we were based on, Phu Quoc Island and An Thoi was known for fish sauce. It was the champagne of Nuoc Mam, that they made there, it was drying out anchovies, they make fish sauce from. You could smell that [*laughing*].

SP: I was going to say that must have had a smell to it.

CG: Yes, it had a smell, but it was considered a delicacy. If you had Nuoc Mam and took it up to Saigon or something, for people it was like a wonderful thing.

SP: What was the temperature like?

CG: Temperatures were, depending on the season, pretty similar year-round, it was mostly in the 70s, it would get up to the 90s in July or so, but it would get a little cooler, but not much cooler. In the rainy season it would be cooler and of course, you're wet, so it felt colder out, honestly, but it was pretty much anywhere from normally in the 80s, get up to 95 sometimes in the warm season.

SP: So the heat was not debilitating for the most part.

CG: It was sweaty and humid.

SP: Yes.

CG: And damp in the monsoon season in the summertime, July and August. June, July August were damp. The winds would blow. With the monsoons it would be tough to get airplanes into An Thoi because of the cross winds and such, so we would not get mail as frequently at times like that. I do remember when it was hot, if you had a night mission and you were going on a waterborne guard post, night ambush-type thing, the mosquitoes were like B-52's, they were huge.

SP: Oh wow.

CG: Yes, and if you're trying to maintain silence you're not slapping mosquitoes all night [*laughing*], but I'll never forget the mosquitoes.

SP: Yes.

CG: I would say it beat the hell out of winter in New England [*laughing*].

SP: Yes, okay [*laughing*]. We're experiencing a lot of that this year so we have a good touchdown for that, don't we? What would be a typical day on the boat, for instance, I assume there was a specific mission that you would go out on, on a regular basis, and what time of day that began and how did it end?

CG: It depended. I don't know if there was such a thing as a "typical." You would have three different scenarios. You'd have a regular patrol with no troops, probably have Navy UDT [Underwater Demolition Team] because they were our explosives guys for blowing up bunkers and things like that. If you were having a large sweep you might be taking Regional Force/Popular Force troops from one of the villages. We call them "ruff puffs, [RF/PF troops] to conduct a sweep in a known enemy village somewhere up along the U Minh or something of that sort, and then there was a night mission, which was waterborne guard post looking for infiltration and things like that. So you had different types of missions. If you want to consider a typical daytime mission, that would be three or four Swift Boats, down south would be operating off an LST. Up at the Cambodian border we would just be operating off a small point and base in the town of Ha Tien. We would be living on the boats at that point, rather than on an LST or a Coast Guard cutter. So let's take it down in the southern tip of the country, you would be operating off probably an LST. We would be sleeping onboard the LST. There would be a SEAL team aboard. There would be a UDT, one or two UDT teams, and the Swifts. Pretty much for a routine patrol, get up about 4, 4:30 in the morning. We would already be topped off on the tanks and we would already be ammunition resupplied. You would do that the minute you get back just in case you're called for an emergency or something, so you are always going to be ready with that once you get back from a mission.

SP: Did other people prepare the boats for you or did you do all that prep yourself?

CG: No, we did the prep. Sometimes we would get help from the LST crew, so if we came back from an action covered with spent brass and stuff, and ammunition, they would help us clean off the boat.

SP: Okay.

CG: They were great. They were very supportive. The officers would gather and we would go over the mission and get together with the UDT team if we were taking them in. We would have usually two UH-B's would be aboard the LST in case we needed them. They would be Navy helicopter attack gunships. The group was called HAL-3 [Helicopter Attack Light]. They would cover us. The deeper we were in, the longer we had to keep them on the LST until something hit the fan because they don't have a lot of on-station time; the longer you get in, the deeper you go.

SP: Yes.

CG: So they would stay until they were called.

SP: Did you always travel in groups of boats?

CG: We traveled never less than two.

SP: Okay.

CG: Normally three or four. We would gather up the boats. We would get the crew together and we would go over what we were planning to do and we would shove off. Down there we had a lot of small rivers and streams off the main rivers. The main rivers as far south in the country as we operated were the Bay Hop, the Cua Lon, that is on the Gulf of Thailand side, we entered there. Around the other tip we had the Duong Keo and the Bo De. The Bo De went into and met the Cua Lon. Then there was the north/south canal that went between the Cua Lon and Bay Hop. So we could get into all four in various ways. The closest village to the south, seeing as Nam Can had been wiped out..... [had not finished this sentence when interviewer asked another question]

SP: That's where the swimming pools were?

CG: Nam Can is the one that they took all the civilians out of at that saturation point.

SP: Yes, yes.

CG: There was a town called Ha Tien [we called it Ha Tien] on the Bay Hop, and that was the southernmost. They had a couple of Army advisors in there for their Ruff-Puffs. That was as far south as the Army was in that country. So we were the farthest south. The Navy was the farthest south in that. We would go up there and pick up troops and do sweeps with them. We also would

do sweeps on our own, which is probably not the smartest thing in the world because you're leaving the boats, you know, you might have a couple of officers and a few guys going in and checking out a village, but you're leaving the boats with one or two officers with four boats, so . . . [chuckling] you were kind of splitting up the troops, not the smartest thing for the Navy to do, but we conducted sweeps when we didn't have troops.

SP: Were you typically sent looking for infiltrators or ---

CG: Supposedly there would be *Intelligence* [emphasis added], of troop movements. We would normally face VC [Viet Cong], but the NVA were also found there. You knew when you were facing the NVA, it was a much better conducted ambush than the VC. So we would go into the main rivers and then we would probe the smaller canals and stuff off those rivers based on Intelligence. It was pretty much all VC-held territory. So we would probe smaller ones. You know, that's where it would hit the fan a lot of times. There were no secrets as to where we were going to operate because if the LST was on the Gulf of Thailand side, we were going to go in the Bay Hap or the Cua Lon. If it was farther north we were going to go in the Song Ong Doc. If it was around the South China Sea side, we were going in the Duong Keo or the Bo De. You could put a guy out there looking with binoculars and say "*Oh, there's the LST, they're coming in here today*" So they had a 50/50 chance with the Bay Hap and Cua Lon of having an ambush ready for you.

SP: Okay.

CG: You're hoping they guessed wrong [chuckling].

SP: Right, right, but overall they pretty much knew what your position was going to be.

CG: They could tell which area we were coming in.

SP: Yes, yes. And so, was that typically what you encountered, was ambushes from either Viet Cong or NVA?

CG: Yes, that would be typical. They were always pretty much initiated by them.

SP: Okay.

CG: One of the things that I always loved was Bill Cosby back 40 years ago, he used to do a routine about the rules of engagement in the Revolutionary War, and he did a bit. The British were required to march in the open in a straight line and wear red coats.

SP: [laughing.]

CG: And the colonists could wear anything they wanted. They could hide behind trees and rocks and anywhere they wanted, and shoot from there. We were the Redcoats.

SP: Ohh.

CG: We were in an open waterway. No cover. Aluminum boats. The widest river we had was the Cua Lon and probably about 400 yards wide. A lot of the stuff we operated in was no wider than the boat was long. To turn the boat around we would have to put the bow into the bank and swing the stern out.

SP: Wow.

CG: That ain't a good position to be in.

SP: No, I guess not.

CG: One of the scariest things I saw in those small, narrow streams, was the overgrowth of the trees and stuff. They would put Claymore mines up in the trees; hang them from the trees. Command-detonated Claymore mines. When you saw those you kind of either tried to shoot them out [*laughing*] or hope they weren't there to put the wires together and blow them. We operated in some very narrow waterways.

SP: Did they mine the waterways, as well?

CG: Oh yes, yes. A lot of times if they had an unexploded bomb they would use it against us and put it in the water and you know, wire it up, and blow them. My best friend in the Swift Boat program was a fellow I met when we went to school at Coronado, and we served together. We went to the same base and everything, still a good friend. His boat was blown three feet out of the water and uh, they were good at it. You could tell they had aiming stakes in the water so you could kind of line up where the heck the thing was going to be. Usually you didn't see the aiming stakes until after an explosion. And, you know, it was depending on which part of the river you were transiting in, as far as whether you were lined up with it or whether it was going to be 20 feet to your starboard.

SP: Yes.

CG: It was all luck for them.

SP: Did your friend survive?

CG: Yes.

SP: Did the boat take other casualties?

CG: They were all injured but it was back injuries and stuff like that. He didn't lose consciousness, but the boat was kind of twirling on its own.

SP: So they were very fortunate, though, it could have happened, right?

CG: Yes.

SP: That's interesting, so, one of my questions in here was, I think you've pretty much already given me an answer to that, but one of my questions was going to be, in the literature, combat is often described as almost unendurable boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror. Was your experience like that?

CG: Yes, it was. If you were at the base, what you were doing was repairing the boat, cleaning it up, getting it ready for more, maybe pulling it out of the water to change the screws if they were chewed up. You were pretty much working on the boat to keep it going. So at least you had something to do.

SP: Right.

CG: I think, the way I felt about going in the rivers- when you went off on that typical sweep or that typical patrol, the minute you're entering the river, you get that big knot in your stomach, it's like if you had a big exam or something in college, you know, you were worried about, you know how you get that big knot?

SP: Yes.

CG: Well that was immediately there, and that thing was there until either you got ambushed and the shooting started or you exited the river without incident, but as long as you were in there and before you were ambushed you had that knot in your stomach, and it was the anxiety, it was almost a relief for the ambush to occur because the worries were over and the anxiety was over- here it is. You could be ambushed multiple times in a stream. We had one day, the Kerry Silver Star incident. We were ambushed three times that day.

SP: Wow.

CG: Three times. And we'll get into that later on because you asked about the Kerry stuff.

SP: Yes. There wasn't really any time to be bored on the boat, though, because you were so, open to being attacked.

CG: Oh you weren't bored. Your thoughts were on survival.

SP: Right, right.

CG: When you want to get the job done, but you don't want your crew to be unnecessarily put in danger. The officer's job is the safety of his crew. Get the job done without putting them in jeopardy if you can.

SP: So this is kind of out of order with the questions, but just listening to you, and you've done a great job of describing the boat and what it was like, as someone who wasn't in the war and whose experience has been primarily from movies, when I think of the boat I visualize the craft in *Apocalypse Now*; was your boat anything like that? Was it a lot smaller than that?

CG: In reality, it was like *Apocalypse Now*.

SP: Okay.

CG: The boat in *Apocalypse Now* was a PBR.

SP: Okay.

CG: 32-foot river patrol boat. The smaller waterways, they were perfect for. They were fiberglass. They had a Jacuzzi jet twin engine setup, so they had very shallow draft. They were highly maneuverable, but nothing in that movie was reality.

SP: Well I was only thinking of the boat because I was trying to get a picture, but from what you are saying, so your boat is longer, less maneuverable, taller.

CG: Taller.

SP: Alright, just to get a visual on it, because you can see it, but it's hard for me to see it.

CG: Yes. They had the Mobile Riverine Force, which was assault boats and stuff. They were slow. They carried the 9th Army Division. They were usually operated up above Cat Lo and areas like that.

SP: Yes.

CG: They had command boats, they had what they called Zippo's, which were flame thrower boats, they had all kinds of stuff. They were very slow. They had bar stock along the sides for the B40 rockets and stuff, they'd go off before they penetrated, things like that.

SP: Did you use flame throwers at all? The portable flame throwers?

CG: No.

SP: Okay, just interested.

CG: How long were you on the boat before you could go on leave and what was leave like?

CG: Usually, I think you had to be in country six months before you could go on R&R. R&R was most of the guys waited until close to the end of the tour because you didn't want to come back and have a long time to go.

SP: Oh.

CG: So, usually you would see guys go in the 9th month of 10th month of their tour. There were three places you could go, was usually six or seven days. Most of the married guys met their

families in Hawaii. Then there were the guys who wanted to sow their wild oats, and they went to Bangkok, Thailand. Some of them actually came back [*laughing*]. The other was Sydney, Australia. I went to Sydney. Brenda was a flight attendant.

Part 3

SP: Okay, so we can resume again.

CG: Brenda was a flight attendant, and she was my fiancée at the time. As of now she's my only wife, and wife of 43 years next month.

SP: Congratulations.

CG: Thank you. Wait a minute; 44 years next month, I better remember that. Anyway, with her flight attendant status she was able to fly to Sydney, Australia on a pass. I met her in Sydney and we had R&R in November, late November. She actually missed her birthday because of the International Date Line and claims she is a year younger [*laughing*] and had a wonderful time in Sydney. We enjoyed it. Sydney was very cheap in 1969, and we had a great time, going to good restaurants. They were building the opera house, it hadn't been completed yet.

SP: Oh.

CG: Went to the Sydney Zoo. We toured. We had an absolutely great time. I knew that when I get back I only had less than two months to go, so it was good.

SP: Yes, that's a good thing.

CG: By then I was off the boats, too, I had been made maintenance officer for the Division. I was still in An Thoi. They had a way of rotating boats in and out of An Thoi because it was a hot base and if you did six months on the boats at An Thoi, chances are you were going to end up being transferred to Cam Ranh or Qui Nhon or you know, a little calmer type thing, and the guys that had done six months in Qui Nhon and Cam Ranh would be rotated down to An Thoi, so everybody had the same shot at survival.

SP: Did you ever visit Saigon?

CG: The only thing I saw in Saigon was the base, Tan Son Nhut Air Base. I was only there twice, two nights, once when I came from Cam Ranh down to An Thoi, and then well, three times. When I went out on R&R, I went from Tan Son Nhut, and when I left Vietnam I went out of Tan Son Nhut. I never got into town, never had a desire to go into town. As far as I was concerned, when I was on a base in Saigon I didn't have my weapon; I was naked. I didn't trust anybody [*laughing*].

SP: That makes sense. So, did you have any exposure at all to urban South Vietnam?

CG: You don't want to call it "urban." We spent time in the village in Cai Nuoc that I told you about, a very small village. As urban as we got was the town of Ha Tien on the Cambodian border and we were in and out of that town. I remember the only TV I ever saw in Vietnam was in the center of Ha Tien, outside, so the villagers could watch the local television.

SP: Oh, that's interesting, that's very cool. So, one of the things, movies, that you mentioned in *Apocalypse Now*, you were the first person that it was a really unrealistic point of view and I'm sure that's the case with many films about the war.

CG: Yeah, sure.

SP: But one of the things, if someone who didn't participate, when you watched these movies, you are often cloaked in loud rock music and drug use. Talk about the music a little bit, I'm kind of interested in what kind of music you were into, and was that typical of what everybody listened to.

CG: Probably the most of the music that I heard other than, let's see, we had the PSYOPS Operations, psychological ops, where you would go down the river. We had a microphone system, cassette tape system, blaring "Your Mother Wears Combat Boots" and all that wonderful stuff, trying to get the enemy to come over to our side, which in our mind, only draws fire.

SP: Right.

CG: You really tick them off, and they're going to shoot at you.

SP: Yes.

CG: So I had Glen Campbell's *Wichita Lineman* tape, that was the selection I played for my Vietnamese friends down in the delta, and never got shot at, so they must have liked it.

SP: [laughing].

CG: Didn't get shot at when we had a PSYOPS tape, which was Glen Campbell. Got shot at when we had a PSYOPS tape that was trying to get them to come over to our side, or the Vietnamese side. I don't recall listening to a lot of radio. We didn't have television. We had movies. Most of the movies we had were Clint Eastwood-type movies, you know, rah, rah. [laughing], and we would do body counts, [laughing], but I know that when I became maintenance officer in the Division, one of the things, they had a tape library, Reel-to-Reel tapes.

SP: Yes.

CG: There was a great series out there at the time, and I can't remember what it was, but we would tape those, you know, to bring home, all kinds of music, nothing current. I know that one of the things in Saigon that everybody listened to, was the Armed Forces Radio and Adrian Cronauer, never heard Adrian Cronauer. I don't think we had much radio contact, either.

SP: Okay.

CG: So we weren't really aware of what music was big at home, and things like that.

SP: Okay.

CG: In terms of what they were showing, mostly because we were on isolated base.

SP: When you explain the fact. . .right.

CG: The ships we were living on, on a small island, not a big island.

SP: You're not going to play music loudly for your own use when you're on a boat like that.

CG: Yes, so we weren't fully aware of things that are going on back home, and that's fine, it didn't bother me a bit. You know, you get into that stuff and a lot of the things are foggy.

SP: Yes, right.

CG: If I was listening to loud music I don't remember.

SP: You don't remember, okay, alright. What about drug use. Did you see a lot of drug use at all?

CG: Once again, because we were isolated, you didn't see it.

SP: Okay.

CG: You saw cheap alcohol over at the clubs on the base, which were nothing but a little Quonset hut. Beer was cheap and liquor was cheap.

SP: Okay, alright.

CG: Our celebrations were, we'd come back after two weeks down south or something, and our celebration of life was getting blitzed.

SP: Yes, that makes sense. I don't blame you. You mentioned that you encountered both the enemy NVA and the Viet Cong. Did you ever see any large numbers of troops or did they just kind of pop out of the jungle?

CG: You were probably, in most cases, facing 10-20 in ambush, usually more around 10 or 12. The typical ambush would start with possibly a waterborne mine being blown up. You'd face rocket-propelled grenades. They might have a recoilless rifle; they would have AK-47's, always had those, so most of the time it was RPG's. Every once in a while they would have a .51 caliber machine gun. Usually that would be an NVA. They had to guess the river right because they had to move that around.

SP: Right.

CG: I don't think they had many of them down there, maybe one or two.

SP: So it was normally small numbers of people with lighter arms more or less than they carried.

CG: Yes. The biggest force that we faced, I think, in our particular area, was on the Duong Keo, April 12th. It was a big operation included Vietnamese Marines, 13 Boats, helicopters, and it was pretty much a massacre. They set up a great ambush, cost us a boat. We will get into that when you asked if I lost any friends.

SP: Yes.

CG: That was the biggest. That was the worst.

SP: At what point, was that like, midway through your . . .

CG: That was April 12th, and that was midway through my time on the boats. Actually, it was two months into the tour.

SP: Okay.

CG: Exactly two months.

SP: So you hadn't been there a long period of time yet.

CG: No. I wasn't in that one. I was a spare crew because I had an engine pulled out of the boat and my boat was inoperable. It was in An Thoi and we went down there as spare crew. That was the one day I wasn't hot bunkin' somebody else's boat.

SP: Wow.

CG: But I stood on the LST and watched that column of smoke from the 43 Boat being blown up, and just felt helpless.

SP: Right, yes. That's like one of your training missions that you missed for a variety of reasons.

CG: Yes, yes, and I'll go into that when we talk about losing a friend.

SP: Yes, yes.

CG: Because I was almost on his boat.

SP: Wow.

CG: Because he thought he was just taking in a pallet of ammo and the UDT team, just drop them off to the other boat.

SP: Well, we don't need to go in order if you want to cover that now.

CG: We can talk about it now since you asked if I had lost any friends.

SP: Yes, yes.

CG: And this was a good friend. He was a Naval Academy graduate. How can you develop a friendship like that in two months? It's hard to explain, but my first week in the rivers when I was on John Kerry's boat, he was one of the other two boats that we operated with. His name was Don Droz. He was a Lieutenant [jg]. He had actually just gotten back in April from R&R where the first time he had laid eyes on his three-month-old daughter in Hawaii. A quality guy. I had come off of patrol. I was writing a letter to Brenda, and Don came into the mess deck saying, "Hey, do you want to take a ride in with me? I just gotta drop off the pallet of UDT explosives and the team and come back." I said, "Jeez, I'm in the middle of writing a letter." I said, "I haven't gotten a letter off to Brenda in over a week and she's going to start to worry." I said, "I gotta finish this thing. I'll see you when you get back." Well, they were running late. It was a Coast Guard commander who was the new Market Time boss in IV Corps, running the operation. His name was Yost, Commander Yost. He later became commandant of the Coast Guard. He had never been in an operation before, but he was officer in tactical command on this one. He had Don Droz, rather than offload the ammunition, the explosives, a thousand pounds of explosives, and the UDT team, he had them form up with the rest of the boats and enter the river. He didn't expect to. If I had said "Yes," and put down the letter, I would have been on the boat, and he would be in the port side pilot house door, I would be in the starboard side pilot house door. Because the boat was overloaded it was slow and it was taking up the rear, and when they got ambushed, his boat got hit with everything, recoilless rifle, a couple of B40's right in the pilot house, killed him, wounded another guy, killed the Chief Corpsman for the UDT team, a veteran, on the fantail. Took out the steering on the boat and it was going full bore, went right up on the shore and beached, right in front of the ambush site. These are all dug-in foxholes and stuff, big ones. So they're facing this whole thing, right in front of them. Commander Yost had two boats come back through the ambush site, with him aboard, I'll give him credit for that, had them come back to get the guys, see if they could get the boat operable again and tow it. They got all the guys off that were uninjured. They brought the injured aboard. Not only a couple dead, but a few were also hit. So they got everybody aboard and got them off the boat. Now I'm starting to hear what's going on in there, so I'm out on the deck, watching. Couldn't see it. But you know where they are. Next thing you know, the boat blew up because the engines were still running, overheated, all that ammunition, all of the explosives aboard, it blew after they had gotten everybody off. The boat was totally destroyed.

SP: Wow.

CG: You've probably seen the websites. One of them is PCF45.com and you can look this one up and it's called *Death of the 43*. It was written by the XO, Lieutenant [jg], who was the XO of

UDT-13, name is, Peter, he's a friend of mine, all of a sudden I can't think of Peter's last name, he lives in Hartford.

SP: Okay.

CG: I'll think of it. Anyway, Peter wrote this thing for the UDT cruise book. He wrote a great article on this, *The Death of the 43*, and it's worth reading, it's a very good account. It's on that website. You can click on it, on that website. It was a devastating ambush. I just lost a good friend, and we had even talked about extending our service to go to a ROTC school together and teach ROTC, Navy ROTC. He had already gotten his orders for Dartmouth. So, Peter Upton.

SP: Peter Upton, okay.

CG: Peter wrote a great article on it, it's worth the reading; it's good reading.

SP: When they evacuated the guys off the boat, was there a firefight going on?

CG: Oh yes.

SP: At the time.

CG: Absolutely, this was all under fire.

SP: Yes. So it's fortunate that they were able to get those men off the boat before it blew up---

CG: Not only that, it was going to be overrun by the enemy, too. They would have taken advantage of that. I mean they had them all pinned down. They were using the boat as cover, you know they were off the boat and used it as cover.

SP: Yes.

CG: Some were in the water using the stern as cover, firing into it. It was a devastating loss. That night I remember Coastal Squadron I Commander call sign "Latch", Captain Hoffman. He was in the helicopters that day. When the helicopters were called he rode in one of the helicopters. He came aboard the LST that night with Commander Yost talking about how we could always go in the next day and show the flag, and you know, *[laughing]* this is not a good moment for that.

SP: Right.

CG: He's trying to bring the morale of the troops up. They spent the night in there. They didn't come out until the next day. You know, there had been a sweep, and of course by then the enemy had left, but there were Vietnamese Marines, I mean it was a big op, and I lost a good friend *[voice cracking]*.

SP: That has to be tough, that has to be tough remembering it after all this time, as well.

CG: His daughter was a filmmaker. Her name is Tracy Droz Tragos, and Tracy was surfing the Net one time to find out if any of her family had become famous, in her words, and she came across the *Death of the 43*, the story. She got into that and she decided she was going to do a documentary, learning about her father and how he died. The name of the film is *Be Good, Smile Pretty*, and that's the way he ended his letters to his wife.

SP: Oh, wow.

CG: Her name was Judy, and a hell of a documentary, it was on TBS. [on Independent Lens]

SP: Have you ever been in contact with her?

CG: Oh, yes.

SP: Oh good, good. That's a very powerful story.

CG: Yes.

SP: It's heartening to know that despite the tragedy that his daughter grew up to do something like that.

CG: She didn't know her dad. She was two or three months old when he saw her.

SP: Right.

CG: It was tough on her family because this was a few years back, but they had to bring all the skeletons out of the closet, you know, all of the letters. His mother [it was actually Tracy's grandmother] brought out the trunk in the attic, that she had never opened, brought that down for Tracy to go through. She interviewed all the guys that were on that mission, a lot of the guys that were on that mission that were friends of Don's. Guys that had graduated from the Academy, guys I knew, you know, yes, very powerful.

SP: Something like that kind of reanimates him to some degree in a very laudatory fashion, so that's very impressive, that's a very powerful story. Is that documentary widely available?

CG: I don't know if it is now. I have the DVD.

SP: Okay, alright, sounds like it's worth watching, interesting.

CG: The name of it is *Be Good, Smile Pretty*.

SP: Now what about yourself? Were you ever wounded?

CG: Yes. At one point I think we had more Purple Hearts in the Division than we had boat crews.

SP: Really?

CG: It was that active. The Operation SEA LORDS, which began in October of 1968, late October, 1968, involved Swift Boats, PBR's, some Mobile Riverine Force and the Coast Guard WPB's. Casualty rate in SEA LORDS was the highest of any Naval unit in the country.

SP: Hmm.

CG: It was running at 6 percent a month at that time, which means if you did a year on the boats you had a 70-75% chance of either dying or being wounded.

SP: Wow.

CG: So it was very active. Like I said, you're in the rivers. You had no cover. So when it hits the fan, you know, you might as well stand out there in that doorway because there's nowhere to hide, at least you can see what's going on and direct your fire and direct the boat.

SP: Were most injuries from direct hits or from shrapnel or what.

CG: Shrapnel was a lot of it because of the RPG's. One of the good things about an aluminum boat is sometimes they can pass through without exploding.

SP: Okay.

CG: But most of the time it would explode. You would get pieces of wire and shrapnel from the round itself, which was a shape charge, or the aluminum was flying; you would get pieces of aluminum stuck in you. There had been direct hits with B40 rockets.

Part 4

SP: Okay, we can resume.

CG: Okay, so yes, I was wounded, arms and legs.

SP: Shrapnel.

CG: Yes, but it was so close together in time that I never looked for the second. Actually, I never reported the first until it started bothering me.

SP: Okay.

CG: And it was when Kerry got the Silver Star, and I didn't know. It was first week in the river, third or fourth day in the river. When the B40 went off at the edge of the water, I got sprayed with some shrapnel, I got some in the leg, got some in the arms. You know, I was a rookie, so the pieces that were sticking out, I kind of pulled out.

SP: Yes.

CG: But a couple of months later there were some that were bothering me that was under the skin, and a Corpsman was riding along with us, and I told him about it, and he extracted some more.

SP: Okay.

CG: I had taken the bigger chunks out, so I hadn't reported it, so when the Corpsman took some out then there was a report done on it.

SP: You were lucky again that through all this you weren't seriously injured.

CG: Yes, very lucky.

SP: Yes.

CG: I had taken a glancing round off the helmet one time. I took a glancing round, I had a pocket in the flak vest, and I had a couple of clips of M16 ammo in it, and a glancing round hit that, you know.

SP: Wow.

CG: And so, I was pretty lucky.

SP: Yes. So you got a Purple Heart for that, I assume, right?

CG: Yes.

SP: So the whole Purple Heart thing I never, you know, most of us were unaware of the controversies about Purple Hearts until the '04 presidential election and Kerry and all that stuff. Was there active lobbying by servicemen to be awarded the Purple Hearts? Was there abuse to this process?

CG: I had never heard anyone lobby. I didn't know anybody who was dying to collect a Purple Heart. It means you're going to get hurt. Why would you want one?

SP: Right. That makes sense.

CG: So I didn't hear any lobbying for Purple Hearts. I didn't hear anybody say "Gee, I really want a Purple Heart," because they gotta be nuts! *[laughing]*.

SP: Okay, well that makes sense. It was one of the allegations against Kerry in that election. We can talk more about that when we get to that, but I just wondered about that. Did your feelings about the War change at all while you served?

CG: Well, you know, while you're involved in it, you want to become "rah-rah," this is a team event, you know? If you're up, and you're "rah-rah" you're not going to be backing off and being worried about getting hurt and stuff. You've gotta be aggressive or you're going to not survive.

SP: Right.

CG: And not only are you not going to survive, what about the guys that are on your crew, you want them to survive. You want them to come home unhurt, so yes, you get really "rah-rah" about it. Otherwise, if you're worried, if you're concerned, if you're worried about getting hurt, you might become a half a step slower, and that could cost somebody their life.

SP: Right.

CG: And you don't want to be that, so I became very conservative.

SP: Yes.

CG: When I got home I was still very conservative, and then you make a swing and become more liberal, and then I got back to the middle of the road after about a year, and that's where my comfort zone is.

SP: Okay. I just wondered, you said before you went away that your only real comment about the war had been that you thought that the South Vietnamese were fighting for what we had already had.

CG: Yes.

SP: And I just wondered if during your time there if you still thought it was a righteous cause or if you just didn't think much about it.

CG: Yes, I did.

SP: Okay, alright, that's fair. So, of course, you were aware of the antiwar movement back home. How did you feel about that when you were serving?

CG: You weren't that exposed to it. You knew what was going on when you went over.

SP: Right.

CG: But you weren't seeing it because I wasn't watching TV, I wasn't listening to the radio. I didn't know Woodstock was going on.

SP: Ah, okay, yes, yes. You were in isolation pretty much.

CG: You heard about big news events.

SP: Right.

CG: Like, let's see, probably one of the real strange ones for me was the 20th of July, we find out that there's actually men on the moon. There's men on the moon, and a week before we had run into punji stakes at low tide. We were beaching the boats, come into shore, low tide, Punji stakes were sticking out of the river bank where they would have been covered at high tide. These are sticks sharpened so that when you're jumping off the boats they would pierce you.

SP: Wow.

CG: They are dipped in feces so not only will you be wounded, you will be infected. How can we be facing something that primitive and there are guys on the moon? I went up on the upper deck of the barracks ship and just stared at the moon for about a half an hour. How can this be, you know? *[laughing]*.

SP: That's interesting.

CG: If we can do that, what are we doing facing this? It was weird, it was just weird. That was one thing that I'll never forget.

SP: That's an interesting piece of color, that's a real flash, because there's a real juxtaposition, right, between the modern and the primitive.

CG: Right.

SP: Did you know anybody personally who was antiwar, either there or at home?

CG: Not really.

SP: No? Okay, okay. Another thing that comes up a lot is allegations of atrocities. Did you encounter any of that from either side when you were there or that you were aware of? No.

CG: No. We were---

SP :On the boats.

CG: That's one of the things that really bothered me with the testimony and all that stuff because . . .

SP: Yes.

CG: We were very careful. We knew where villages were. We would not fire near them. We knew where, if where the woodcutters were working, one of the nice VC tricks was to fire at us from that area to try to draw fire into the civilians, and we would not return fire in that instance. We were as careful as possible about the civilians.

SP: Okay.

CG: One of the things that bothered me is, you see little kids that have been damaged, they might have scars on their legs or whatever, and stuff, it bothered me that kids had to grow up in that environment. . .

SP: Yes.

CG: Even though Vietnam had been at war for years. Why would a kid not be able to grow up in a safe environment? It always bothered me when I was there.

SP: Yes.

CG: Civilians as far south as we were, they didn't have a lot of contact with the government, they just wanted to survive. Their livelihood was fishing, cutting wood, things like that, and we're in there telling them they can't operate on the rivers at night. Well, they've got to get their goods to market, and that's their highway system, and they have to leave before dawn to get to a market to sell goods. It was just tough in instances like that to justify not letting them do it.

SP: Right, that's fair. I think I already know kind of the answer to some of the next question, but I was going to ask you if you formed any really strong friendships with people that you served with and if those friendships extended beyond the war.

CG: Yes, one of the things about Vietnam was, you didn't really go over as a unit, all of Coastal Division 11 didn't go over together, you had a one-year tour. I went over with four crews, so the guys I was going to be friendly with, I might know some of them only three or four months.

SP: Yes.

CG: Some of them I might know, you know, the entire year. I told you one friend, my best friend, I went through training with and served with in the same division, we remained friends. He lives in Ohio and I am friends with him. A lot of the contacts and friendships I reinvigorated were due to Kerry's run for president, and pretty much, most of them were on the anti side, but that's how I found them.

SP: Right.

CG: You know, there's a newspaper article. Jeez, I know him, well, he's close.

SP: You know that guy.

CG: Did the same with Peter Upton and his law offices in New Britain, but he's living in Hartford. He was in Unionville. I saw him in the documentary and I have a picture of Don Droz and myself and Peter Upton at the ambush site from February 28th, when Kerry got the Silver Star. I thought he was dead, that guy, so I contacted him at his law office in New Britain and we got together again and struck up a good friendship. A fellow up in New Hampshire, who is a

good friend, he is in the Lake Sunapee area. I wouldn't have found him if it wasn't for Kerry running for president. Another Naval Academy grad is in Washington State, you know, we stay in contact, you know. So a lot of it was interesting, the whole thing.

SP: Yes.

CG: If you want to get into that right now or wait until later.

SP: The Kerry thing. Yes. What do you want to talk about, like I said, we don't have to go in order.

CG: Well, we can, because it feeds into after coming out of the country, so maybe that's the appropriate place for it.

SP: Alright, alright. Well, actually, the next thing on the list was Kerry, but you mentioned the Silver Star incident and what have you, so it might be a good time to kind of talk about your experience knowing him, and---

CG: Yes, well when we were assigned to his boat in our indoctrination in the rivers, and really what they're trying to do, I think, is find out if you can hack it and survive it mentally.

SP: Yes.

CG: So, I think it was the 24th or 25th of February, we transited down south on Kerry's boat. Three boats were going to operate together, PCF 23, which was skippered by a fellow named Bill Rood, and Bill ended up being an editor of the Chicago newspapers, the Chicago Sun Times, what's the Chicago?

SP: Tribune, okay.

CG: And the other was the 43 boat with Don Droz, which was destroyed on April 12th. We operated off of U.S. Coast Guard cutter Spencer, off of Square Bay, down south, so we were operating in the Cua Lon and the Bay Hap. First day in the river we were taking the UDT team in and we were going to do a search and destroy mission of a known complex of bunkers and stuff like that. We were going to destroy them if we could or else put CS gas in them, which is like tear gas, makes them inoperable for a long time if we couldn't destroy them.

SP: Yes.

CG: We went into the Cua Lon. John Kerry used to like to shoot up the banks a little bit, trigger an ambush ahead, so if we were in an area that we knew didn't have villages, he would kind of "pre-prep" the banks of the river. He was the OTC [Office in Tactical Command]. He was in charge of the boats, the operation. We had helicopters when we needed them. We had UDT aboard.

SP: Were you and he of the same rank or did he have---yes.

CG: We were both JG's.

SP: Yes, okay.

CG: But he had been in country longer. Usually the OTC would be the person that has been in the rivers the longest for obvious reasons, you know it the best. So we went through into the rivers and we were short of the Bo De, and we were ambushed. I am in the starboard door, he's in the port side door of the cabin of the pilot house, so you can bark your orders to the helmsman, your gun tub is above you so you can get orders to the guns and recoilless rifle rounds went off, missed us, and the AK-47's started chattering. I immediately emptied two rounds [meant to say two clips] of M16 ammunition into the wrong side of the river bank. *[chuckling]*. Knew what I was doing *[laughing]*.

SP: Well, you were doing---

CG: And we ended up suppressing the fire. It didn't last long, maybe about 10 or 12 minutes. Then we went in afterwards and swept that area. They blew up some bunkers. Then they set CS gas in the others. They used C4 to blow the bunkers they could blow up and the ones that were well fortified they put CS gas in and as we left we would trigger the gas. Then that tear gas effect would be in there for months. So we were getting ready to beat feet and chopper had seen somebody enter a bunker on the other side of the river, so we went over and we swept that area and there was a bunker. We tried hollering in there and nobody was coming out, so we just tossed a grenade in. Got back to the boats and we were headed north towards the Bo De. The way that river was situated we were actually headed east. When we blew the CS in the bunkers, well, the way the wind was blowing was the way we were going.

SP: Umm.

CG: So we CS'd ourselves *[laughing]*. We are dealing with the old tears and you know, it was just hilarious. Here we are, we're the ones that the tear gas is affecting.

SP: Wow, interesting.

CG: Yes, it was. So that was the first day on the river.

SP: So what did you think of him at the time, the way he conducted himself?

CG: During that week he was the OTC on all the missions and I wrote an op ed in the Springfield newspaper concerning his service. I didn't take any sides politically, but I felt that when I was on his boat in that week, he had done a good job. He was a good officer. He was aggressive. He was getting the job done and he didn't seem to be putting his crew in danger. So I was impressed because the three boats operated very well together, they knew each other, and it was a very fruitful week. Seven days on the river and you know, one night patrol. We had been through ten firefights, and I thought he handled himself well. That's what I wrote in that op ed.

SP: Fair enough.

CG: A month later, mid March was the controversial Bronze Star bit where he claimed his boat had been mined, but the one that got blown out of the water was my friend's.

SP: Oh.

CG: Nobody remembers taking any fire from the shore on that. It was pretty much strictly a one-mine incident and Kerry claimed the other boats left, but he stayed there. He was the one who bugged out.

SP: Oh.

CG: And [he] took off down the river. The other ones stuck around and went over and took over the 3-boat, which was mined, and blown out of the water and got it operating.

SP: Yes.

CG: So I think somewhere along the line John knew what he wanted to be, you know, he wanted to be in politics, and I think he was pretty much getting his ticket stamped, he was doing well. I think he was starting to look at his own mortality and I think it probably had something to do with, you know, what was going on, but he did have a tendency to take some other incidents that maybe he wasn't involved in, but said he was involved in, like when he initially took over the 94 boat, he had claimed in his website, he had claimed a couple of operations that were before it.

SP: Yes.

CG: When Ted Peck was the captain, including the one that Ted Peck was wounded on, kind of claimed them as his own, and Ted Peck came forward and you know, set the record straight on that one, and they had to remove those from the website.

SP: Yes.

CG: I understand that not long afterwards Ted Peck had an inquiry from the IRS, which seems very interesting.

SP: Yes, that's interesting. So what did he get a Silver Star for? What was the circumstances for that?

CG: In that one we picked up troops at Cai Nuoc and we were going to sweep a stream off the Bay Hap and we got into that stream and we were ambushed with small arms fire and we offloaded the troops. First time I saw VC running, you know, fired some shots. I actually got them into the correct side of the river that day.

SP: You were more experienced.

CG: Yes. *[laughing]* and in a few firefights already, and we offloaded the troops and a couple of Army advisors, U.S. Army advisors, and they swept down. The 94 boat and the 23 boat continued on the river. The 43 boat stayed there to support the troops that had been put ashore. We got up a little farther and all of a sudden that B40 went off right at the water line, didn't really do damage to the boat.

SP: Yes.

CG: But sprayed some shrapnel. At that time I guess the guys, the boat captains, discussed this the night before, but they quickly turned and wheeled in and put the nose of the boats in the riverbank and attacked the position, you know, went right into it. At that point a guy jumped up out of a spider hole with the B40 rocket launcher. He had loaded another RPG, but we spooked them, I guess, because we beached right in front of them, and he was about maybe 20 yards in. He popped up and ran and the M60 claimed they nicked him in the leg or something, but afterwards I didn't see any evidence of a leg wound, but Kerry jumped off the boat and his leading LPO, petty officer, jumped off with him with the M60, and the guy took off towards a little hooch and then he must have been turning again to fire and Kerry shot him. After the sweep I stayed aboard the boat. I was considered, I guess, the assistant officer in charge, so I was going to direct any gunfire support needed for the sweep with the mortar. The .50 caliber machine gun, when we beached, had some stops in it so you couldn't shoot the bow off the boat.

SP: Oh.

CG: He was elevated, couldn't get the gun down, so he couldn't shoot at that guy, so the .50's were never aimed at this guy when he popped out of the spider hole. So they swept the area and they found a VC resupply area, they were setting up a base camp, probably going to involve NVA. They found hospital materials, sewing machines to make uniforms, to make flags, you know, all the supplies were there for a base camp that they were setting up, and so all that stuff was destroyed or captured. When the sweep was concluded, we were backing off the bank, took fire from the other side of the riverbank, some troops coming up from the other side. They weren't close, but they were firing at us. We suppressed that fire. Took the troops back to Cai Nuoc. Then when we actually did the river at night, it was dark by then. We got ambushed again from a VC cemetery, which was along the bank of the river. It was on the south bank of the river. It was a night firefight. Our red tracers, every fifth round in the .50's is a tracer, a red. Their green tracers. Our point detonated ammunition in the .50's, you know, every couple of rounds is a point detonated thing. When it hit the trees you would see bright flashes. It was the most spectacular firefight I ever saw. It was like the Fourth of July!

SP: Wow, pretty colorful.

CG: Our reds, their green tracers coming in, point detonated stuff; spectacular. It wasn't fun, but it was spectacular, so that time we had three engagements that day. As far as I was concerned he got the Silver Star for leading the operation, did it very successfully. They had about ten VC killed. He jumped off the boat and took out a guy and that was the first casualty I had seen. When I got off the boat afterwards post sweep, looked around, the guy was shirtless, and I thought he had shorts on, but he might not have, but I noticed the flies were already on the exit

wound. The entry wound was this side [*pointing*], the exit wound, which you can pick out easily because it's big, from an M16, the flies were already congregating on it.

SP: Oh.

CG: I didn't see a leg wound.

SP: Yes.

CG: But he didn't shoot this guy in the back.

SP: Right.

CG: He got him in the side. The way I envision it was, the guy was turning---

SP: To fire.

CG: To fire again. So, it wasn't a kid. It was probably a late teens, early 20's.

SP: Yes.

CG: Much like our younger crewman, so it wasn't where O'Neill said he shot a kid in the back. No. A wounded helpless individual- no, no. A guy with a loaded RPG. So he captured that and brought it back. That was the fourth day in the rivers, fourth or fifth. That was the 28th, so that was the fourth day. We patrolled the next two days, had more contact with the enemy and then came back on the 2nd or 3rd, I think we got back after the patrol on the 2nd, we probably headed back to An Thoi.

SP: So as far as you could see he conducted himself fine.

CG: Yes. And I will go into the other. My friend, who was typical Midwesterner, just totally trustworthy, his version of the March 17th incident that Kerry got a Bronze Star for, was entirely different than Kerry's version. And the guys, the other officers that were in on that, I know them well, and I trust them too, so I think what happened is, if you're going to run for office, you gotta live through it, you know, so I think he started thinking maybe a little bit about his own mortality and got concerned with survival.

SP: Yes.

CG: Like we all do.

SP: Right.

CG: Survival is at the top of your mind.

SP: Right, well that certainly makes good sense. You mentioned that you worked with Vietnamese, South Vietnamese troops on one or two occasions.

CG: On many occasions.

SP: What was your impression of them overall?

CG: Well, the Ruff-Puff's, the Regional Force/Popular Force, I'd say, you know, that was their National Guard-type thing.

SP: Yes, yes.

CG: I had an incident, a very successful operation that I was OTC on, in May, May 25th. If you go to that PCF45.com site.

SP: Yes.

CG: Look up, on the links, he has one up there at the top, he's got a bunch of links.

SP: Yes.

CG: There is one, *Song Ong Doc*, if you click on that, you'll have the entire operation, a fellow named Steve Waterman was with the UDT team aboard, very well written. What happened was, we were going into the U Minh Forest, we were going to go about seven miles up the stream and do a sweep. We picked up the Ruff-Puff troops in the village of Song Ong Doc with an Army advisor who was from Florida, an Army captain. We headed up the Song Ong Doc, which is the southern border of the U Minh Forest. We were ambushed partway up. We had five boats. A mine went off in the water and then we took small arms fire, a B40 round, didn't hit anything. We beached the boats on the ambush side. The way we were split, we had three boats that had gone through the ambush, so we had two boats below it, three above it, UDT aboard and Ruff-Puffs. The Ruff-Puffs were a little reluctant to get off the boat. The UDT aboard, thank God we had the UDT. They are always aggressive. They were just great guys to have aboard because you knew you could do well with them.

SP: Yes.

CG: They were in the game. They were tough guys. So the UDT team is getting off the boats to go in and counter attack. We sprayed the place up with .50 caliber and everything else that we had, threw a bunch of fire into them. I called in the helicopters because I didn't want an escape route north, and what I had done closed the back doors. So we had a nice pincer movement there. We had an opportunity to put an ambush out of business. The Ruff-Puffs didn't want to get off the boat. The UDT's were already working their way in. One of the UDT officer's told his Army counterpart to get them off the boats or he'd shoot them [*laughing*], and they understood that.

SP: Yes.

CG: So they got off the boats. The helicopters arrived. I watched the B40 fire at the helicopters, they were so low, they were over the ambush crew. UDT had already knocked off a few of them, so we had to be careful about how we fired in there. So the boats didn't fire. The helicopters could see what was going on and they knew where to fire. They knew where our guys were. All of a sudden the Ruff-Puffs got a big "rah-rah" in them and they went in after most of the shooting had stopped.

SP: They got inspired.

CG: Yes. It was extremely successful. We wiped out the entire ambush crew, a dozen of them, all dead. We didn't take a casualty except my forward M60 machine gunner in the bow; he caught a ricochet off of the tripod and barrel of his gun that went into his forearm. He actually had a piece of a round in his forearm. That was the only casualty. We got a little fire from the other side and suppressed that as we were leaving, but it was the first time that a total ambush site had been wiped out successfully and all the weapons captured. We went back to Song Ong Doc after that.

SP: And you were in command then.

CG: Yes.

SP: Yes. And so, as far as the---

CG: The article is *Ambush on the Song Ong Doc*.

SP: Okay. I'll look that up.

CG: You can get it off this site.

SP: Yes. So the quality of the Vietnamese troops varied depending on which troops you served with.

CG: It varied.

SP: Did you ever learn to speak Vietnamese yourself?

CG: No. We had Vietnamese language training, but like anything, if you don't use it, you're not going to retain it.

SP: Right.

CG: And I wasn't fluent in it to begin with. You know, it's not an easy language to learn.

SP: No, no.

CG: Neither is English.

SP: No, no.

CG: We had the benefit of growing up with it.

SP: And as you indicated throughout this. . .

CG: They would do some looting and stuff, things like that, they'd be trying to bring sewing machines back to the boat. No! *[laughing]*

SP: You don't need to weigh down the boat with sewing machines, right? Well, and as you pointed out earlier, you spent most of your time on a boat. You weren't mixing with the population at large, so there really wasn't an opportunity to practice foreign language speaking.

CG: No.

SP: As your term of service approached the end, did you ever consider doing another tour or were you just happy to leave?

CG: I had talked to Don Droz about extending for ROTC or something. I did not intend to make the Navy a career.

SP: Yes.

CG: By the time I was ready to come home I was getting married in May. I got out of the country in late January. I had no intention of staying in. I never had an inclination of doing another tour in Vietnam.

SP Okay, yes. Do you feel that it was, in your opinion, feel it was detrimental rotating people out as quickly as they did; the lack of long-term experience on the boats?

CG: I think it probably was. Yes, as far as you mean doing the half term on the boats and half term in the staff position or a training position? It probably was, but it was so intense in that half year tour on the boats that I think if you were going to do a year in it, I don't know how your mental capacity was going to be---

SP: So there was a good argument for it, as well.

CG: There was a good argument for it as well, but they're right because as I was getting experience as OTC and getting better at it, and I knew my way in every river. I knew where every bump was, how to avoid the fishing weirs, which ones were new and might have mines on them. Knowledge like that is something that you don't write down, you just know.

SP: Right.

CG: And yes, I think taking that out of the rivers probably is not a great idea, but for the survival and for the morale, rotating, knowing you had a chance to get out rather than the 75% chance of going a year and getting creamed, yes, I think that was good.

SP: Okay, that's fair.

CG: There's both sides of that argument.

SP: Sure. When I wrote these questions, of course, I hadn't talked to you, so you know, more things come to mind as we go forward.

CG: Oh yes.

SP: It seems to me as reported earlier, you were incredibly lucky in many ways with your experiences.

CG: I had a great crew, and that's luck of the draw, because they were assigned. We didn't know each other before we got to Swift school. They were good guys. They were all good guys. I mean these guys, really, they weren't trained for this.

SP: Right.

CG: They didn't expect this.

SP: Right.

CG: But they did their job.

SP: Right.

CG: You know what I mean? John Wayne never served, but he had the best description of courage I ever heard. "It's being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

SP: Yes.

CG: Perfect.

SP: Yes.

CG: Because fear, I don't know how it is with other guys, fear is what drove my adrenalin and it was more the fear of being looked upon by your crew as a coward is much greater than the fear of being wounded or killed. And also, if your crew loses confidence in you, they're going to be a step slower, worried about themselves. You're not doing anybody a favor, so yes, you're just scared to death and saddle up anyway.

SP: Did you have any sense that you were going to have such a positive outcome or did you ever consider that you weren't going to make it, or did you think about these things.

CG: The first week in the rivers, ten firefights, I said to one of my guys, I said, "You know, at this rate, I don't know if we're going to get through this."

SP: Yes.

CG: So, it was a pleasant surprise.

SP: Yes.

CG: There were some respites in there that were unexpected, like when the boat had the engine out. We had more days off than normal. Then we were hot bunking boats and using other guys boats to keep them going, but no, there were nice little breaks in there that, "Thank you very much," [laughing] none of them intentional.

SP: Your experiences, and I guess the experiences of your compatriots on the Swift Boats were very different from a lot of other people's experiences because you worked with small groups of people relatively isolated for long periods of time, so you really did have to count on those other people.

CG: Oh yeah.

SP: All the time.

CG: Absolutely. Everybody counted on each other.

SP: Right.

CG: And if somebody was a little bit whacky about expressing interest in getting a Purple Heart or something, I didn't want them.

SP: Right.

CG: On my ops, because if they don't respect their life, they certainly don't respect my crew's and mine.

SP: Right.

CG: So you know, guys admitted they were scared, they're welcome on my boat.

SP: Right.

CG: You're welcome on my operation.

SP: You want somebody who's rational, obviously, yes.

CG: I want somebody who respects life enough to want to survive.

SP: So I've asked you this question a couple of times, so I'll just revisit it one more time. At the end of your service.

CG: Yes.

SP: Did you have any great epiphanies about the war itself, or did you really not think about any of that, basically, you thought about going home, more or less.

CG: You're still gung-ho at that point because you've got friends still doing it.

SP: Right, okay.

CG: So you know, you want them surviving. They were already turning over boats to the Vietnamese when we got out. We still had our base.

SP: Yes.

CG: But they were turning boats over in Saigon from some of the other bases and stuff, so eventually our base was going to be turned over, and you'd have some Navy in there, advisory status, so you know, while our guys were in there you really wanted. . .

SP: You're still pretty gung-ho.

SP: So, you've alluded to this in some degree in the past, but rolling back to John Kerry and the antiwar movement, what have you, so after his service, Kerry joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He testified before congress about atrocities and various different things and I am sure you're aware of it probably at the time. What was your reaction?

CG: My reaction was very negative. I felt that he was betraying us. He was especially betraying the guys that were still over there. He was pretty much saying we were all Genghis Khan, which is not true. The winter soldier bit and stuff, he had guys testifying to atrocities that were later found to have not have ever served, or some of the ones that claimed to have served in Vietnam may have been in the Service, but not in Vietnam. I mean, the whole thing really ticked me off, and one of the ones that especially, he spoke at Smith College one time. I was going to go up and ask a question from the audience. I didn't do it, but he talked a lot about the free fire zone concept and stuff. Well, the free fire zone, use of the free fire zone was up to the Officer in Tactical Command. You didn't have to go in firing your guns all the time. That was the OTC that made that decision, and every time I operated with him, he would fire up the river banks, wherever, trying to trigger an ambush, and that was his decision.

SP: So he was the aggressive one.

CG: Yes, I wanted to confront him about that question.

SP: Okay.

CG: Well it was your decision, why did you make it?

SP: Right.

CG: My feeling, in most cases, not all cases, because where we knew ambushes might occur, we did light it up a little bit because we knew there weren't civilians around, but I always liked to possibly hear, if we were going to get fired on, I wanted to at least hear where it was coming from, or see the puff of smoke, or whatever, the muzzle flashes before I fired, because I just wanted to know where it was coming from first.

SP: Right.

CG: No benevolence there. It was just a difference of opinion. It was tough to hear, you probably wouldn't hear sniper fire because the boats were noisy.

SP: Yes.

CG: But it was just a personal decision.

SP: Right, why waste the armament, right? A lot of Vietnam veterans, when they got back from the war, they experienced being, or at least spoke about being shunned and you know, treated badly by the public. Did you have any of that experience yourself?

CG: No, I was lucky. I had the greatest rehab program ever invented. When I got back, Brenda was in LA at the time, she was flying out of LA as a flight attendant. She lived in Manhattan Beach with three other flight attendants, and she was going to transfer back to Boston when I got out of the service. So I mustered out in Long Beach, so I came back to LA. Wonderful flight into Travis Air Force Base, north of San Francisco. The first time I saw any of the Hare Krishna stuff that was going on in the San Francisco Airport, and you know, you heard of the incidents, you are in uniform. Flew down to LA. I didn't have any incidents at all. When I reported to the base, actually Brenda's cousin was there to meet me, and I stayed with them the first night [actually, I stayed with them for a few hours into the evening and went back to the airport]. Brenda was getting in that night from a trip, so I waited at the airport for her. Then I moved in on the living room couch with four flight attendants in Manhattan Beach, California, a half a block from the beach.

SP: Wow.

CG: It was perfect. I lived there for a month. If Brenda was on a trip, a couple of the other girls would go to dinner. I had a ball.

SP: Oh.

CG: I mustered out, I piled \$5,000 onto Brenda's bureau. We flew up to San Francisco and saw the city with her cousin and you know, her folks lived in San Diego at the time, we'd be down there. I had my brother; he's 13 years younger than me. He was in junior high. Had him and our cousin fly out because I needed an excuse to go to Disneyland. Took them to Disneyland, took them down to San Diego and all over the place. We had a ball. We had a wonderful time. So I was there for a month. The kids were there. I had my brother and cousin there for about six days. It was school vacation.

SP: Were you still in the Service officially at that point?

CG: Yes, yes, yeah.

SP: How much longer were you in the service?

CG: Ah, I got out of Vietnam, I think the 20th of January, and I mustered out. They had to give me leave time, travel time, to the east coast, so I was officially out February 10th.

SP: Oh.

CG: So, we got to see a lot. When we went up to San Francisco, one of the only two incidents that I had any flashback or any recurrence, was when we were up in San Francisco in late January or early February or something, around Chinatown, and somebody let off a string of firecrackers.

SP: Oh.

CG: For a moment, I almost ducked under a car, but just for a moment.

SP: Oh, yes.

CG: The only other incident I had was a few years later, up here, going up Route 57 in Agawam, there's a Mill Street exit there.

SP: Yes.

CG: It goes up by Agawam High School.

SP: Yes, 75.

CG: There was a state trooper there with a radar gun and I come up over the overpass over Suffield Street.

SP: Yes.

CG: All of a sudden there's a guy standing there like this, [as if pointing a gun] and just for a moment.....

SP: Right.

CG: And that's the only time I ever had any type of reaction that was caused by that.

SP: Did you get a ticket?

CG: *[laughing]* No, I wasn't speeding.

SP: How long after that did you and Brenda get married?

CG: We got married, well, we came back to Boston, I would say, late February. We got married in May, on the 23rd of May. I was invited to John Kerry's wedding, the 23rd of May, in New York City, but I was getting married in Philadelphia, so I didn't go, same day.

SP: Wow- interesting.

CG: Yes.

SP: Before the election, were you in touch with him at all over the years?

CG: The only time I had contacted him was when he was Lieutenant Governor. I was working at UMass and a fellow who was the state purchasing agent, a good guy who was a real business type, he wasn't the, the guy who predated him, was the governor's driver *[laughing]* ... Al Holland.

SP: Yea.

CG: Nice guy, but you know, back slapper. And I put in a word for John Manton to keep him going as state purchasing agent not to replace him, so I contacted him then. I wrote the op ed when he was running for president. I was not a John Kerry supporter. I didn't want to get into the anti-Kerry stuff, but I'm a middle of the road, politically we're not in tune.

SP: Yes.

CG: But I'm not a strict conservative, either.

SP: Right.

CG: And yes, I felt he may not have served a long time, but I knew he had been in ten firefights plus some, so I knew he had been involved, yes, he earned his right to speak. An interesting aside on that is we were down in Raleigh, North Carolina. Brenda's brother had lung cancer, and he was in the fifth stage and he got into an experimental program. He was in the pharmaceutical industry with a guy that used to work for him in his Exxon chemical career. Brenda's brother

spent pretty much all of his business life with Exxon. He spent it in South America or in Aruba, or you know, and he liked the warm weather. So when he retired from Exxon, the guy that used to work for him was very successful, a guy from Italy in the pharmaceutical business. He was buying manufacturing facilities, making them work better, you know. So he went to work with him, but he developed lung cancer somewhere along the line. The interesting thing was the program he went into was one that a fellow he worked with in the chemical industry in the town that they start the Boston Marathon in.

SP: Yes.

CG: What the heck town is this, you know where I mean.

SP: I know where you mean, it's been in the news constantly, but I can't remember that either.

CG: You're not old enough to be that way [*laughing*].

SP: Right.

CG: Anyway, they were running one of their trials and he got into it at Duke Medical Center.

SP: Okay.

CG: Well, the thing was caustic to him, the process was caustic, and his wife was up, they lived in Cartagena, Columbia. She is a Cartagena native.

SP: Oh.

CG: He met her while he was living in South America. So we went down, Brenda's mother, and Brenda and I went down to help her because all of a sudden he's in intensive care.

SP: Yes.

CG: And not doing well. So while we were down there, I didn't have CSPAN up here at the time. I had cable, but I didn't have that, and I turn on the TV down there, and here's a bunch of guys I know. It's a press conference for the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

SP: Oh.

CG: Their initial press conference.

SP: Yes.

CG: And I'm seeing a bunch of faces that I knew a long time ago.

SP: Yes.

CG: So I watched that, and I had a lot of friends involved, a lot of them had served with Kerry, that small group of about a dozen, a lot of them served with Kerry, but they had been painted with that wide brush of cutting off ears and heads, and tying electrodes to the body parts, and you know, they had had enough. They had been called too many names to let this go.

SP: So do you feel that a lot of that process behind that Swift Boat Veterans for the Truth was revenge?

CG: I don't think it was revenge. I think there was a lot of untruth being told.

SP: Yes.

CG: And I think, like I said, some of these episodes were taken over, you know, what your mind can do.

SP: Right.

CG: You're doing similar things, but that one is noted, so that one's mine.

SP: Right.

CG: So there were a lot of inconsistencies. Those three that he took of Ted Peck's were one of them.

SP: Right.

CG: The incident on March 17th, with the boat being blown out of the water.

SP: Yes.

CG: You know, things like that.

SP: Yes.

CG: They weren't the way it happened. First of all, when you're in a firefight you never see the big picture, anyway. It's not like cinemascope. "Oh, look at that one!" You see little bits and pieces where your eyes are.

SP: Right.

CG: Afterwards, you can put the pieces together and get a scope of the entire operation.

SP: Right.

CG: So some of the guys that were involved in the Swift Boat Veterans, one of them being my buddy that got blown out of the water, and two others, Jack Chenoweth, who became OPS

officer just before I became the maintenance officer, and Larry Thurlow of Kansas, honest-to-God farmer, great guy, get together, and they're talking about that Bronze Star, and all of a sudden they realize it's the incident they were involved in, but they didn't realize it until they put the pieces together.

SP: Right, right.

CG: And it just didn't jive

SP: Right.

CG: So there were elements of truthfulness, that they wanted the record set straight on. Some of them, and the ones, I would say that didn't know Kerry and didn't serve with him wanted to answer the fact that, I had one guy, one good friend, he had a younger family, you know, he has a little kid whose now, I think, going to be a junior in college, asked him if he had killed babies after hearing all this stuff.

SP: Yes.

CG: Can you imagine your son asking you that?

SP: Right, right, I can understand it.

CG: So they think, they were painted with a broad brush, and everybody thought that we were a bunch of animals.

SP Right.

CG: And we weren't.

SP: Right.

CG: You can become an animal.

SP: Right.

CG: It's real easy to shoot at somebody that's shooting at you.

SP: Right.

CG: But we didn't shoot at people that weren't shooting at us.

SP: Yes, so I mean it sounds like you very realistically can see both sides of some of the allegations that were made there.

CG: I also had a brother who was a mayor of a local small city, when Kerry visited his office after he was elected.

SP: Yes.

CG: Had my scrapbook pictures on his desk and Kerry all of a sudden knew that Eddie's brother was a Swiftie who served with him. So he had a good connection politically for the town that I wasn't going to screw up for him.

SP: Right.

CG: Because I didn't want any revenge on a town that didn't need it.

SP: Right. So, did you vote for him? In '04?

CG: Actually, I didn't. I supported his service. [Misspoke. I did vote for Kerry after agonizing over it for a while]

SP: Yes.

CG: But, uh, I thought about that a long time and I didn't vote for him. [See statement above]

SP: Okay. One more question before I ask it. I want to thank you because it was really an extraordinary interview, far more than I ever expected to get as far as information. I think for most people, as I said in the beginning, they have no idea what really went on with the Swift Boats.

CG: I don't know if I do, I mean, really, we're sitting here, and it was 44 years ago, right now. [Actually 45 years ago]

SP: Right. You seem to have brought it to life.

CG: Forty-four years ago. [Forty-five years ago]

SP: You seem to have brought it to life. I think, you know, again, what was most unfortunate was that the information that people do have about the Swift Boats have to do with the presidential campaign, which really is beside the point, you know, so this is really good to actually learn what people went through.

CG: I liked it when nobody knew what a Swift Boat was.

SP: Yes.

CG: That was my comfort zone.

SP: Yes.

CG: I did not like being contacted by reporters from the Globe and reporters from here and reporters from there. That was not my thing. One thing I mentioned that for my time of service and the time we were there, on January 22nd of 1969, all the officers in COSDIV 11, except for four that had to maintain operations down there, were brought up to Saigon for a briefing with General Abrams and Admiral Zumwalt, and the briefing was that we were going to be stepping up operations in the rivers because the peace talks in Paris, one of the arguments they had was that Kissinger could not be speaking for [South] Vietnam because the North Vietnamese controlled the IV Corps, the Ca Mau Peninsula, the U Minh Forest, so that meeting was to notify everybody that we were going to be stepping up the riverine operations that came up with the SEA LORDS Raiders, which were what we dealt with. I get in country three weeks after that. I won another lottery.

SP: Wow.

CG: What are the odds? Think they'll send me to An Thoi? Yes! *[laughing]*

SP: Wow, that's an interesting point.

CG: Yes, it was. It was, "Here we go," you know, it was. . .

SP: So, 44 years, that's almost a half a century since all this happened. [45 Years]

CG: Yes, it was.

SP: How do you feel about the war today? Is there anything in your opinion the country can learn from that experience?

CG: We can learn things from every war we have been in, but we don't. We never learn from our experience, especially the bits about the country itself, culturally, things like that. We're isolated. The United States of America, we have a border to the north, people that look like us and speak like us, and to the south we have a border with Mexico. We don't have the interaction. We know the Middle East on a map.

SP: Right.

CG: We don't culturally. We have somebody advising us that would like to go back to their country and be the president, so obviously they have things that are in their best interest that aren't necessarily ours. So I'll leave it to the historians, and they'll argue it forever because I don't know if there are any answers. But yes, we should learn.

SP: That's very well put. Anything else you'd like to add? Anything that I overlooked that you think posterity should know about?

CG: I just want; I think it's nice that it's known that the Coast Guard played a big part.

SP: Okay.

CG: On the rivers.

SP: Good.

CG: The people don't know that and they should.

SP: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it, Charlie.

CG: Yes, we'll walk through this.

SP: Okay, let's resume.

CG: I'll throw a little postscript in this, afterthoughts. One of the things that always bothered us down south was that we would go into the rivers in the daytime, and we'd be there at night, too, but we'd visit the villages in the day and the same villages would be visited at night by the Viet Cong or the NVA, and if they had talked to us they were in jeopardy. How would they know if they talked to us or not? But the fact that we were there would paint them with a wide brush of helping the Americans. We weren't taking any turf. We weren't protecting them. We weren't staying with them and making sure that the Viet Cong didn't come in at night. In what Admiral Zumwalt's, what he called his "Wild ideas" was to bring a thing called Sea Float into the Cua Lon river opposite what used to be the city of Nam Can, which was no longer populated because they removed all the civilians following Tet, and blew up the area. They brought a 9-pontoon Ami into the Bo De River and down the Cua Lon and parked it in the river and anchored it opposite old Nam Can city, and they set up an established base for Swift Boats and the Coast Guard WPB's and SEAL team and actually established and stayed there. It drew people into the area again because they knew it would be safe. They eventually set up land-based base that they called Solid Anchor. It grew and it was a substantial city again because we were there, and we were going to make sure the VC didn't come in at night and bother them, and they were protected. It was something, that I think was the right idea. It was always an interesting spot because they tried to float mines down the river and stuff like that, and we would operate in the areas, the smaller tributaries off there and keep the enemy out as much as possible. The other thing I mentioned is that we pretty much devastated the turf. Shooting .50 caliber machine guns into a forest has a tendency to knock down trees, and Agent Orange defoliated forests saved our lives because it took away the element of surprise and ambushes along the riverbanks. We took away the vegetation that they hid in. But if you went up the Giang Thanh River on the Cambodian border, you look on the left side over into Cambodia, which was lush and green and had beautiful palm trees, and on the right is Vietnam, and we had pretty much cleared a lot of the brush and devastated the area. It just hit you in the head to look at the left side of the river compared to the right and see the difference of what war can do to it. Just an afterthought, but it's worth mentioning.

SP: Have you ever thought about revisiting Vietnam?

CG: Never [*laughing*]. I know a lot of guys that have gone back. I know a guy that was in the Army that I worked with at UMass. He's been back a number of times. I have no inclination

whatsoever, even though there are now 20 resorts on Phu Quoc Island. There are better resorts in Bermuda!

SP: *[laughing]* Thank you very much, Charlie.