

## **Description Sheet**

**Interview: Robert D Baldwin**  
**Year: 2003**

**New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs**

**Name: Robert D Baldwin**  
**Date: 28 Feb 2003**  
**Place: Chemung County Historical Society**  
**Interviewer: Beardsley, Melissa**  
**Transcriber: Joseph DiDonato III**

**Biographical Information: Robert D Baldwin of 2623 Petrolin, Wellsville, NY was born in Wellsville on 8 Nov 1948 and entered the service at Wellsville in Oct 1967. He was discharged in Oct 1970 having reached the rank of E-5 in the US Army. He served in Vietnam with the United States Army, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and was awarded the Purple Heart, the Silver Star and Air Medals.**

**Robert D. Baldwin**  
**Narrator**

**Melissa Beardsley**  
**Videographer and Interviewer**

**February 28, 2003**  
**Chemung County Historical Society**

MB: So you were in Vietnam.

RB: Yes, I was.

MB: What did you do in Vietnam?

RB: I was an observer on an observation helicopter(?).

MB: That sounds neat. What was your rank?

RB: E-5

MB: How long were you in the service?

RB: Three years.

MB: Drafted?

RB: I was drafted but then I enlisted. So I wasn't really drafted, I mean I was but I wasn't. I didn't go in as draftee.

MB: So what was it like? I mean I have heard people don't want to talk about it.

RB: Ahh, it was a war. (Shaking his head)

MB: Was it a war that you agreed with or disagreed with?

RB: When you're eighteen years old you don't much give a shit about what you agree or disagree...

MB: Well that's true. Some people do and some people don't.

RB: Nah, I didn't.

MB: Well it was a war and you wanted to fight for your country.

RB: Well I was going to ...or not...(unintelligible).

MB: Where you here?

RB: I graduated from school in 1967 and I got drafted in October. I enlisted in October, I have to correct that. I got out in 1970.

MB: Were there a lot of casualties?

RB: Yeah....when you go to Vietnam its a completely different world than this one we're in here. I mean the freakin' people shit on the streets. And there is not streets and the houses are freakin' grass huts wit dirt floors. And they all talk a stupid ass language that you can't understand a god-damn word they say. And they run up and down the streets on motor bikes and scooters. Its not even close to being the United States.  
I was in Củ Chi Base Camp (?) Vietnam, the base camp was about thirty miles northwest of Saigon. Rice paddies, shit holes. The were no mountains were I was, there was one, kind of stuck up in the middle of nowhere. That's kind of weird.

RB: We flew every day. I put 11,000 hours in the air before I left Vietnam. I got shot down four times.

MB: Wow that's a lot of hours...

RB: I was with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, we had 3 companies of tanks and one company of helicopters. All we did was fly around and ...(inaudible)look for gooks.

MB: Where there any incidences...?

RB: Well when you first get there you're kind of a greenhorn, dumb-shit, you don't know, you know what I mean? You're just a kid. First night you're there, Long Binh, where they check you in. It's right there by Saigon, the freakin' barracks blew up right next to me with a rocket! It was during the Tet Offensive in 1968. When I got to base camp they took us out there in a god damn bus!  
And we had to start flying on the second day we were there.  
The scout team there is one guy down low and there's a cover ship that watches you from above. If you get into trouble they'er supposed to shot at the people who are shooting at you.  
Probably the hardest thing I ever did was the first time they told me I had to shoot somebody.

MB: Oh yeah, I...

RB: It's like, they're screamin' at you, "shoot that mother-f...." (he makes the sound of a gun firing...) After that is all downhill from there.

RB: Well I had some good times too. I got to Saigon a couple times. They wouldn't let us go down there when we first got there because it was during the Tet Offensive. Cause it was the first time Saigon had ever been attacked. It was like piss around Saigon. They blew up the embassy and shit. And that's when I was there, that's when I first got there.

MB: So how many pranks and stuff did you guys pull on each other?

RB: We didn't much prank pulling, they kept us pretty busy flying. Looking for gooks, shooting 'gators, that's the only thing we liked to do. The Saigon River was right there. A big muddy river, it's big and it's muddy, alligators and shit in there. We used to go shoot them sons of bitches some days when we got nothin' better to do. I had fun, shootin' shit birds, pelicans, I mean uh pelicans, they were pelicans, I don't know we called them shit birds because every time they took off a big turd would come out of them.

MB: (Unintelligible comment) that was fun. Do you remember the day that your were done with Vietnam?

RB: 6/23/1969 , or May, yeah May or June.

MB: So you were there a month?

RB: Thirteen months. Little over a year. The showers were like...if you wanted a hot shower you went in the afternoon with the sun would heat up the water. There was a water tank on top of the freakin' hut, it was a room about this big with poles sticking up and they had a water tank up there that they would come and fill once a week and if you wanted a warm shower you would take it in the afternoon because in the morning it was kind of cold! And in the freakin' outhouses you had to burn the shit, I hated that.

MB: You had to burn it?

RB: Yeah they burnt the shit because the gooks used the shit on the Punji cords and stuff, they put it on the bamboo and if you get infected with at turd it makes you sicker than hell. So we had to burn the shit, put diesel fuel on it and burn it.

MB: I'll bet it stunk.

RB: Uh - huh. I never got stuck with shit burning detail very much.

MB: That's a good thing.

RB: I had my eleven thousand hours in. I was one of the first to get to eleven thousand hours because most of the guys go home early, either shot or something. So I didn't have to fly no more, but I still had a while to do yet. So I got shit detail and stuff like that for a while. Garbage detail. Got over ran once.

MB: Over ran?

RB: Base camp did.

MB: Did you ever get taken prisoner?

RB: No, we didn't get....they just over ran us. I got shot once.

MB: You got shot once?

RB: Yeah, in the back. It was a piece of shrapnel got me.

MB: What was it from?

RB: It was from the armor plating from the back of my seat.

MB: In the helicopter?

RB: It got stuck in my back, they pulled it out and I got a couple of days off, is all. It wasn't bad enough to send me home. I was hoping.  
...the first months we were there...the Gooks shot rockets at us every night.

MB: So when where would you sleep?

RB: ...underground...In the bunker. That's where you slept, in the bunker.

MB: Did you have any real close friends....do you keep in contact with them?

RB: Eh. (Mumbled)

MB: Have you attended any Vietnam reunions since you got back?

RB: ...I am not really into that Vietnam shit.

MB: I have heard that some people have nightmares and stuff...

RB: You got to block that shit out. People can't do that, you know what I mean? It's over with, it's something that happened along time ago, it's over with and go on with your life. Forget about that crap.

MB: Anything else you want to tell me?

RB: About Vietnam?

MB: Yeah...what do you think about war now?

RB: I think their crazy. War, it's easy for people to talk about because they've never been in one. But after you're in one you don't want to be in another one.

MB: I don't want to be in one and I've never been in one.

RB: Yeah, if you been in one you never one to be in one, especially some Mickey Mouse war like that one's gonna be. See if it was like WWII we had to win or we were dead, that different. The United States never attacked anybody in the history of the United States so why start now?

I don't agree with it.

They got a bunch of young guys in there and they been feeding them crap ...cyborg?...they're ready!

It was like the Tet Offensive, anybody moved you just shot 'em. It was like if they were wearing black pajamas...all of them seem to have some deal with black pajamas, every Viet Cong had black pants on, it was like if they had black pants on and he ran, you shot him. That's all there was too it. Cause if you didn't he'd shoot you.

Then towards the end, when I was getting ready to come home, it was you were supposed to be shot at, before you could shoot back.

MB: Wow it changed that much?

RB: Well because of Lt. Calley shit that was going on, that was happening. That was 25<sup>th</sup> Division too. You remember when they wiped out that village there?

MB: I heard about it.

RB: Them boys were kind of bad. When you get caught up in the war and shit, you see your friends get blown up and shit. You see a Gook, you're not going to wait, you're going to shoot the son of a bitch. ...when those guys get into that goo, and they all do, I did, everybody did, it's like shot first, ask questions later. That's why we did it. Its no wonder sometimes thing get carried away.

MB: You're in the stress mode...

RB: You're not in the stress mode, you're in the crazy mode. You know what I mean? When I was there someone (?) shot a...company commander. (17:12)

MB: What happened?

RB: Killed 'em! Somebody threw a grenade under the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant's bed. You don't give a bunch of crazy ass GI's guns and stuff and get them all psyched up and then start giving them a hard time, because they don't give a shit. They're in that don't give a shit mode. ...along come a full bird colonel and that jeep driver blasted him with nineteen rounds.

MB: What happened?

RB: Killed his ass!

MB: Wow!

RB: Crazy things happened. (?) We had a prisoner of war camp right next to us. Where they bring the prisoners. Every time we got rocketed some Mexican guy would ...?... and start shooting at the prisoner of war camp. This is a prisoner of war camp. Everybody knew.

MB: That's amazing.

RB: The next morning there were dead gooks all over the ? site.

MB: The over ran you and then you over ran them.

RB: They were in there for like three days before we got them all. It took us a god-damn deuce and a and half ...to clean up the whole area, throwing the dead bodies in a bag...guys grabbing a bag and throwing them in the back of a dump truck. That's was was stuck in my mind when I left, throwing gooks in the back of a dump truck.

That's two of the things I remember most, throwing dead gooks in the back of a dump truck and shooting the first guy I ever had to shoot. After that you can, (gestures with a wave of the hand to dismiss everything else).

MB: Giggles (Unintelligible).

RB: I got a Purple Heart, Silver Star.

MB: You got a Purple Heart, Silver Star, wow.

RB: ...? Shit.

MB: Cool.

RB: Good soldier.

MB: Well you gotta be.

RB: Well it don't bother me, like some people. Nowadays I think some people carry it on. (Whining) "Im a Vietnam Veteran so now I am all screwed up." So what!

MB: Unintelligible

RB: There's a lot of dope in there now too.

MB: A lot of dope?

RB: Ah man you wouldn't believe it. The freakin' pot growing out of the sand bags around the god-damn bunks.

MB: (Giggling) I didn't even think that that was (?) back then, I mean I knew it was around here.

RB: There wasn't much around here, not compared to over there.

MB: Wow!

RB: .....(?) guys it took to get off the heroin, opium, hash and all that bullshit that was over there.

Transcription ended at 20:49.