

## Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Kent Kirkton

Kent Kirkton founded the Tom and Ethel Bradley Center at CSUN, and was interviewed by Keith Rice in 2013 as part of the Bradley Center's ongoing oral history work. As a young man, Kirkton enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1965. He became a medic, and was detached to the Marines in 1968. He deployed to South Vietnam later that year, and discusses his experiences and impressions of the war in this clip.

### Transcript:

KK: Marines were flying used helicopters that they got from the army. And they had so few of them, they would take a lot fewer risks with their helicopters than the army would. So there would be times like when I had a patient that needed to be medevaced, we'd call in to the marine unit and ask for a medivac. And they'd say No, and I, we'd call the army and they'd send somebody in. 'Cause they could get another helicopter, and the Marines couldn't get another helicopter if they had a crash flying in the fog.

KR: Why did the Marines get treated?

KK: Well, in the you know, it's a bureaucracy, you have to fight for your budget. I mean, I don't know. I mean, it's just a matter of budgeting, and the Marines just didn't have the budget that that the army had is one of the weird things that came up, you know, so anyhow, back to well, so once they shifted to this body count idea.

KR: Okay.

KK: Right, it seemed to make as I look back on it, the whole atmosphere of the way the war that that the US conducted itself was much nastier than it was before that.

KR: How they conducted themselves against the enemy?

KK: Yeah. Well, in these villages and stuff, where you would, they'd go in and set fire to hooches or, you know,

KR: Cities, or towns, villages.

KK: Well not cities little villages

KR: Right.

KK: Where they had built houses out of

KR: Sticks.

KK: Local materials

KR: Yeah.

KK: and thatched roofs and stuff, and they'd set fire to them. And then people that ran, they would shoot them down when they ran, 'cause they wouldn't declare them to be enemies that were fleeing, you know. And I mean, that whole thing was just...you put that into a military context

where you've got people out there that don't have enough food, you're tired, you're exhausted, you're, you're...

KR: Irritable.

KK: Well, beyond irritable.

KR: Yeah.

KK: I mean, you've got jungle rot and your, your legs and your feet hurt and you get leeches on you all day long. And you know, you're exhausted from humping around in these mountains, and you start you're trying to go up the side of a mountain, and you slip in the mud, the clay on it, you reach out and grab something and drive a thorn through your hand or some— I mean, it was it was a miserable existence, you know, and they're already very unhappy men out there,

KR: Right.

KK: And then then the— we know, everybody knows that you keep score by how many people you kill, so...

KR: that's actually

KK: That becomes

KR: a form of releasing frustration. Well, right?

KK: Yeah. I don't know exactly how you describe it. But I mean, I don't,

KR: You're pissed, you're angry. Pulling a trigger and taking someone's life. I don't know what the word is, but...

KK: Yeah,

KR: Yeah, yeah,

KK: right.

KR: Under those circumstances that makes it easier for you to (inaudible)...

KK: You know, and there's this psychological training that goes in on in the military where you never speak of Vietnamese. There's some derogatory slang word that's used for everybody, you know, so that dehumanizes the enemy.