

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

JOSEPH A. TRAVIESO

An interview conducted on

March 7, 2018

Interviewer: Marcus Rodriguez

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Joseph A. Travieso are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 7, 2018.

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RODRIGUEZ: I just want to start out with just saying your name and then where you're from and where you grew up, basically.

TRAVIESO: Okay. My name is Joseph A. Travieso. I was born in San Antonio [Texas]. I grew up on the south side of San Antonio and I have three children.

RODRIGUEZ: When did you enlist in the service and what branch were you in?

TRAVIESO: I was in the army, the Ranger Department. And I enlisted in, I believe it was, 1958.

RODRIGUEZ: What years were you in the service? For how long?

TRAVIESO: Well, I was there was for 22 years.

RODRIGUEZ: Twenty-two years? Dang, son. What motivated you to join the service?

TRAVIESO: Well, it was a cause that I had to find a way to help my mother out. She had TB. And the government, the army, they offered me 100% dependency and she would have everything as far as hospitalization and bills are concerned.

RODRIGUEZ: What about whenever you found out you had to go to Vietnam? How did you react to that?

TRAVIESO: Well, at that particular time, I just got back from Santo Domingo. They just had a thing over there and when I arrived back at Fort Bragg, North Carolina—I was there about a month—and they told me I had orders to go to Vietnam. So, I kinda thought about it for a while and then I said, "Well, I'm in the military and I have to comply." And I was going to leave my wife and kids there in Fort Bragg, so, I went ahead and left.

RODRIGUEZ: Was the fighting in Vietnam already going on when you left?

TRAVIESO: Oh, yeah, it was going on. I was assigned individually to the 1st Cavalry Division, which was in Vietnam already. They were stationed there out in Khe and I arrived. I was with them for one year.

RODRIGUEZ: What did you think about the conflict? How did you feel about it?

TRAVIESO: Well, as a soldier, individually, you do what you're told and you do the best that you can. As far as the war was concerned, the higher-ups made the decisions and all we did was comply.

RODRIGUEZ: When you first got to Vietnam, how was it? What was it like for you?

TRAVIESO: Well, I got assigned, like I said, to An Khe and at that time I was Airborne, and they had a battalion called the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup>. And they were all Airborne, and I got assigned to

them at An Khe and, from there, I was further sent to join the company that was out in the field and I stayed with them.

RODRIGUEZ: Whenever you first got there, what'd you think of it, like the environment that you were in?

TRAVIESO: Well, the area that we were in was . . . the vegetation there was like if you were in the jungle. There were a lot of monkeys jumping up and down in the trees. But as time went by there were less and less monkeys were there. But you didn't stay more than ten days right there. They would move you further out into the woods.

RODRIGUEZ: So, as it went on you saw less and less vegetation and animals?

TRAVIESO: Yeah, because the military, as soon as they get to a place, they start clearing it out—the area—so that you don't get fired on or ambushed. So they had the whole area cleared out, you know?

RODRIGUEZ: Sure. So, you said you were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division whenever you served there?

TRAVIESO: Yeah, you know at the beginning, my first tour.

RODRIGUEZ: Whenever you were in combat did you ever get wounded? I don't know if I ever asked you whenever I was younger but did you ever get wounded there?

TRAVIESO: Not with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. No, I never got wounded. I did come close. I got wounded on the second tour, but not the first.

RODRIGUEZ: Did you ever come across or ever encounter any of the locals there during your time in Vietnam?

TRAVIESO: Oh, yeah, there was plenty locals. There were some locals that we called . . . They were guides, you know, for the military. They helped out any way they could. And, being that it was an Airborne company, we didn't jump while we were there but we went further than most people did.

RODRIGUEZ: Did the locals ever say what their view was on the United States or any of the Americans there? Like did they ever say what they thought about y'all?

TRAVIESO: Well, the soldiers were assigned as guides or with the Americans, they were all for the war. They didn't want to be with the North Vietnamese so consequently we had no problem with them, and a lot of them joined and helped because the government was paying them and they needed the money.

RODRIGUEZ: Did any of your service ever influence anybody back home? Like, did [your wife] ever know about this? Like did you write to them?

TRAVIESO: Oh, yeah, I wrote to them quite a bit. But she never said anything. She stayed in North Carolina. There was nothing anybody could do. You just gotta do what is assigned to you.

RODRIGUEZ: I bet that was tough. When you were serving did you ever hear anything from the United States, like any big news from there?

TRAVIESO: No, we didn't get the news. In fact, when we were out in the woods—we had no radios at that time—the only radio we had it was the Army-issued radio to connect from one platoon to the other. But we had nothing to do with that.

RODRIGUEZ: What years did you say you were over there in Vietnam?

TRAVIESO: Uh, let's see. It's hard to remember, '65 and '66 I believe. And then I went back again in '67-'68.

RODRIGUEZ: So, were you informed about Ap Bac? When the North Vietnamese shot down all the helicopters? Were you informed about that?

TRAVIESO: No, sure didn't.

RODRIGUEZ: During your time there—this is a little touchy but please, Tio Anthony, don't hold back whenever you answer this—what were one of the most vivid memories you can recall of your time in Vietnam?

TRAVIESO: I think when . . . I remember when they killed one of my GIs, the point man, and it was due to a booby-trap of a 105 Houser I believe. And it hit the guy in front of me, hit the guy behind me—three of them—and I got out without a scratch.

RODRIGUEZ: Wow, the good Lord must've been looking out for you, huh, Tio Anthony?

TRAVIESO: [Chuckles] Yeah, yeah, he was.

RODRIGUEZ: What about whenever you came home? I know there was a lot of controversy here for the soldiers, you know? Did you receive any hateful acts towards you whenever you came back?

TRAVIESO: Well, when we arrived in California . . . And, at that time, you would be transported back and forth, so they wouldn't see you, because right outside the gates from the airport there were a lot of demonstrators and they would throw cans and rocks and everything at the GI. So they kept everything covered up until we got to the next place.

RODRIGUEZ: When you were serving, did your conception or opinion about the United States or our government change when you were done in Vietnam?

TRAVIESO: Personally, it didn't change my outlook on it. I was there to do a job. But, uh, what really got me was every time we go, you'd find some people that didn't believe in what we were doing, but there was nothing you could do about it.

RODRIGUEZ: Looking back at it, do you feel like Vietnam was something we shouldn't have gotten involved in?

TRAVIESO: Well, you'd have to know the whole story behind it, and most of the GIs just had that portion that pertained to them and what was going on. And you go out into the woods and you sleep in woods, and you just didn't get the information, so you start seeing it when you came back to the United States. And even then, you know, it brings back the memories of what was going on. As far as the government, I don't know why they were doing what they were doing. Some would say it was political, others would say that it was part of our job. I don't know.

RODRIGUEZ: How did [your wife] feel when you had to go to Vietnam and then when you had to go back? How did she feel when you had to leave?

TRAVIESO: Well, she wasn't too happy about it, and neither was I. But I called the Department of the Army and I talked to them, I said, "Look, I am supposed to stay in the states for at least a year." And they said, "Well, you've been here four months, and we are going to send you to school for language training and that'll be six months. So, by the time you leave it'll be over a year." So I said okay, and they sent me and the whole family to El Paso, Texas and to Fort Bliss, and that was where I went to school. Even my kids went to school there.

RODRIGUEZ: I guess I'll ask this question. It's pretty controversial but, do you feel that America lost the Vietnam War?

TRAVIESO: Well, I don't think the military lost the war at all. I think the politicians were the ones that caused a lot of the grief and agony and the amount of soldiers that we lost by not giving us the right to do what we were trained to do. You could go to the Cambodian area and the VC would go across the river and, from Cambodian ground, we couldn't shoot at them because all we were able to do was just push them back.

RODRIGUEZ: Whenever you were serving, were there any orders they ordered you to do that you felt weren't the right thing to do?

TRAVIESO: No, not with our company. It was strictly infantry company on the first tour and, on the second tour, was completely different. It was working with the Vietnamese. It was a range of battalions and we would go out with them. It was only five Americans by themselves out there with the Vietnamese.

RODRIGUEZ: Were there any other major events that happened to you or around you whenever you were in Vietnam?

TRAVIESO: Well, I know I wasn't claustrophobic before, and now I am pretty claustrophobic because of the tunnels we went into made out of dirt . . . and I just don't like to be encased anymore.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I bet that was pretty tough there. I always heard about those tunnels. So did you have to go into those tunnels a good amount of times?

TRAVIESO: Quite a bit, we went in because some of our tunnel rats—we called them—would go in first with just a .45 and there would be some Vietnamese in there from the North and we knew he got shot. So, we had to go in there and take him out but the Vietnamese had already blocked the tunnel and ran off into a different direction.

RODRIGUEZ: Alright, Tio Anthony, one more question. Do you have any advice for anybody, in today's time, that is about to join the service?

TRAVIESO: Well, different people join for different reasons, and all I can talk about is infantry and the Airborne is completely different companies. So, in that respect, what we did was fast and furious as they say. We got in there, done what we had to do and get out. There was only five of us in the second tour. That's when I got hurt. We were pulled off.

RODRIGUEZ: Well, Tio Anthony, I believe that's all the questions I have for you.

TRAVIESO: Let me tell you something, the one thing that we did for the fun of it, okay? At night we used to go fishing for rats, because there were a lot of rats. And when we got them, you would go and get your .45 or .38 or whatever you had and kill it. And in the morning, you'd give it to your handler or your manager and he'd be real happy about it.

RODRIGUEZ: [Laughing.] So you had some free time to be fishing and whatnot.

TRAVIESO: Well, yeah. When you became guards for the artillery, oh heck, it's like Christmas. We got at least two hot meals a day. And before, you were having nothing.

RODRIGUEZ: Pretty interesting.

TRAVIESO: I've done my time.

RODRIGUEZ: Alright, Tio Anthony, I believe that's it. I appreciate your time.

TRAVIESO: Bye.