

Garrett Carter

Side 1:

At his request this was taped on his porch. In the background there are dog, cat, weed clipper, plane and finally a TV - but it's audible and worth it.

Garry had a bumper sticker saying "Vietnam Veteran" - so I asked for an interview.

He was born in the Mission Hospital - now the Parkway Office building, in 1943. His grandparents' house was across from the old Merrimon Ave. Baptist church at 278 Merrimon Ave - now Asheville Rental Co. The house was warm and friendly (see enclosure). [Olie and Ken Kincade]

He lived at 8 Ramoth Road, an only child with many friends to play with and a park down the street (now the Beth Israel Synagogue, 229 Murdock Ave. (Photo Enclosed) [Florence and Andrew Carter (parents)]

[25] He went to Claxton School, David Millard and Lee Edwards. There were very few discipline problems. He graduated before integration.

[35] "If a guy got out of line he would get his rear end busted with a paddle real quick and everybody would forget about it and go on with their life." The situation did not drag on involving the teachers, parents, and social workers. Now no one forgives and goes on. "Teachers can't provide any discipline. If they do they get sued and fired - either or both. Not a good situation for the students or teachers." There is not much less violence in class and a lot more outside the class room.

[49] When he was growing up, the front door was never locked unless the family was going on vacation and they would leave their key next door with a neighbor. He didn't have a key until he was 12 years old. Now, most people are working and older people are in retirement homes.

[65] He went to college at Mars Hill, studied Spanish in Madrid, went to UNCA one summer and was deferred from the draft until he graduated in 1967. History was his major with political science as a minor. He had trouble learning a language so went to Spain to learn Spanish so he could graduate from Mars Hill.

[84] Two weeks after graduation he was drafted. He knew of no rioting or draft-card burning in this area. Several of his friends, to avoid the draft, joined the National Guard or Army Reserve. Most of his friends had already been drafted or were to be drafted the next year, as he graduated in the middle of the year. He went to Fort Gordon for basic training and on the plane was one of three not in the Army Reserve unit. He saw these same men when he was returning after discharge. They had avoided combat temporarily, had married and started their lives but had to go anyway. He was glad that he had served straight through (and also saw much of the world on leaves).

[114] Because of his political science training he understood the "Domino Theory" and was more loyal to the government because of this. He has read parts of McNamara's book and feels he should have come out in 1968 and said the war was lost. He had been there 5 months before the Tet (Feb 28, 1968) offensive took place.

[149] He received very little training beyond learning to teletype and spent most of his time in a fixed station located in an old French-built office used for communication. He worked at a desk where the temperature reached 140 degrees causing the machines, which were outdated, to cease functioning until an air conditioner was brought in. The Vietcong could not get close enough to attack and their 122 M rockets were not accurate enough to hit the headquarters. He was given M14 rifles which were badly worn, jammed every third round and for which there were no new parts. Some men in the Air Force got 9mm uzzies from Israel. All good equipment went to the men in the field. Some officers got 45's that worked and, when on guard duty, men were issued M69 rifles that worked. He said this was not like M.A.S.H. He ended up being office manager.

[243] He ate well - finally tiring of roast beef, slept in a real bed, worked or was on guard duty 12 hours and slept 12 hours. He was bored to tears. Morale was never good but probably worse in other places.

[264] During the Tet offensive he was on guard duty 8 hours, had normal assignment 8 hours and private time 8 hours. The Vietcong charged the perimeter and tried to overrun the compound. A "dragon ship" with BC3 mini guns, capable of discharging thousands of rounds a minute, killed thousands of Vietcong and local people. The Engineering Battalion buried an estimated 26,000 casualties within a 3-4 day period. If it had not been for the dragon ship the Vietcong, which was charging across a cleared area, would have taken his building. His machine gun would not have fired.

[319] After serving a year he was given a chance to return to the states for 6 months, however by extending service 6 months he got a 30-day pass which didn't count against his regular leave, and he was given 15 days for travel time.

[340] One had to learn a lot of things to stay alive in Vietnam. There was virtually no training. The average G.I. with him was either college material or a college graduate. Soldiers tried to teach basic English to Vietnam civilians, especially those who wanted to work on base cleaning or doing laundry. They held classes. The people were still in the Dark Ages, never having seen electric lights or telephones.

[400] The Vietnamese were bewildered as to why we were there but a lot had sons or husbands in the army and they did not want to be part of Vietcong.

[415] The U.S. didn't do a good job in conducting the war. The emphasis was on body count rather than defending a village. He was with a very good quality draftee who tried on a limited basis to teach villagers how to plant crops and how to work on the base to make money. He seldom saw soldiers from the field and never got deep in the country.

[477] On his final return home he saw the group he had been in training with. They had avoided staying out for 14 months and had established their lives but had to serve anyway and didn't get good assignments.

[494] He was so glad to be home when his service was over that he didn't care that there was no welcoming. He never saw people he knew when he was on R&R and has had limited contact with two men he knew in service. They didn't share any happy moments that could be celebrated with a reunion.

[540] On his first leave he came home. For R&R he visited Tokyo, Formosa, Bangkok and thought he might come back and teach. On his second leave he visited Italy, Switzerland, and England. A professor for UNCA, whose father was a Marine, has taken down stories of his adventure. [William Bruce]

Side 2:

He would like to see a veteran's organization specifically for Vietnam Veterans as they do not seem to fit in with the existing groups. So many have problems and don't seem to get any better. They were neither trained properly nor were they "detuned" when they came back. While the soldiers were fed adequately, the equipment was always a problem.

[2/25] When he returned he couldn't sleep without his 22 rifle beside him. The military didn't tell him about this reaction. The guys were trained to kill and were apt to turn and give a judo chop and break a nose if they were bumped. A lot of that happened and they should have been calmed down before being turned loose on society.

[2/53] On Memorial Day Veteran groups put poppies on the graves at Green Hills Cemetery. The Enka High School ROTC group helps put flags on all veteran's graves, which stay up at least 2 days. He is not familiar with Huff (see his tape). [Wade Huff]

[2/74] He is very familiar with the Asheville High ROTC because of his son who went through the program and ended up a student colonel Battalion Commander - the only student to make his rank. He is grateful to Thomas who makes everyone jump when he barks but who loves the kids and has a heart of gold (see his tape). [Darby Carter, Colonel Alfred Thomas]

[2/97] His son's car was parked in front of the school one day and Thomas saw some 18 year old student run from someone who was chasing him. He jumped up on the car roof and down on the hood. Thomas ran him down and held him until the police came. The boy was so embarrassed at being caught by an old man with a cane that he never came back - peer pressure was too great.

[2/119] When his son started high school he joined the ROTC. This was an important influence in his life as Carter had had a heart attack and was unable to play the parental role.

[2/132] In November, 1969, when he was released from service the economy was no longer booming. Jobs were scarce and he needed 4 more college credits to teach. Instead of going back

to school he got a job accounting with Young Life (see enclosure). He was working at Windy Gap Camp.

[2/150] He was approached by Madeline who asked him whether or not he would become superintendent at Green Hills Cemetery. He accepted. [Madeline Pennell]

[2/155] Green Hills, founded in 1901, is a non-profit cemetery which offers lots at a reasonable cost and is run as a normal business. It is non-profit, has no stock holders or dividends and avoids property taxes. Traditionally cemeteries used to be organized otherwise. A lot of money was taken in at the beginning but, when it was filled, the cost of maintaining led to abandonment.

[2/178] New NC cemetery laws require that a portion of cost for every new grave (20-25%) in a commercial cemetery be put in a trust fund. Most regular cemeteries are run as a business. The older it gets the more it costs to maintain.

[2/192] In 1954 Riverside Cemetery went bankrupt and, under Parks and Recreation, the city took it over (see Ray Kisiah tape). In hilly land, dirt from dug graves is used to fill the valleys, thus creating more land.

[2/211] There are two Jewish cemeteries. One, for the more liberal group, is part of Riverside, and the other, for the conservative Jews, is off Louisiana near the K-Mart. This is right next to Green Hills and graves were once intermixed. Riverside started as a for-profit business whereas Green Hills was the result of a group of business men in West Asheville donating property.

[2/240] In the late 20's, at the request of some Jewish families, a portion was split off and Lou Pollock Cemetery was formed. They have a different management and maintenance. The area is separated by a high link-chain fence with barbed wire at the top and a gate needing a key for entrance. The border separating this section from Green Hill, such as fallen trees causes no problem.

[2/285] The Blacks also had an active cemetery in this area. At first they were mixed together and later divided with a separate Board of Directors. It is now full, has been abandoned and there is no maintenance. No one is left to care for it. Every few years a Black wants to do something about it. He doesn't know John but has heard about the Kenilworth cemetery. [John Baxter]

[2/354] In his position at Green Hills, aside from maintenance, he does a little of everything - sells lots, keeps records, and helps as pallbearer when needed. Because of uneven ground, dollies cannot be used. Lowering devices are used, the procedure takes place after the ceremony.

[2/425] There are two privately owned mausoleums for above ground burial but most are buried in air-tight and water-tight vaults which protect the casket and keep the ground from subsiding. People used to be buried with jewelry but now even the glasses are removed and donated to the Lions. Once in a while, by court order, a body is exhumed.

[2/466] He has supervised as many as six funerals a day. He has two men to work with. Under the direction of the funeral director, vaults weighing 3,000 to 3,800 pounds are delivered. Each grave has a vault or liner to keep the ground from subsiding. Without this protection, a grave would have to be filled 10-12 times over the next 50 years. In many cases it is very important to a family that the vault be air-tight and water-tight as some caskets are made of real mahogany-like furniture.

[2/514] Some changes are gradually coming in burial practices. Most bodies are embalmed which is cheaper than refrigeration and necessary if there is to be a viewing. In the event of a murder, however, the body must be refrigerated. Cremation is used by 10% but the percentage is not growing fast.

[2/550] While there are several crematoriums in Asheville, most are handled by Thomas Shepard and Son in Hendersonville because of the quality of their work. The amount of volume of remains must fit in a standard container regardless of the size of the body.

[2/590] The Green Hills lots run between \$350 and \$750 for a single grave. In order to have a stone, a double grave must be purchased. A grave only had to be 3 ft by 8 ft and 18 inches on top of the lid of the lines.

[2/600] His son was corporal in the Marines and a grandchild is on the way. He showed me snaps just received. It's a boy. [Darby Carter]