

Bruce G Shelley

Interviewed by Judy Hansen
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My name is Bruce Glen Shelley and I was born April 20th, 1952 to Glen Earnest and Mildred Carlson Shelley in the old Lehi Hospital. I am the fourth child of five: Louise (Dinneweth), Verl, Diane (Miller), Bruce, and Lynn.

I was at Lehi High School in 11th grade and I was just bored with High School. I knew as soon as I graduated I'd get drafted because that is just what happened to young men then. My friend, Larry Grace from Lehi who was a couple years older than me; as soon as he graduated he got drafted and went to basic training. He went to infantry training. He came home a few days on leave where I was able to see him. He went to Vietnam and got killed right off. When you get to Nam, what they do is send you to what they call a replacement company.

You stay in this replacement company for about a week while they get your uniform with your name on it. They teach you about booby traps and stuff like that. After all that, they figure out where you're going to go and what company you're going to be in. Then they ship you to that company. Larry was in the back of a deuce-and-a-half¹ with a bunch of other brand new guys that were going on their way to their company and a mortar hit right in the back of the deuce-and-a-half and killed all these new guys. Larry didn't even get to his company before he got killed. When that happened I worried that I would get drafted, go to Nam, and get killed just like everyone else was doing. I talked with my dad about it. My dad served five years in WWII and he told me to go join the Army. I said, "No, No, I don't want to go to Nam and get killed." He said if you join for three or four years they are not going to put you in the infantry because they want to get all those years out of you. He said, "You'll get a better job than just being in the



¹ A M35 2 ½ ton 6 X 6 cargo truck used by the US Army. It inherited the nickname 'Deuce and a Half' from the older 2 ½ ton truck used in WWII GMC CCWK.

infantry or artillery.” So that is what I did. I thought, “I’m going to go get it over with.” I went down to Provo to a recruiter and I told them I wanted to join.

Barry Cannon from Cedar Fort went to Lehi High school with me and was one of my best friends. I told him I was joining the Army and he said he wanted to join with me. I took Barry down to Provo, Utah with me and we talked to a recruiter. The recruiter said, “I got a program just for you kind of guys. It’s called the buddy plan. If you both join for three years I guarantee you will spend your whole three years together. So we both joined on this buddy plan. We got it all in writing that we would spend our whole three years together.” We took our oath Dec 29th 1969 and we went to basic training on the 2nd of January 1970. We went to Fort Lewis, Washington for two months of basic training.

January and February 1970 was basic Training. Basic training was pretty hard physically and mentally. We had to learn how to be a soldier. They taught us how to March and about our guns. We trained with M-16’s. They just started using M-16’s when we went in. They had been using M-14’s but they went to these M-16’s not long before we joined. It was a lot of marching and a lot of hard physical work. While we were there, Barry and I both took classes at night for about a week and then took a test. We both got our G.E.D.’s while we were in basic training. We had quit High School to join the Army.

We graduated basic training and the next day we went to the bulletin board because they would put these lists up that would list your name, where you were going, and what you were going to do. They didn’t have the orders made out yet but it was a break-down of where you were going to go. It said that Barry was going to Fort Bennion, Georgia to be a flight engineer on a helicopter. They call it an F-E on a helicopter. My name wasn’t on the list. I went to my drill sergeant and asked why I wasn’t on the list, I didn’t have any orders. He said maybe they just didn’t get them all done. I told him to just make order for me to go with Private Cannon because we joined on the buddy plan. We’re going to spend our whole three years together so if he’s going to Fort Bennion, Georgia then I’m going to Fort Bennion, Georgia. He said, “Your orders will be coming down tomorrow. Don’t worry about it.”

The next day there were a bunch of new orders for the ten of us that were not on the previous list. They put out this list and everybody's on it but me. I ain't got no orders! I'm getting nervous now. I went and talked to the 1st Sergeant and asked if I could talk to the Commanding Officer. When you're a brand new private in the Army, the Commanding Officer is like God. They let me talk to the C.O. I went in there and told him, "Look Private Cannon and I joined on the buddy plan and we were guaranteed we would spend our whole three years together. Just make orders for me to go with Private Cannon. That's the deal, we joined on this buddy plan." The Commanding Officer said, "I'll tell you one thing about the Army. You don't do anything in this Army without orders. Nothing happens without orders. You'll get your orders." I told him, "I go with Private Cannon. That's the deal." He told me not to worry about it that my orders would come down tomorrow. The next day I still didn't get orders and Barry, he leaves. He went to Fort Bennion, Georgia and I'm still sitting there. Everybody in the whole company starts leaving and I still don't have orders. I'm just sitting there.



After everyone in the company left, I still didn't have orders so they put me on permanent KP duty² until I got orders. I'm doing dishes, peeling potatoes, regular KP duty and two weeks go

² KP duty is "kitchen police" or "kitchen patrol"

by. The next class of recruits started coming in and that company didn't know what to do with me. Finally they sent me to Fort Ord, California to a replacement company in March 1970. They put me on permanent KP duty (Bruce laughs) and I'm peeling potatoes, washing dishes, you know. I sat in that company for two weeks. One day a sergeant walks up to me and asks if I can type. You know, with a typewriter. I said, "Yes." I had taken two semesters of typing in high school. He said, "Ok, we're sending you to this company in Fort Ord and you are going to be a clerk typist. Get all your stuff and we'll get you your orders and take you over there." I put all my stuff in my duffle bag and they took me to this company at Fort Ord and I'm going to be a clerk typist. I was a clerk typist in this company through April 1970.

I got orders that I was going to go to Fort Shafter, Hawaii for a three month school in August, September and October in 1970. After the school I would go to Vietnam. It was data analyst specialist school. It was complicated. I flew over to Hawaii in a military aircraft. At this school we had to learn to be a data analyst. The most important thing about the school was we had to learn this secret code. As a data analyst in Vietnam I had all these companies I was responsible for. Every day, every company fills out a morning report in triplicate, three copies. For all the companies I was responsible for I would get a copy of their morning report every day. Whatever happened in that company; like if a guy got promoted, they got a new guy in the company, someone got shipped out, someone got killed, a guy got wounded; whatever happened would be on that morning report. I would get the morning reports for the 30 or 35 companies I was responsible for and anything that was on the report I would change into this secret code. The secret code was then put into the computer. If anybody got into the computer all this code would be a series of letters and numbers that no one would have any idea what it meant. I was able to read this secret code like a book. That is what I did. When I graduated that school I got a top secret security clearance because I knew this code. I had this top security clearance for the next two years.

When we were at the school in Fort Shafter they told us, "The better you do in this school, the better your duty station will be in Vietnam. It's to your advantage to do the best you can in this school. Me and a friend of mine named Jeff from Montana, both went to this school for three months. Jeff finished top of the class with the best score and I finished 2nd best. There was about 30 in the class and everyone knew as soon as they passed the class they were going to Nam. If you didn't grasp it then you would still go to Nam but not as a data analyst. At that point they could put you wherever they wanted; infantry or whatever so it was important to pass this class.

I flew in another military aircraft from Hawaii to Vietnam. When we got to Vietnam I thought that Jeff and I, graduating 1st and 2nd would be in the same place but he was sent to Da Nang and I never saw him again. I was sent to Long Binh. Long Binh was down by Saigon. I flew into Saigon and then took a bus to Long Binh. I was assigned to Special Troops Division, DSC (data service center). Creighton Williams Abrams Jr was the U S Army General over Vietnam at that time.

My job was mostly research. I handled a lot of the 1st Cavalry and 101st airborne units. I would get morning reports; like from 7th Cavalry, 3rd Division, Headquarters Company, Company A, Company B, Company C, etc. When a soldier first arrived they would usually send him to Headquarters Company. Headquarters Company would put it on their report saying John Doe

got here from the United States into Headquarters Company. I would change that into secret code and put it into the computer. Then the next day or two that man in Headquarters Company would then get sent to Charlie Company and put on Headquarters morning report he went to Charlie Company. Charlie Company would put on their report that he got there from Headquarters Company. I would change him to Charlie Company into the secret code and put it into the computer. A lot of times things would get so screwed up. A man would get to Headquarters Company and they would put him on their morning report and then maybe that afternoon he went to Bravo Company. They wouldn't write that he went he went to Bravo Company and I still think he is in Headquarters Company. In the computer he's in Headquarters Company but he's actually in Bravo Company. That happened a lot.

The morning reports would have how many people were in each company each day. It's called the strength report. Maybe there would be 222 or 212 but things got screwed up when the numbers didn't match the computer report. I'd lose the soldier. I'd think a soldier was in Charlie Company when he wasn't there. So then a company strength report would say they had 212 guys but I'd have 208 guys. I'm off by four guys so I'm wondering where the four guys are.

Why wasn't my strength report matching theirs. They knew how many guys were in their company because they wrote it down every day. Sometimes things would get so screwed up I'd have to go out to the company. You couldn't just call them up and say, "What happened to Joe Doe?" because there is no communication. You can't call them. Sometimes I'd have to go out and sit down with the Company Clerk and go over everything; "Where's this guy?" "This guy ain't here?" "No, he got killed?" "When did he get killed?" "I don't know, it was before I got here." (Bruce laughs). I'd try to straighten out how many guys were there, where they were at, and make sure they were in the right Company in the computer. It was a lot of research having to find out where everybody was. It was a hard job trying to keep everything straight. Everything that happened I'd put it into the computer but I'd have to change it over to this secret code. All day I'm just trying to figure it out so I can change it to the code to put it into the computer. I done that whole time I was in Nam.

I don't know how I ever got picked for that school or who made those decisions but it was a good thing. If I had went to Nam as a clerk typist, once a clerk typist got into the replacement company they could do anything with him. They could put you in infantry or artillery. Every company has a company clerk that would fill out this morning report – 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Long Binh was just like a Fort or military base and I was in an office. I'd receive the morning reports a week later than when they were actually written. My job was a lot of research and morning reports³.

I graduated the school as a PFC in November 1970 and was a data analyst E4 until when I got to Vietnam though the end of my service in December 1972. It was a hard job but it was my job. I was in Nam for a year and then I was in Germany again as a data analyst E4 for fourteen months.

I had a lot of bad stuff happen in Nam. I didn't have to go out and beat the bush⁴ but I'd pull guard duty at least once a week or sometimes twice a week. Sometimes I'd get shot at on guard

³ The company clerk kept one copy of the morning reports and the other two copies would get sent to data service center. They were kept for a short period of time and then destroyed.

⁴ Beat the bush = being in the infantry or being in the jungle

duty by the VC or NVA⁵. Our Company had so many bunkers that we were responsible for. We had to have two guys in each bunker 24-hours a day. Our Company had the night shift. The company next to us had the same bunkers but they had to have people in them during the day. Our Company would pull guard duty from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM and the Company next to us would pull guard duty from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. There were always two guys in a bunker 24-hours a day. We'd get shot at and they used to call it harassment fire. The bunkers are 50 yards apart and they surround the whole camp. At night the enemy would open up on a bunker shooting 20 or 30 rounds into a bunker and then they would move. You couldn't see them because it was dark. After shooting at one bunker they would move and go down two or three bunkers just trying to kill someone. They could see the outline of the bunker to shoot at. Sometime people got wounded or killed on guard duty. A few times they would have an attack big enough that they would load the whole company up and take us out to the bunker line to fight. They would be shooting at you and you'd be shooting at them, but at night all you could see was the blast of their rifle. We could only shoot toward those rifle blasts. So the only combat experience I had was on guard duty.

I never got wounded but I almost got killed a couple times in Vietnam by snakes. I've had nightmares about snakes. One night on bunker guard duty my friend Scotty was with me. Scotty felt something bump his leg. I grabbed the flashlight and it was this great big rat. So we chased the rat out of the bunker. About an hour later, he felt something brush his leg again and we thought it was that rat. I put the flashlight on it and it was a cobra sitting all puffed up about four inches away from the flashlight. We saw this cobra and we both jumped right out of the bunker. The cobra was still in the bunker. It never stuck at me and I think the only thing that saved us was that the flashlight blinded it for a second because it was pitch dark around 1:00 in the morning.

I almost got bit by a viper snake once. The viper snake is just this little water snake except they are dark green. We used to call them two-step snakes because if one of them bit you that is how long you had to live. The time it took you to take two steps you'd fall over dead. There was no antidote and if you got bit you were dead. One of them missed me by a quarter inch.

The food in Vietnam was bad. It was really bad. They couldn't even make toast. I used to eat a lot of C-rations from WWII because they were a lot better than anything they were putting out in the mess hall. I used to eat a lot of rice with the mamasan's rather than eat in the mess hall. One day the company commander got some new c-rations in and told me to come by the office to get some. The c-rations came in cases that were 2 ½ feet long and 2 feet wide. The cases were made of wood and wire. There would be wood slats running east and west (parallel) and then you'd undo these wire clips and lift up the lid to get the c-rations out. I was going to get these c-rations and I untied the wires and lifted up the lid. One of these viper snakes was laying on top of the c-rations. When I lifted up the top, it struck and hit right next to my thumb. I saw it, jumped back, and started hollerin' to the CO, "Viper snake! Viper Snake! Look Out!" The CO went and got an ammo can and put the viper snake in the can. I don't know what happened to the snake but I know I almost got killed by it. I've had nightmares about snakes ever since.

⁵ VC = Vietcong; NVA = North Vietnamese

In Vietnam there was nothing to do. We had a volleyball and a volleyball net. That is all there was to do. If you wasn't working you'd be playing volleyball. If you weren't playing volleyball you were sitting on the sidelines waiting for a game to get done so the winner could be challenged by another team. There were no movies and nothing to do on base. The USO only came once in a year. In Vietnam you were mostly bored unless you were working.

I left Nam September 27, 1971 and went home for a while before going to Germany. I should have been home for a month but when I left Nam I flew to Bangkok. I spent two weeks in Bangkok and then came home. Me and four of my best friends in Vietnam would go to Bangkok on R&R⁶. It was like the 1st week of Aug in 1971. I met this girl and wanted to marry her. When I left Nam, I got orders to go to Bangkok. The orders read that I could go to Bangkok for seven days to finalize arrangements for my upcoming marriage. I was going to marry this girl and bring her home. I went to Bangkok and had orders for seven days, but I didn't want to leave. I would go to the military airport and they would tell me to be there at noon tomorrow and they would get me on the flight that left at 2:00. So the next day I would go there about 4:00 and the plane was already gone. It would be a different guy and I would tell him that the guy the day before told me the plane was leaving at 6:00 and to be there at 4:00. They'd yell, "No it left at 2:00, you missed your flight." So they would schedule me for another flight a day or two later and I would do the same thing. I'd go two hours after it left. I said, "Oh there must have been a screw-up and I missed another one. Sorry." I did that for another week. I missed three or four flights. They scheduled me for my final flight and I said, "OK, I'm going to go." I couldn't marry this girl because she did have a birth certificate because she was born up country and not in Bangkok. I could have married her but I couldn't get her out of the country. While I was there I went to the US Embassy. I talked to the Army trying to figure out a way to get her back to the US. What I should have been doing but I was too naïve, was looking for someone that could have forged papers for her. I was trying to do it legal. I even tried to get transferred there. With my MOS⁷ as data analyst my orders came from Washington. The Army in Vietnam didn't decide where I was going. The day I actually went to catch my flight I showed up on time. I was going to fly out but there was something wrong with the engine and it wasn't functioning properly so they cancelled that flight and I got to stay another day.

When I left Bangkok we actually took a flight that went to Taiwan then we changed planes in Taiwan. We went to Guam, the Philippines, Hawaii and then flew into Oakland. I got to Oakland Army Base and went through customs. Everyone on the plane were G.I.'s. They looked through all our clothes and made sure we didn't have drugs or anything. (Bruce laughs) This Warrant Officer and Staff Sergeant said to me, "Let's see your orders." So I show them my orders. The guy looks at my orders and says, "You left Vietnam fifteen days ago. Where the hell you been?" This Warrant Officer is having a fit. I pulled out my orders that I could go to Bangkok on a delayed route and showed them to him. Then he really had a fit because a delay in route would be stopping in Guam, the Philippines, or Hawaii. Bangkok is the other way. There is no such thing as a delay in route to Bangkok because it's west, not east. He has a big fit about it and says, "There is no such thing as a delay in Bangkok, these are illegal orders." I told him the orders were signed by a full bird Colonel in Vietnam and that they were legal. The Warrant

⁶ R&R, military slang for rest and recuperation (or rest and relaxation or rest and recreation or rest and rehabilitation), is an acronym used for the free time of a soldier.

⁷ The Army calls their enlisted jobs MOSs, or "Military Occupation Specialties."

Officer was having a fit that I was gone for two weeks. He had a Sargent go and get a Captain and he shows this Captain my orders when I left Nam and orders to go to Bangkok. I looked at the Captain and said, "What the hell you going to do? Send me to Nam! This is what happened and if you don't like it too bad. What you going to do?" The Captain said, "Leave him alone, let him go home." The Warrant Officer wanted to bring me up on charges for illegal orders or something. I'll never forget that Warrant Officer. I thought he was going to have a heart attack. He was screaming and yelling at me (Bruce laughs).

When I flew into Oakland coming back from Vietnam I had a run in with some protesters. It almost escalated into a fight. There were protesters and a bunch of us GI's, maybe fifteen or twenty of us. We had just gotten off the plane and was walking through the airport going to security. The protesters were yelling at us, calling us warmongers and baby killers. One gal threw a drink on me which really pissed me off because I was in my Class A Uniform. It was some kind of 7-UP or Sprite fountain drink because it was clear. I almost got in a fight with her and some guys with her. That was a bad deal coming back. That was the only trouble I had during my service with protesters.

It turned out my friend Barry that I joined on the buddy system with, was in Nam the same time I was. I didn't know he was there. He didn't know I was there but we were both there about the same time. In fact, when I had come home on leave he was home from Vietnam on leave at the same time. At least we got to go to basic together but it was too bad that we didn't get to spend the whole three years together.

I came home for two weeks and then I went to Germany towards the end of October 1971. I was stationed at the Merrill Barracks in Nuernberg. I was in 569th Personnel Company. It was doing the same thing: Data Analyst. My job was about as high tech as the Army got back in the 70's. There were not many people trained like I was. We were few and far between. I spent the next fourteen months in Germany.

Germany was so different than Vietnam. In Hawaii when I was going to school, there were a lot of high ranking Officers. Especially at Fort Shafter – Colonels, Generals, Majors everywhere. You had to be strac⁸ troop. Your uniform better be good, your boots better be shined and you better be in formations. It was quite a shock going to Vietnam. In Nam is was like the TV show *MASH*. If you saluted an officer he would kick your ass because the enemy is going to know who to shoot. My company commander was very relaxed. He was not a career, gung-ho, lifer. I turned 19 in Vietnam. Germany was a lot more strac troop – formations every day. First thing you do is go to formation. They make sure everyone was there. I really had a good time in Germany. The Army sucked there because it was so strac troop but I never had to do KP. They had civilians that done KP. They did in Vietnam too.

In Germany I got to do a lot of neat things. I went to Munich for the '72 Olympics. I took a week leave and three or four of us from my company spent a week in Munich. Of course we couldn't afford to go into any of the events. The tickets cost more than we could afford. It was all we could do to afford the hotel and eat. We had a lot of fun. That city never quit, it was

⁸ U.S. Army slang term for "a well-organized, well turned-out Soldier, (pressed uniform, polished brass and shined boots)." A proud, competent trooper who can be depended on for good performance in any circumstance.

running 24-hours a day. I was in Munich on Tuesday September 5th, 1972 when they had the Munich Massacre terrorists kidnap and kill some of the athletics participating in the Olympics.

Munich was a couple hour train ride. That is how I got around in Germany - on trains. I had a top of the line job but I was only an E4. I think when I got out I was making \$224.00 a month.

The Army had a generator that had broken down. There was one guy in Europe that could fix it. So they sent me and this other guy with the generator in the back of a deuce-and-a-half to get it fixed. I did not want to go with this guy because he was a dumb red-neck. He was in the Army for 20 years, a Buck Sergeant, E5. With him being an E5 and me being an E4 he was in charge. He'd drive the truck and I was the assistant driver so we would trade off driving. I tried for a week to get out of this detail because I did not want to go with this dumb red-neck. I couldn't get out of it so I ended up going. We went to a little town in France. There was this mechanic there who was the only mechanic in Europe that could fix this generator. We had to stay in this town until it was fixed and then we were to bring it back. We stayed in this town for a week and I'm with this guy I don't want to be with. We each get a room and I ditched this guy. I don't think I saw him the whole time I was there. I had such a blast in that little town. It was a wine town and the whole valley was in grapes. There were a lot of companies that made different wines. They would have these pubs which was a couple of rooms in a person's house or the basement of the house. They would have a bar and you could drink a beer or some wine. They would have a pool table or dart boards. There was a bunch of these pubs in this town. The people were so nice and I had a blast there. It was probably the most fun I had while I was stationed in Germany. They would spot an American GI a mile away. The best thing about it was I didn't have to be with that guy I was there with. I just ditched him (Bruce laughs). The mechanic had to order parts and then wait several days for the parts to get there and I had a blast.

Another time I was in Germany, three or four of us got hooked up with this deal. We had to sign up with the Pastor or the church and it was kind-of like an R&R. We went and stayed in Bavaria in the top of the German Alps. It was right next to Salzberg, Austria which was a 10 minute train ride from Balvaria. We went into Salzberg and stayed a day there. I went on that trip and I had a blast. That was a good fun time spending that week in Balvaria. It was beautiful mountains, it was a beautiful retreat.

I had built up a lot of leave by the time I was in Germany. There was always concerts in Germany. We could take the train to Heidelberg or to Munich to a concert. I could go all over Germany on the trains. I went to a rock concert once that was kind-of-like a Woodstock deal. It was called the 2nd British Rock Festival⁹. They had had one the year before. That was a lot of fun. I spent a week at that concert. They played music 24 hours a day. They took a two hour break every afternoon to check all the equipment but they had two stages set up. When one band was playing on one stage, the band that had just finished playing would be on the other stage tearing their equipment down, and the next band would be setting up. That way when one band got done the next band could start. They would do this all day and all night. The concert started

⁹ British Rock Meeting held in Germersheim, Germany in May 1972, with over 70,000 attendees. Some of the bands showcased at these events included Deep Purple, Rory Gallagher, Pink Floyd, Uriah Heep, Beggars Opera Status Quo, Fleetwood Mac and Rod Stewart. The whole affair was heavily sponsored by the American Army (50-70% of the audiences consisted of G.I.'s).

on a Thursday and went through to the next Friday. So I was there seven or eight days at this concert. That was a lot of fun.

I left Germany and went to Fort Dix, New Jersey and that is when I got out of the Army. I was supposed to stay in the Army until December 29, 1972. I guess the Army cut me loose about ten days early and got out on Dec 19, 1972 so I could be home for Christmas that year. I came home alone on a commercial flight. Fort Dix is only about a ½ hour ride to Philadelphia. So four or five of us that just got discharged got with an Army GI that had a station wagon and he would load us up in his station wagon. We each paid him \$20 and he took us to the airport in Philadelphia. He'd make \$100 to drive for a ½ hour one way and back. After being in the Army three years we were happy to pay this guy \$20 to take us to the airport instead of taking the bus. I flew from Philadelphia to Chicago and then to Salt Lake. When I got home to the Salt Lake Airport my dad and Lynn were there to meet me.

The Army will grow you up fast. You mature quickly. I was a 17-year-old high school kid when I joined. You're not very mature when you join at 17. You mature a lot faster in the Army. It taught me a work ethic. After I got out of the Army I always worked. It teaches you good work habits. Going into the Army you're always working. There are also a lot of bad times that you try to forget. I'm telling you the fun things that I did and that is what I try to remember. I didn't join the Army hoping that I would go to Vietnam, I actually joined hoping that I wouldn't go. I think the whole war was handled wrong. It was a politician's war and not a military war. The politician's sent us over there just to get killed.