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Oral Memoirs
of
Rocco Muffi

An Interview
Conducted by
Megan DeFries
February 28, 2017

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

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Legal Status

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Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Oral History Initiative (OHI) and University Archives, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Megan DeFries

Transcriber: Lauren Eisenhart-Purvis

Editor(s): Megan DeFries
Lauren Eisenhart-Purvis

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Project Detail

The purpose of the Duquesne Veterans' Oral History Project is to record, preserve, and make available the stories of Duquesne's student and alumni veterans in order to highlight the many ways they have contributed to our country and to Duquesne University.

Rocco Muffi [b. 1945] is a veteran of the Vietnam War, serving in the US Army from 1969 to 1971. He attended Duquesne University prior to his service 1964 to 1968.

Megan DeFries was the oral historian for the OHI.

Rocco Muffi

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Megan DeFries
February 28, 2017
Home of Mr. Muffi
Green Tree, Pennsylvania

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

DeFries: This is Megan DeFries, interviewing Rocco Muffi, a veteran of the United States Army, for the Duquesne Veterans' Oral History Project. It is Tuesday, February 28, 2017 and we are at his home in Green Tree, Pennsylvania. How are you today?

Muffi: I'm great, and you?

DeFries: Great. Thank you for agreeing to do the interview. I'm really looking forward to hearing your story. So I just thought we'd begin, very briefly, just discussing when and where you were born and your family life.

[00:00:29]

Muffi: I was born in 1945 in Abruzzi, Italy and I came here in 1957 when I was eleven and a half years old and I've settled in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania] ever since, never moved out. So I lived in a couple different places in Pittsburgh, but it's—Pittsburgh's always been my home.

DeFries: Why did your family decide to immigrate to the United States?

Muffi: The American dream.

DeFries: Okay. What was that like as a child (beeping noise) coming to the United States?

Muffi: Uh, weird.

DeFries: Weird? (both laugh)

Muffi: Yeah it was—because I didn't speak any English. I knew three words—hello, goodbye, and thank you and I had to learn everything from scratch. So it was—it was difficult, but I started working the second day I got here at a—at a grocery store on

Frazier Street in Oakland. So when you—when you (clears throat) work in a store like that, you get to interact with the public, so you're forced to use the language. And by—this was April—by the time we went back to school, I guess August or September, I knew enough to get by and, you know, as the years went—went on I just picked it up like a duck to water.

[00:01:51]

And then when it was time to go finish high school here in Pittsburgh, (beeping noise) Schenley High School, and (clears throat) I was accepted both at Duquesne [University] and the University of Pittsburgh. (beeping noise) However, Pittsburgh was, at that time—was still a private school, believe it or not, and they were much more expensive than Duquesne. So I says—and they had offered me a scholarship to play soccer. I said, “Well,” he said, “But we're not sure about your English.” I said, “What do you mean you're not sure about my English? I've been here seven years, I just graduated with high honors from high school, and you're not sure?” So they wanted me to pay the first semester, the first year. I said, “No, I think I'll go to Duquesne.”

DeFries: Okay, so that's why you chose Duquesne. (laughs)

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: What were—what did you study while you were at Duquesne?

Muffi: I was a—I majored in modern languages and I took a lot of business courses and I've always been in business the rest of my life.

DeFries: Okay. What—now you were in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] all four years (beeping noise) you were there?

[00:02:58]

Muffi: Yes.

DeFries: And I understand the first two years used to be compulsory for male students.

Muffi: Yeah, I was in the Air Force ROTC then. I really wanted to be a pilot, but for some reason I could never pass the flight school, the flight test. So my eyes were good, physically I was [in] great shape, but I says—and I said, Well, you know, the army's always looking for guys, so I switched over to the army.

DeFries: Now, did you do that after you had graduated—or did you do that before you had graduated, planned—

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Oh, oh yeah.

DeFries: Okay, okay.

Muffi: So the first two years was in the Air Force ROTC—

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: —and then the second two years was in the Army ROTC.

DeFries: Okay. Was there a big difference between the two as far as the training or the experience?

[00:03:42]

Muffi: Well no, the—the air force didn't have much training there, like you said, it was compulsory. You know, we had meetings and we had—the army—now you're a junior and a senior, we had to go to summer camps (beeping noise) in [Fort] Indiantown Gap, outside of Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], actually. Two summers in a row. Four, five weeks at a time. So that's when we did some real physical stuff and get—get familiar with the weapons and stuff like that, but I was also on a drill team, which—we were very good at it too and we toured other schools and competed, so I fell in love with the army, so I stuck it out.

DeFries: What—what attracted you to the military? What made you want to join in the beginning? Whether it was the air force or army, what made you want to join?

[00:04:39]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Well, because I knew that eventually I would get drafted, at that time. I says, And I'm not going to go in as a private. So I chose to go through ROTC and I said, At least I'll be an officer. Not that it makes it any easier, but (beeping noise) it worked out for me.

DeFries: Okay. Can you tell me more about some of the campus activities you were involved with, because I saw from the yearbook that you were in quite a few clubs, like Spanish Club, Pre-Law Club? You were in Alpha Phi Delta—

Muffi: Yes.

DeFries: —Fraternity. Could you tell me some more about your fraternity and your experiences on campus?

[00:05:17]

Muffi: Well, I joined the fraternity spring of '65. I was initiated and I've been a brother since 1965. That's over fifty years.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: I'm now an Emeritus member, which means fifty years or more and I still stay very active with them. We're part of—we have [an] alumni club that's called the Pittsburgh Alumni Club of Alpha Phi Delta and we meet at least once a month. The first Friday of every month, except July and August, vacation time. So we stay together, (beeping noise) we keep in touch. Some of my best friends are fraternity brothers, believe it or not.

DeFries: What kind of activities did you do on campus with the fraternity? Did you do charity work or—I saw that you were involved with the Duquesne carnival—

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: —in the fall, what kind of—do you—

Muffi: Well, the carnivals were always fun, we sold things, we had plays. We were very active, very active. We managed to stay out of trouble (DeFries laughs) unlike these days; they get in more trouble than they want. But—and we were—we were well known. I think pretty well respected too. I mean, we didn't cause any problems, but the sororities were always nice to us. We had joint activities, fundraisers, (beeping noise) dances, parties, all legal and all good—it was fun.

[00:07:05]

DeFries: (laughs) Sounds like it. Okay. So what was campus like at that time because it's not how it is today. I understand it was still part of a neighborhood—it was still more attached to local neighborhoods. Can you kind of tell me a little bit about campus and what it was like being a student at Duquesne at that time?

Muffi: Well the Bluff, as we called it, (clears throat) it's—it's named after Bluff Street—there was still houses there, believe it or not. I took a couple classes on Bluff Street, in an old home and where the science center [Mellon Hall of Science] is now, was also homes. Where the pharmacy building [Bayer Hall] is, was homes and they had classes there. (beeping noise) The Student Union didn't exist. It was actually completed when I was a senior, in 1968. So I got to enjoy some of that, but we used to meet in Canevin Hall and at the bottom of Canevin Hall was a cafeteria, huge cafeteria, and all the Greeks had a table of their own. So Alpha Phi Delta had one and then the Gammas and the rest of the fraternities and sororities, we had our own table. You know, we'd go there in the morning. If you brought lunch, you put it on the table and made your name on it, nobody touched it. Well one day, this one guy decided, says, "Well, let's see what Rocco brought for lunch." I had a nice sandwich with peppers and stuff like that, and salami and stuff like that, and nobody would admit to who did it, who stole it. So the next day, (beeping noise) I brought the same thing, except this time I put all hot peppers in it and they tried it again. And later that morning or that early afternoon, I saw this kid was kind of crying. I said, "What happened?" He says, "Oh, I ate somebody's sandwich and it was all hot peppers."

DeFries: (laughs) So you found out who did it. Now, it wasn't a member of your fraternity, it was a member of—it was a member of your—

Muffi: Oh yeah.

DeFries: Oh boy. (both laugh)

Muffi: Yeah. Never did that again.

DeFries: (laughs) What did you think of the Union when it was built? I understand there was some controversy about the way that it looked, that it wasn't exactly popular when it was built.

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) No, I kind of liked it because they had—downstairs they had the—what they call the Rathskeller, they had a bowling alley there. I don't think it's still—it's there anymore, but the Rathskeller was like a—like a little nightclub. (beeping noise) You know, you could get sandwiches; you could have a meal. If you wanted, bowl a couple lanes of bowling, you could do that. It was very nice. We had all our military balls there. We used to have—the fraternity used to sponsor the May Ball at that time. Nowadays it's called the Valentine's Ball because school then didn't end until the end of May, first part of June. So we could have what they called a May Ball. It was always the second week or so in May and that's why we called it May Ball, and we used to have some big names, entertainers, and wouldn't charge much. Whatever money we raised, most of it went to charity and some of it to support ourselves, and it was the social event of the year on campus. And now (beeping noise) it's been replaced by the Valentine Ball, which is nice, and they still keep tradition. This year, they didn't have it because they were grounded there for about a year, our fraternity was, but they're back to full strength now, so—but it took a lot of involvement from the graduated brothers, to give them a hand, show them the way. Either shape up or get out. (laughs)

DeFries: Yeah.

Muffi: Pretty much, you know, I think most people liked the Union because it was a place to go. They had classes there; they had social events, meeting rooms.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: We would have fraternity meetings there monthly, anyway, if not weekly.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: It was—it was very nice, attractive place. So—and that started the renovation of the campus as we know it today. Believe me, it looked nothing like that in the sixties, but we made it through anyway. (both laugh) My degree says Duquesne University.

DeFries: Right. What was the climate on campus as far as the Vietnam War? Was there unrest or was it something that students were aware of, but it was in the background? How much—how present was it in your student life?

[00:12:29]

Muffi: At Duquesne, I don't think it was—there was never any unrest or any protests or anything like that, but we knew that if—we were on a three point system then, okay. A three, you got an A; a one, you got a C. So if you fail—if your QPA [Quality Point Average] fell below a one, you got drafted, if you were male. If you were (beeping noise) a female, you probably got talked to or maybe expelled. You know, this one fraternity brother got a .98 that one semester and he got drafted. So he went to the army for two years, as a private of course, and when he came back, he went back to Duquesne and the rest of his career he was on the dean's list every single semester. I guess he had to find that the hard way. Now there was a—I don't recall—in fact, we wore a uniform at least once a week—whatever, you were in either the army or the air force. It was well accepted. They knew that the war was going on, we were losing some people. Of course the opposition lost a heck of a lot more than we did, but still (beeping noise) we lost 58,800 people in Vietnam. Most of them males, of course. Females only served as nurses or medical fields, no combat. Now they're Rangers and they're SEALs [US Navy Sea, Land, and Air Teams], fighter pilots. God bless them.

DeFries: Do you—I noticed that in May of 1967—I don't know if this is something you remember—Timothy Leary, the apostle of LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide], came to speak at campus. Is that something that you attended or that you saw?

[00:14:37]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) No.

DeFries: No, okay. (laughs)

Muffi: No. He was a pothead. (DeFries laughs)

DeFries: Okay. (laughs)

Muffi: He was LSD, I think, was his famous thing. No, I did not attend that.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: I stayed away from marijuana. I couldn't even spell marijuana, I didn't even know what it was, (DeFries laughs) but I got to smell it a couple times and I says, "Oh boy." You know, you could be in a room with somebody that was—if they were using it, you got high. (laughs) I said, "I'm getting out of here." (both laugh) So no, I stayed away from that. Our biggest drug was an occasional beer, that [kind of] thing. Even in the army, on active duty, I had to stay clean because I was an officer—would

look—would not be popular for an officer, especially a company commander in Vietnam, if you were under the influence and you're trying to lead a company. So Timothy Leary was not my friend.

DeFries: What were your—I know you said you had joined ROTC so that you could be an officer going into Vietnam. What were your views on Vietnam? How did you see the war prior to going?

[00:15:55]

Muffi: Well, (beeping noise) prior to going, actually, I spent six months at Fort Gordon, Georgia. We took our officer training course. And then—I did very well and they said, Why don't you stay for another six months and—or another three months—and go to advanced officers' training, which I did. And they paid me TDY duties, which means temporary duty, and with the extra money that I made with that, I bought my first car there. I was twenty-three. (laughs)

DeFries: Very nice.

Muffi: A Ford Cortina, 1968. Well—yeah, it was '68—this was in early '69, I was there—and then I was shipped to Fort Lee, Virginia. And Fort Lee, (coughs) we had—we trained on civil affairs. Civil affairs meaning that you got to know everything there was to know about Vietnam, (beeping noise) the population, their customs. For example, in America if you want someone to come toward you, you use the index fingers, point them like that [gestures with index finger]. In Vietnam, that would be an insult because if you look at your hand when you do that, you could have a small weapon in there. So what the Vietnamese do, they go like this [gestures to come forward with whole hand]. They use their whole hand. I know you can't see this [refers to audio recorder], but they use their whole hand, so it tells that the person you're asking to come close to you, "Look, I'm not armed."

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: So that put them at ease. And then we studied every square inch of the map. Not just South Vietnam, but North Vietnam, Cambodia. We studied topographical maps, temperatures, seasons, different seasons.

[00:17:55]

You know, we knew about the monsoon season (beeping noise) before we got there. Monsoon season, when it rained for days and days, probably a month and a half or two. Didn't matter how many ponchos you wore, you were going to get wet. You're still warm; temperatures was horrendous. Five o'clock in the morning you got up and temperatures were around seventy and we were cold, so we wore field jackets. Reason we were cold because with those extreme temperatures, you actually—your blood actually gets a lot thinner. So by eleven o'clock though, temperature hit 100 or

plus, so off came the field jacket and you're back to short sleeves shirts. Sometimes it hit 130 [degrees], (beeping noise) and you do sweat, or perspire, excuse me. (laughs)

DeFries: That sounds unimaginable. Do you mind if I just back up a little bit to your commissioning. You were commissioned June 2, 1968.

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: And can you just describe your commissioning ceremony, what that was like?

[00:19:18]

Muffi: Yeah, actually it was about the same time I received my degree—received a degree at the old Civic Arena. It was a big attendance and later that evening, we had the commission ceremony, where everybody that was being commissioned—you had a family member that actually put the bars on your shoulders. They called it pinning. So I was going to have—either have my girlfriend at the time, Terry, or my sister. I says well—and I'm married to Terry, yeah, so my sister got the honor. (both laugh) My baby sister, Teresa. She eventually went to college herself and became a radiologist first and then she got a degree at Carlow [University]—not Carlow, the one up in—by the hospital up there.

DeFries: Oh yes—the name is escaping me at the moment. (laughs) I'm sorry about that.

Muffi: But she got a degree too.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: But I was the first one to go to college and then everybody else followed. Now we got pharmacists, we got—my only daughter—one of my daughters went to Duquesne and got a pharmacy degree there.

DeFries: Very nice.

Muffi: Recently, in two thousand—she graduated 2005.

DeFries: Wow. Very good. So I saw on your DD—or—yeah, DD 214 [Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty], that you were entering active duty (beeping noise) on February 18, 1969. Now you weren't considered to be on active duty after you were commissioned or—

[00:21:05]

Muffi: Oh yeah.

DeFries: You were, okay, because—

Muffi: Oh yeah.

DeFries: —for some reason, the date they had entered was later.

Muffi: Well, that's when you actually reported to a base.

DeFries: Got you—oh okay.

Muffi: Okay, but I was commissioned in June, but they said, You have six to eight months before we call you—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Okay.

Muffi: —for active duty. So in the meantime, instead of wasting time, I got a job at Joseph Horne's Company. Nobody knows what that is, but it's part of the—became part of May—the May Company and it was right downtown Pittsburgh. It was—the three major stores was Joseph Horne's, Kaufmann, and Gimbels. So—and it was—(clears throat) they welcomed people like us because you got to work through Thanksgiving holidays and Christmas holidays and I had a ball there. I got to work in what they call the varsity club. (beeping noise) We sold clothes to high school students, college students, mostly males, that's what the varsity stood for, and the manager there, of that particular department, was a fraternity brother, believe it or not. I still remember his name, John Fregelmeni, and so I was his assistant buyer (laughs) and I had a ball there. I mean, you can imagine big department stores with a lot of good looking ladies, a lot of young men like myself and, of course, by the end—by Christmas, I got my orders and it says, "Report to Fort Gordon, Georgia in February," and I did.

DeFries: What was your family's reaction to you having to leave for duty?

[00:22:49]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Oh, they hated it. (laughs) They said, Why is that fool going to a war? I said, "I'm not going to a war, I'm going to Georgia." (beeping noise) Yeah, but actually when I was on active duty, especially Vietnam, my—my mother chose not to watch TV at all.

[00:23:09]

Of course, I would call them almost on a weekly basis. I called my now wife—was my best friend at the time, female friend—I would call them at the last part of the—since I was in the Signal Corps, we had ways to communicate. So I'd call my switchboard, they would patch me to the air force switchboard, then they'd patch us over to Arizona, as Senator Goldwater had, what they call, a short wave radio. So when you're using short wave, you have to say, "Hello, over," "I love you, over." (both laugh) So, but I would (beeping noise) have to call, let's say, three o'clock, two o'clock in the morning my time. This being Tuesday, it would've been 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon Monday for Terry and she'd be at work. We were thirteen hours ahead.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: So—so you have to really place your timing when you called. What time is it over there, you know? They were thirteen hours behind us.

DeFries: Okay. So just to make sure no one missed a phone call and—

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: Yeah.

Muffi: So I called my—I would call Terry at work because I knew she'd be at work. She would—after she met me and a few other fraternity brothers, she decided to get a real job and went to work with Alcoa [Aluminum Company of America].

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: So she stayed there until she was eight months pregnant, two years after we got married. (laughs) (beeping noise)

DeFries: (laughs) So—so you went first to Fort Gordon for your officer training—

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: —and then you said you went for the civil affairs training at Fort Lee, Virginia.

Muffi: Correct.

DeFries: And they were both about eight weeks?

Muffi: Um-hm. (chair creaks)

DeFries: Okay. And then I see that you were promoted to First Lieutenant?

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: So after Fort Lee, when did you actually get your orders for Vietnam? Was that right away when you were on—went on active duty?

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah, well—

DeFries: You knew that's where you were headed?

[00:25:26]

Muffi: Well, while we were still at Fort Lee, we got our orders.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: And you got a thirty-day leave in between. So in that thirty days, I spent twenty of it in Italy, back in my hometown. I went over there lean and mean and I was like a 150 pounds, 160 pounds; all muscles. While I was there for twenty-one days, I gained (beeping noise) twenty-two pounds. (DeFries laughs) I mean, those Italians, you can't say no. "Hey, let's mangia [eat]. Have a glass of wine, have dinner," and this was three meals a day. By the time I came home, I didn't fit in my clothes anymore, (both laugh) but right after that, of course, we shipped out.

[00:26:16]

We left Pittsburgh through Chicago O'Hare Airport and Travis Air Force Base in California, and then to Hawaii, (chair creaks) Wake Island in the middle of the Pacific, Guam, and then Vietnam. Eighteen hours in the air. Well, I should mention also that (clears throat) before I went on active duty, I had never flown on an airplane. By the time I came home, I think it's in that article too, you'll see I had clocked over eighty-six (beeping noise) thousand miles in the air.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: That included the helicopter rides back and forth from Buon Ma Thuot to Nha Trang and they were at least once a month, maybe twice.

DeFries: You were well traveled by the end. What was that journey like, knowing that that's where you were going to end up was Vietnam? What was that journey from the United States to Vietnam like for you? What were you thinking?

[00:27:23]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Well, actually, it was—it was nice because I had two very good buddies, both at Fort Gordon as well as Fort Lee, and Fort Lee—actually the three of us, I call them Coleman and DeBartolo. Coleman was from Alabama, Southern accent like you would not believe, and DeBartolo was from Rhode Island, but make a long story short, he met a girl in Richmond [Virginia] and decided to get married. The night—let's see, he got married in—(beeping noise) New Year's Eve 1969 and I saw him like twenty years later, I says, "When was your born son—when was your son born?" He said, "September of 1970." I said, "Wait a minute. Weren't we in Vietnam then?" (laughs) because the three of us went there at the same time. He said, "Yeah. Um-hm, wasted no time." (both laugh) So I was with those guys, but we never saw each other in Vietnam because one went here, one went there. We were all in the Signal Corps too, so we were able to talk weekly, but we never saw each other. We didn't see each other until we actually got discharged at the same time. So next time I saw them was in Oakland, California, when we were coming home. Unbelievable. (beeping noise)

Yeah, so it wasn't bad because when I reported Travis Air Force Base, there were people that I knew there already, so I felt comfortable. And as soon as we landed in Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base in South Vietnam, outside of Saigon actually, I saw a sign that said—with an arrow pointing east—and it said, "Pittsburgh 12,500 Miles." (DeFries laughs) Of course, I took a picture of it. A lot of it is in those books [points to scrapbooks].

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: So—

DeFries: That's a good omen I guess. (laughs)

Muffi: Yeah.

DeFries: What was your first impressions of landing in Vietnam? What was the first thing you remember thinking or feeling when you got there?

[00:29:43]

Muffi: I think it was hot as hell, for one thing, dusty. But there were so many soldiers there, I really felt comfortable, you know. I wasn't scared, I wasn't afraid. (beeping noise) I mean, it's what you were trained for, so be that as it may, next thing I know I'm a company commander. I says, "Holy—" and they called—if you look at that first book there [refers to photo album], you open it and it says—there's a picture of me there—it says, "The old man," and believe it or not, I was only twenty-four and I was the old man. The old man is referred to affectionately to the company commander, regardless how old he is or not. He was the CO, the company commander—commanding officer is actually what it stands for. You were the old man, but except for five sergeants that I had under my command, everybody else was twenty-one or less. Eighteen and above.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: Nobody below—nobody below eighteen. All guys, so (beeping noise) I was the old man. (laughs)

DeFries: Wow. So your first company command was of C Company?

Muffi: Yes.

DeFries: Okay and that was at Nha Trang or at—

Muffi: Buon Ma Thuot.

DeFries: Buon Ma Thuot, okay.

Muffi: Um-hm. Central Highlands.

DeFries: (clears throat) Okay, and that was still with the 459th Signal Battalion?

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Signal Battalion, yes.

DeFries: Okay. So what were your main duties as company commander of C Company? What kind of things were you doing daily?

[00:31:20]

Muffi: We were actually building these (clears throat) signal towers that you see now being used for cell phones and things like that. We built those. So we could—every company that—every unit that came through that area were able to communicate with their battalion commanders, their brigades. We provided all the communications, anything from landlines, telephones, short wave, (beeping noise) top secret stuff, crypto [cryptography]. You name it, we did it. Anything with communications.

DeFries: Was your company embedded with another battalion or you were with the 459th in Buon Ma Thuot?

Muffi: I was with the 459th.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) You were with the four—okay.

Muffi: Part of the First Signal Brigade.

DeFries: Okay, okay. So what—did you ever encounter combat situations, being shot at, or mortared, those kind of things?

[00:32:27]

Muffi: Mortared, yeah. Actually, we were watching a movie one night, was *Gone with the Wind*, and it's a long movie, as you well know. So the first night—first Saturday we tried to watch it, was almost halfway through and, of course, there some incoming, some mortar attacks. I says, "All right guys, shut it down." (clears throat) So we shut it down and you get in your combat fatigues and we called in for (beeping noise) air support. Before you know it, the choppers are up there and their silencing the opposition and that was it. Two weeks later, we tried it again. Same thing. I said, "These guys don't want me to watch this movie," and that went on. I said, "That's it." After the second time, I said, "I'll wait until I go home." (laughs) So after, I came home, about two—oh about ten years later actually—my wife and—at that time we had—the two girls that we had had a cheerleading competition in Florida. So they went down there and here I am, I'm left here all by myself and I was living here. I says, "I'm going to go rent *Gone with the Wind*. I'm going to watch it all the way through," and I finally did. Hell of a movie.

DeFries: (laughs) Was it worth the wait?

Muffi: Oh yeah. (laughs) “Frankly, my dear—” (DeFries laughs) You know the rest. (beeping noise)

DeFries: I do. (both laugh) What was life on base like? What did it look like? Can you describe just what your daily life was like on base?

[00:34:09]

Muffi: (chair creaks) Well, it was dusty, like I said, but where I was, (clears throat) we had a company headquarter, which [is] where I spent most of my time. Next to it was a runway that could accommodate a C-30 [Lockheed C-130], our aircraft—fixed wings—and right opposite of that was a helicopter company and the enemy would always try to hit the helicopters. So—but they were—they were bad aims and sometimes one of the mortars came pretty close to us. So—(laughs) and one time I remember, the helicopter company also had these big, big planes—(beeping noise) helicopters, they’re called a Chinook—they’re those double propelled things—and they were so big and strong, they could actually lift a tank or a jeep. So—(clears throat) and we had built revetments for these choppers to sit in nice, so in a mortar attack, at least they would be protected unless it was a direct hit, of course. And like I said, they were bad shots. But anyway—so one time the company—my company commander at the time—the first month I was the XO [Executive Officer], the next month I was the CO, and my buddy, who was the CO—another Italian—his name was Philip Zuccani. He got into an argument with the commander of one of those Chinook helicopters. So the next morning, (beeping noise) the captain of the helicopter company, the Chinook, he decided he’s going to lift off straight up, move it over a little bit, right over our headquarter, and the suction of that took off our entire roof. (DeFries laughs) I said, “Phil—P,” —is name was Philip Zuccani, so his initials was PZ and phonetically it stands for Papa Zulu, so we call him Papa Zulu—I said, “Papa Zulu, you got to go make peace with that guy. I’m going to be here, you’re going to leave.” So they had a beer and that was it. (both laugh) Of course, I had to replace the roof.

DeFries: Right. (both laugh) Did you have Vietnamese that worked for you on the base?

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: What was the relationship like with the local people? (beeping noise)

[00:36:59]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Well, they were—they were very nice. We had some females that took care of the latrines, kept everything clean. Some even did some cooking. In the mess halls, we ate; they took care of the soldiers there. Yeah, we had a lot of Vietnamese civilians and we got along pretty well. In fact, the Montagnards

[ed. note: also known as the Degar, the indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands of Vietnam] were very tough soldiers, but they were Vietnamese. Of course, they were on our side, thank goodness, and we got to know a couple of them very well. One of them was a sergeant, he invited us to his village, not far away from our headquarter. And we're sitting in this village and he has this little—this little hut, little house on pillars, to avoid the rains when it came and we were over there drinking (beeping noise) rice wine. And the rice wine, the way they serve it there is [a] big pot in the middle of the floor with a six foot—a six foot straw and you're supposed to suck this out. Now, you got drunk not because of the wine, but because all the air you had to— (laughs) so I got sick, excuse myself, went out, threw up, that was it. (both laugh) I didn't drink any more of it. So—but yeah, they were very nice. They were hospitable. I got to learn a few words of Vietnamese, but I tried not to get too close to them. You know, they were still civilians, so you left civilians alone. As long as you did that, you were fine.

DeFries: Did you venture into the village often? Did you have to go to the local (beeping noise) village outside of base very often?

[00:39:00]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah, yeah, they had the markets there. Actually, we had to go from where the headquarter was, my headquarter was, to get to where we were sleeping—was called the Darlac Hotel. Well, it wasn't really a hotel, but that's what they called it, and like I said, the quarters were substandard, but course in Nha Trang then it was—it was a lot better, but the air force side was like a Taj Mahal. You know, everything they had was brick and mortar, asphalted, cement because they had a huge runway there. All kind of planes landed there, fighter jets, major aircrafts. That's the air force side. (laughs) The army side was still dusty, dirt roads, (beeping noise) but we managed. We used to go to the air force side quite a bit, their officers club, the NCO [Non-commissioned Officer] club. In fact, one of the NCOs from the air force says—he says, "Sir, why don't you come with me," he says, "I'll show you what (laughs) a nice club you can have." I said, "Okay, we'll go." It was—in fact, they were showing a movie there one time, the original *MASH* movie, and for six months, they refused to show it to the troops, allegedly because of, quote unquote, it was too realistic. I said, "Duh. (both laugh) It's a combat zone, buddy." So—but we did eventually see it and it was funny. Hot Lips and all the rest of those characters. Then it became a series on TV, as you well know. So that's about it. (beeping noise)

DeFries: Were movies one of your primary sources of entertainment or what other kind of—did you have R&R [rest and recuperation] while you were there or did—what other forms of entertainment did you guys have to take your mind off of—

[00:41:08]

Muffi: We had—we had traveling groups. We had entertainers that came from Australia, they came from Thailand and some of them, you'll see through the books, were very

entertaining, dancers, singers. They couldn't say the word—"We Gotta Get Out of This Place" [by The Animals], it was one of the most famous songs there and they could not pronounce the word river properly. You know that one song was "Rollin' on the River" [as sung by Ike and Tina Turner] and they would say, "Rollin' on the reever." (laughs) You know, it was still fun, it was still entertaining and that was all it was supposed to be and (beeping noise) yeah, so we got—we got to do a little bit of that too. Wasn't all ugly. We had some good times.

DeFries: What was your relationship like with your men that—

[00:42:10]

Muffi: Very good. I treated them like brothers. I said—because I said to myself—I said, If I respect them, they will respect me. If you don't have their respect, you could get killed—easily. Some of them by your own troops. You know, we heard stories, documented stories, that some officers were actually fragged. Fragging means when, if you're sleeping, they take a hand grenade, throw it in where you're sleeping, and you're gone, but that's because that particular officer (beeping noise) or maybe an NCO officer, non-commissioned officer, did something nasty to one of the troops. And that was real, it did happen. Thank God not with us. I was lucky enough not only to come home alive, but between the two companies, Charlie Company and Headquarter Company, was a total of 330 guys, 165 or so in each one of them. Thank God we all made it home alive.

So I'd say overall my relationship was excellent, especially in Nha Trang, I had an NCO, a non-commissioned officer—there was a mess hall—he was in charge of mess hall, but he had served in 'Nam for eight straight years. So his last name was Morales. His mess hall was known as (beeping noise) Morales' Palace. I mean, this place was unbelievable. Huge place, banana trees all around the place, the food was absolutely excellent. He spoke Spanish more than he did English. So luckily, for me, I spoke Spanish, so I got along very well with him. (DeFries laughs) On Sunday afternoons, we'd have a little bit of extra time; we'd meet in the mess hall. I said, "*Sarjento, ven aqui,*" [Sergeant, come here] we spoke a little Spanish. I said, "I want to make you spaghetti sauce today, my way." So I make the spaghetti sauce, we cook some pasta, and somehow, somewhere, he came up with the strangest things to eat, like a lobster or a steak. So I said, "Sergeant, I don't want to know where you got it or how you got it, but thank you." (laughs) He had ways. (chair creaks) (beeping noise)

DeFries: How was being company commander of HHC (beeping noise) different than C Company?

[00:45:03]

Muffi: Well, (sighs) (chair creaks) Headquarter Company was very—so different because you have a 165 guys that you're responsible for, but only ten of them actually work for you. The mess sergeant, the motor pool sergeant, or the officer in charge of that.

The rest of them are assigned to these other—to run the company. You need a mess hall because people have to eat. You need a motor pool officer and a sergeant there, keep the trucks going; the Jeeps, the Deuce and Half—two and a half ton trucks [M35 cargo truck]. You have the quartermasters for the clothing and so they're all spread out. And the only time you get called in is somebody gets in trouble and you say, "Well, you got to go (beeping noise) see the old man." So we used to issue what they call an Article 15, which is like the magistrate, you know. You're the judge and jury, "What the hell did you do?" (papers shuffling) And well, I'll tell you one story about the—this one afternoon, a beautiful Sunday afternoon, (chair creaks) it had been raining for a couple days. So this E4, he's a specialist—or a sergeant, like a buck sergeant [ed. note: military slang for a new sergeant or sergeant of the lowest rank], he decided that he was going to borrow one of my two and a half ton trucks to take it for a joy ride. Well, would you know it, he ended up in a rice paddy and got stuck. I guess he was on—out, I don't know, looking for love or somewhere. I said, "You're looking in the wrong place, buddy." (DeFries laughs) So he got stuck and, of course, I (beeping noise) had to—I was in charge of rescuing his little butt. So it was me and three other sergeants and a specialist who knew how to build what they call a dummy, so we could pull that Deuce and a Half truck out with a Jeep after they built this fancy little thing, right? I says, "You got to be kidding me," I said, "What were you thinking?" Well, he was an E4 on Sunday; by Tuesday, he was an E2 [Private Second Class. I mean, I was only allowed to take one stripe from somebody that did something bad, so—but he put five of us (chair creaks) in severe jeopardy and I went to the battalion commander and I says—I said, "We need to take two stripes from this guy," and the battalion commander says, "I agree, Rocco. I'll sign the papers. You write it up, I'll sign it." (beeping noise) He was an E2; that cost him big time. He never did that again. (both laugh) That's how it was different, I mean, you have these guys, but not all of them report to you. You know, maybe I knew 25 percent of them. I knew their names. The rest of them, you never saw them.

DeFries: Wow. (laughs) Now, Buon Ma—I'm going to say this incorrectly—Buon Ma Thuot is that right?

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: That's Central Highlands; Nha Trang is on the coast, right?

Muffi: Correct.

DeFries: So how was the base different in Nha Trang? Was the lifestyle different or the same?

[00:48:34]

Muffi: It was totally different, yeah. Buon Me Thuot is like you've been out in the boonies, you were in the middle. We had adjacent to us, we had coffee plantations, we had banana trees. You were in the country. You know, there were roads there of course and, like I said, we had a runway, so we got to see a lot of planes land there and take off. And a C-130 is the workhorse for the army and they can actually take off on a

very short runway. They're noisy as heck, but they get the job done. So the—and it was much higher elevation, so it was still hot though, very hot. Nha Trang, if you weren't on a red alert, you got to go to the beach once in a while. One afternoon, I did, (laughs) me and two buddies, called Nha Trang Bay. Beautiful place. I mean, the water was crystal clear; it reminded me of the Adriatic Sea in Italy. But we didn't get to do that—very much of that. That's—(beeping noise) and you were at sea level, you know. The South China Sea is right adjacent to you. The Bay is to your left and right between is the air force base and the army base. Air force base, like I said, was a Taj Mahal and the army was the army. (both laugh) Yeah, very different.

DeFries: You had said that your—your primary, I guess, duty or mission was defensive operations.

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: So what did that look like, your defensive ops—what did that mean? What did that entail?

[00:50:37]

Muffi: Well, you were always on the alert. You always had to be ready, so we didn't take any offensive missions. You know, we didn't go out looking for the enemy, okay, but if they should come, we were ready. I mean, (beeping noise) most of us were experts at whatever weapons we had. In my case, I had an M45 pistol as my sidearm. I was an expert at the M16 rifle that everybody else used, but one of my favorites was called an M79 and that was a grenade launcher.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: So, how far can you throw a grenade? If you're Ben Roethlisberger [Pittsburgh Steelers football quarterback], maybe you can throw it 100 yards or fifty yards, whatever, but this thing, you could go three hundred yards. If you aim it at a forty-five degree angle, you could hit somebody almost a half a mile away, at least that general area. That was one of my favorite weapons. I got to use it in Buon Ma Thuot, that one night that we got—before the choppers went up to silence where the (beeping noise) attacks were coming from. I got to use it a couple times and it helped. At least it told the helicopters where to go, so yeah, very different. That's what you call a defensive, you know, especially in the triangle. Even Buon Ma Thuot, where the people slept, we always had guard duty—(garage door opens) I think that's my wife coming back—(kitchen door closes) and you had to—you had to be prepared. In fact, I wasn't allowed in Buon Ma Thuot—when we had this crypto piece of equipment—I wasn't allowed to go in there even as a company commander because I didn't have a top secret clearance. So I says, "Well, what's it going to take for me to get a top secret?" He said, "Well, we have to apply for it and we have to go back to your roots, where you were born." (beeping noise) (laughs) So they had to go back to Italy and check out my background. I mean, I was eleven when I came here, how much trouble can you get in as an eleven year old? (laughs) But they went back there.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: So when I finally got my top secret [security clearance], they said, Okay, now you can come in. And one of the orders we had received from—on a crypto was, Do not shoot unless you're shot upon. I told the sergeant, I said, "Please reply, message garbled. Please retransmit." Never got another message.

DeFries: What was your reason for responding like that?

Muffi: I know there was—I was telling them, I'm not a sitting duck. Don't shoot unless you're shot upon, what are you crazy? So, one of the following few weeks later, I guess I was the OIC—it's called—it stands for (beeping noise) officer in charge—of the perimeter guards. So—[wife enters kitchen]

DeFries: Would you like me to pause for a moment?

Muffi: Yeah, go ahead.

DeFries: Okay, sure.

pause in recording

DeFries: Okay, go ahead.

Muffi: What were we talking about?

DeFries: We were talking about defensive operations.

Muffi: Oh, defensive. Yeah, so the one night I was the OIC, the officer in charge, so I went up to the sergeant in charge and I says—I said, "You haven't seen this message, have you? It said, do not shoot unless you're shot upon?" He said, "No sir." (door closes) I said, "Neither have I. Carry on." The next morning, there were a couple civilians, slash, armed people, that didn't make it. They got too close to the perimeter and (chair creaks) our mission was, you get too close, you know what you can expect. That's what we had to do.

DeFries: How did you deal with difficult times there? Did you have difficult times with any of your soldiers or any situations that happened—how did you deal with that while you were there, personally?

[00:55:11]

Muffi: Well, it was just part of—part of the duty, you just had to handle it—I mean, I didn't like giving people the Article 15s, but if you didn't deal with it, then other people could—other soldiers could take advantage of it. So you handled [it] while it happened. You know, the guy took my Deuce and a Half. That was Sunday, I

handled it Monday, Tuesday he was busted, and the rest of the guys knew that you shouldn't mess with the old man. That's how you handled it, seriously, and you just move on. And we find time to exercise. At lunchtimes, sometimes we used to play volleyball, in a hundred degree weather, in the sand, you know. It was sand over there and we play volleyball, sweat a little bit. And where we slept, especially in Nha Trang, it was a U-shaped type building. The army was over here, over here was all the dentists and doctors, and the other place was other soldiers—other officers. So it was right in the middle we set up this volleyball net and whoever wants to play, we played. Some nights I'd make spaghetti sauce and we'd have a party and that was it. You just handled it. We counted the days, as you see in my diary, tells you how many days I had left. Yeah, she did come visit [references wife, Terry], even while I was in Vietnam. She traveled 6,000 miles, I traveled 6,500 hundred.

DeFries: So where did—where did you meet?

Muffi: Hawaii. (laughs)

DeFries: Hawaii, very nice. (laughs)

Muffi: Yep.

DeFries: How long was your R&R in Hawaii?

Muffi: A week. So I only spent fifty-one weeks in Vietnam.

DeFries: What sensory memories do you have being there, as far as sights, sounds, smells? Is there anything that stands out to you from being in Vietnam that you remember?

[00:57:32]

Muffi: The food—they used—the locals cooked a lot of rice, as you can imagine, (chair creaks) but it was—it was all flavored in different ways. I remember people, even the locals, using drugs. Some of older folks, their teeth were orange-ish because they used it so often. Sensory stuff, no I really don't have any special things that was either bad or good.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: Yeah. They were normal people.

DeFries: Right.

Muffi: A little weird, but normal people.

[00:58:25]

DeFries: You noted that you had exposure to Agent Orange.

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: Can you tell me a little bit about that? Was that just from being in the highlands and the defoliation?

[00:58:34]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Well, they said anybody that had their boots on the ground was exposed to Agent Orange.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: Okay.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: Okay. It was just a—because it travelled all over. And I—I seem to see it more now as I got older because some of the guys that were badly affected by it, they said the first thing that goes is your legs. Perhaps your vision. I've had cataract surgery done on both of my eyes, but now they're perfect. I don't even need glasses, except to read. So next time I go in, I'm going to ask for bifocals because I hate taking them on and off, especially if you're using a computer or a calculator. I just don't like it. (both laugh)

DeFries: Yeah.

Muffi: So, yeah I'm still—I'm still handling that. I want to get it resolved because I was probably due some compensation. Especially in the Central Highlands, that was one of the main places they called Darlac Province. If you were there, you were exposed. (laughs) You didn't know it. We didn't even know what the heck they were doing. It's defoliation, it's supposed to be defoliation. You know, I can see it—in the boonies, it was all jungle, you know, and if you wanted to try to find the enemy, it's better because there's no trees there. (laughs) So that's why they did it.

DeFries: Right.

Muffi: In the meantime, our troops were there too and they got exposed. Some people died from it. Thank God, I haven't had any particular side effects or anything like that, yet, but I'm seventy-one now, so I'm dealing with it.

DeFries: Now, you received several medals for your service while you were there and the two you said you were most proud of were your Army Commendation Medal and the Bronze Star Medal. Can you tell me about how you received those?

[01:00:56]

Muffi: Basically, for being a good officer; was for meritorious achievement, not for valor, okay. Valor is if you're—if you're in actual combat, you're firing your weapon to kill somebody or get killed, but I was—as a first lieutenant, to be a company commander for eleven months out of the year, it was an accomplishment. So the Army Commendation [Medal] was for Buon Ma Thuot, the first six months. They said, Well, okay, you did a pretty good job here, take the Headquarter Company, see what you can do with that. And toward the end of that duty, they gave me the Bronze Star too, which is not way up there, but it's—

DeFries: No, it's an important medal. (laughs)

Muffi: Yeah. It's not as—yeah.

DeFries: And you said all of your men returned home alive—

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: —and safe.

Muffi: Yes.

DeFries: That is an accomplishment. (laughs)

Muffi: It's called luck too.

DeFries: (laughs) So from all your time in Vietnam, what stands out to you? What do you remember the most when you look back on your time there?

[01:02:10]

Muffi: The heat. (both laugh) I mean, it was just unbelievable. Some of the afternoon I said I had a hard time staying hygienically clean, I mean, because you could take a shower in the morning, but by eleven o'clock, it didn't matter, you know. You'd have to take another shower just to go to sleep properly at night.

And the one thing I remember the most is that one night I had worked like thirty hours in a row—we were exchanging money because we used to have—we got paid with what they called MPCs, military payment certificates, or as we called it, funny money. (DeFries laughs) It was—it was legitimate. You could use it anywhere, bars, PX—post exchanges—but every three or four months, we changed the colors of them, so that way, if that money got into civilian hands and they didn't have an opportunity to exchange it, they got stuck with it. In other words, if one of our guys in— (coughs) I would always preach to them, I said, "Don't go to the local meat market, don't go to the local bars. We have plenty of whatever you want on base. If you want a drink, I don't care. Just don't get drunk, don't do anything stupid and that's it." So we had to change them like that, so it was thirty hours straight that I worked. And that night—and this is in Nha Trang—we had some mortar attacks and

it was—BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] was right here—I mean, where we slept was right here. This is the mess hall, and a space in between was right over an open parking lot [gestures to indicate location of buildings in relation to each other]. The mortars landed right in the middle and I slept right through it. (DeFries laughs) Five o'clock in the morning, I said—I'm in the bathroom shaving, getting ready, and everybody's coming back with their combat gear, I says, "What are you guys doing?" I said, "What's up?" He says, "What do you mean what's up? Where the hell you been?" and says, "We've had a red alert, we had incoming." I says, "Oh boy." I didn't get in trouble for it. The battalion commander knew that I had worked too long. Thirty hours in that kind of heat and that, just goes on. (both laugh) I did sleep through it.

DeFries: How did you feel once you knew that you were short, once you knew you were a short timer and you didn't have a lot of time left?

[01:04:58]

Muffi: Oh, you stayed low. (chair creaks) You avoid any—any conflict that you could, you didn't take any chances. I even refused to drive my jeep. (laughs) I mean, in Nha Trang I really didn't have to. Buon Ma Thuot I did, just to go back from my headquarters to—to where the soldiers were sleeping. They would sleep in separate areas, [than] where we were sleeping. Just—just to get around. A lot of time we go right through the local markets, you know, went right through it.

[01:05:36]

We used to get care packages from my family and Terry would help package them. They included spaghetti sauce, salami, capicola, that kind of stuff—cheese and it would be marked cookies, all through the box, and it probably weighed ten, fifteen pounds. And the orderly I had working for me, he'd go and get the mail and he'd come back and he says, "Sir," he said, "These are some awfully heavy cookies." (DeFries laughs) I said, "Private, they're not cookies." (both laugh) I said, "I'll show you what's in there later," (DeFries laughs) so I did share with him. (chair creaks)

DeFries: Was it—did most people share what they got in their care packages with each other?

Muffi: Oh yeah.

DeFries: Yeah.

Muffi: Yeah.

DeFries: Did you get a lot of communications from home, in terms of—

Muffi: Oh yeah.

DeFries: —mail and—

Muffi: A lot. Well, Terry almost weekly. My sisters, my mother of course, couldn't write, but she'd have somebody else write it for her. Yeah, constantly. I still have a box full of them.

DeFries: Wow. And were you able to make—you said you were able to call fairly often?

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: That's good.

Muffi: At least once or twice a month. It cost me, I think.

DeFries: (laughs) That's good. Would you like to—it's been about an hour, would you like to take a break at all? Or—

Muffi: Sure, you want to take a break?

DeFries: Sure, we can for just a few moments? Okay.

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Okay, sure.

pause in recording

DeFries: All right. So we were talking about communications from home. And so once you knew that your time was up in Vietnam and it was time to return home, did you know that you would be discharged right away? Or did that—did you find that out in the course of returning?

[01:07:43]

Muffi: We knew that once we got back to the States, I would be a civilian.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: What I did not know was that they kept me in active reserves because we had served over there. We did not—did not have to—our commitment to—as an ROTC officer was eight years. So they kept me in active reserve and then they promoted me to captain while in active reserve. Although I never had to report anywhere.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: So—

DeFries: So you didn't have to serve another obligation beyond—

Muffi: Unh-uh. I was—they said, Because you served over there you can still be part of the reserve if you want to. In retrospect, I probably should have because really from '71, when I came home, until '92 actually nothing happened, except a little skirmish in—not Bermuda, there was a movie made about it—

DeFries: Grenada?

Muffi: Hm? Grenada, yeah, but other than that, nothing happened. But if it had, I would've been one of the first ones to be called, within that eight years, so that's why my discharge papers says November of 1979. That's almost eight years later, but says captain now and you saw it.

DeFries: Were you ever nervous that you would get called again? Were you nervous that you would get called again?

Muffi: No.

DeFries: No. (laughs) So what was your—

Muffi: Because after I came home in 1975, we actually pulled all the troops out of there and we took a lot of civilian refugees out of there. In fact, where I served—where I trained at [Fort] Indiantown Gap, that was used as a refugee camp for the Vietnamese displaced persons, civilians.

DeFries: Oh really?

Muffi: Um-hm.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: Barracks are still there. (coughing in background)

DeFries: What was your journey like home from Vietnam, when you left?

[01:09:49]

Muffi: Well, we were—we got our last pay in Oakland, California, which is right across from San Francisco, me and two other buddies. I said, "Oh, let's take a little ride to San Francisco," so we did. We got to see some straight eyed girls instead of slanted eye girls (chair creaks) at a club, had a few drinks, and that night I flew to Los Angeles [California], outside of Los Angeles, Orange County. Her [wife Terry's] aunt and uncle lived there, so I got to spend a night or two with them. I had bought a bottle of scotch in Japan on the way home and I gave it to them as a gift and they said, Well we're not going to open this until you and Terry come back and visit together. So—and as far as I know, we never made it back together, although she went back, and—but they still never opened it.

DeFries: Oh. (laughs)

Muffi: And since then, they've both passed away. So, but I spent a few days with them. Then I went to Texas, visited two fraternity brothers down there, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas. It took a week for me to actually make it home back to Pittsburgh because it was February. So I knew what the weather was like here and where I was coming from, you know, it would've been too much of a shock for your body. So I took my time to get home—like a week. (laughs) And when I come back, I was fine. You know, you get used to it.

[01:11:37]

I took a month off and started looking for a job and interviewed all kind of people. And I landed a job with Atlantic Richfield, that's a petroleum company, I don't know if you remember them.

DeFries: Unh-uh.

Muffi: It's called ARCO [Atlantic Richfield Company], then it became Atlantic again and then it became Sunoco. So I worked with them for twenty-five years. Well, that summer, we got engaged, '71, yeah, '72 we married, rest is history. (laughs)

DeFries: What was the adjustment—did you have an adjustment period coming home, where you had to get used to being home or being back in the States?

Muffi: No.

DeFries: No?

Muffi: No. I didn't have any P-P-S-T-D, whatever they call it.

DeFries: PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder]?

Muffi: Yeah.

DeFries: Yeah, okay.

Muffi: Yeah, I was fine. All I wanted to do was just take some time off and then I says, Okay, you got to get a job before you get engaged and think about marriage and that.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Muffi: Even though I told her, I said—I had money to buy a ring before that, before I went actually—I said—but you think about the ultimate what if, you know. So I didn't have to address that anymore, says, "Here's your ring." (laughs) No, I asked her nice. (laughs)

DeFries: Yeah. (laughs) Aw.

Muffi: And it's only been a short forty-five years.

DeFries: (laughs) Well, it sounds really special. She was with you that whole time while you were gone. What was your family's reaction to you being home?

[01:13:19]

Muffi: Oh, they were elated, you know. They all met me at the airport when I finally did decide to come back to Pittsburgh and my sister was there, my mother was there, dad was there. And actually, after we got married—the year after in 1973—he passed away in December. Had he lived one more year, he would have seen all of his children have at least one child because my sister was already married in '71; she was pregnant when he passed away and then, of course, Terry got pregnant shortly after that, in '72, they both had a child and two girls, actually. We had a girl first and she had a girl first. She had three; we had four. (laughs)

DeFries: Two of each you said, two sons—

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Yeah.

DeFries: —two daughters. (laughs) Very nice. Did you personally witness any certain kind of reaction from people when you said you had been in Vietnam? I mean, did you find that people were supportive or did you find anybody that was unsupportive to you being there? You—like your personal experience.

[01:14:38]

Muffi: Personally, no, because when we—in Oakland, California—well, we left all our weapons in 'Nam. But in California, we left all our uniforms there. You know, got back into our civilian clothes and we didn't even talk about the fact that we just came home from Vietnam because I heard some of my comrades were badly treated. You know, now they think we're—we're heroes. We're not heroes, I mean; we just had to do a duty, that's all. But some of them, somebody spit at them, call them names, baby killers. "Baby killers?" I said, "Geez." Yeah, it's terrible. You know, nowadays, when they come home from someplace they're treated with respect. Personally, I did not experience that because I would've probably killed somebody. (laughs) I'd want to do that.

DeFries: So, since your time at Duquesne and in Vietnam, what—you mentioned a little bit, but what alumni or veterans organizations have you been involved in—or have you been involved in?

[01:15:58]

Muffi: I'm a member of the Green Tree American Legion group. I meet with a bunch of veteran buddies, just about every morning. Most of them are veterans, different wars. In fact, one guy served the same time I did. He went to—he was an enlisted person, but he didn't go there. He served in Germany. Actually, it was funny because some of us knew when we were at Fort Lee that if you were single, you were bound to go to Vietnam. If you were married—at least that's the way it looked—the guys that were married ended up going to Germany. I said, "Damn it, I should've got married." But Lou was married—you know, DeBartolo—

DeFries: Um-hm.

Muffi: —but he got married the night before he was supposed to go. (both laugh)

DeFries: Didn't do it soon enough.

Muffi: Yeah, didn't do it soon enough. So, you know—so it was different, it was different. (chair creaks) But I adjusted pretty well coming home. I—like nothing happened. People didn't know that I had served over there for years. My family knew, my friends knew. Now everybody knows.

DeFries: Yeah.

[01:17:25]

Muffi: You know, I wear that hat proudly [refers to Vietnam Veteran hat] and in fact, when I meet at this meeting with these guys, they just affectionately call me, Hey Cap, hey Cap—just, Okay Cap. So we have fun. So the American Legion, I'm very much involved with them. We meet at least once a month and we have a—we do a flag raising ceremony on Memorial Day and then we walk to church and ride to church right up the street there and we actually do a Mass for the deceased veterans. We actually call out their names and their family members, if they're there, they come up and light a candle. If not, the rest of us light it and put it on it. It's [a] very, very, emotional thing. (clears throat) So we do a lot of that stuff.

DeFries: Okay.

Muffi: We do a lot of, you know, community service. Raise funds and that kind of stuff. Yeah, it's nice to be involved.

DeFries: Um-hm. And you said you're an emeritus member of your fraternity—

Muffi: Yes.

DeFries: —now? Yes, and still do work with them or do you just gather socially—[that] kind of thing?

[01:18:47]

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) It's mostly social, but we still do—in '71, we actually started a scholarship for the national [fraternity]. Pittsburgh Alumni Club [was] the start of it all and I was one of the ones that started fundraising, like raffles, (chair creaks) all kind of things to raise money. And we started with ten thousand dollars and that scholarship at the national level has over a half a million dollars now.

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: Last year, we gave out forty-eight scholarships, ranging from the smallest, 500 dollars, to the highest at 3,500 dollars.

DeFries: That's really—

Muffi: Yeah.

DeFries: That's great.

Muffi: Two—two of my daughters received scholarships. Gina and Julie [nieces] both received scholarships. You know, if you—the only requirement to apply for a scholarship, you have to be recommended by a brother or be a relative of a brother. That's it.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Nice.

Muffi: We want to see your grades, of course, and a transcript and a recommendation from your professor and a recommendation from the brother who recommended you and that's it.

DeFries: Very nice. (laughs)

Muffi: Yeah. We give them out every year. So that's a biggie.

DeFries: That is, that is. That's really helpful to a lot of students, that's great. What has been the lasting impact of your service on your life? Has there been a lasting impact of your service on your life?

[01:20:31]

Muffi: Well, you feel that you had to do something because like I said, I had no doubt in my mind I probably would've been drafted because I only had one brother and he never served. He was too old when he came here and yet he was too young to serve in the Italian Army and he was married. He married very young, at seventeen, had a child at eighteen— (noise in background) crazy fool, anyway, but I'm happy with it. I—I did what I had to do. I had fun and today, I'm well respected.

I've done presentations about Italy to several groups and I compare Italy to the state of California in the way they're shaped, their altitudes, their seaboard. It's amazing

how similar they are. You know, California the tallest mountain they have is Mt. Whitney, which borders Oregon. Italy has Monte Bianco, Mont Blanc, as they call it. Gran Sasso—Mont Blanc, is like five—almost three miles high. It's huge. Fifteen hundred, 1,500 feet, which, that's over three miles.

DeFries: Wow. (laughs)

Muffi: No, 15,000 feet, excuse me. (DeFries laughs) Yeah because a mile is 5,200 feet, 5,280, to be exact. (DeFries laughs) So—

DeFries: Wow.

Muffi: (noise in background) Yeah, I did stuff like that and, in fact, I'm even involved even right now [with] what they call—(water pouring) the Italians have a meeting, actually in your neck of the woods, in Mount Lebanon Library. They meet every Thursday and it's called Conversational Italian. (laughs)

DeFries: Oh.

Muffi: So when Terry recommended it, I said, "What do they want me to do, teach the class?" (both laugh) So I still speak fluent Italian. I'm pretty fluent in Spanish. [Wife Terry enters the room]

[01:22:49]

Mrs. Muffi: He got to see the world for free. (DeFries laughs)

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah. Yeah, an all paid expense vacation to the tropical zone. (Muffi and DeFries laugh)

Mrs. Muffi: His mother was the one that suffered the most.

Muffi: Yeah, I told her she didn't watch TV for a whole year. Well, the only—

Mrs. Muffi: (speaking at the same time) She could—she was—spoke broken English and she just couldn't understand why he had to go there and it was very hard for her, being that he was her favorite son anyway. Also, her baby son, so—(chair creaks) but he came back, thank God. Four kids later and nine grandchildren later. (laughs)

DeFries: Wow, crazy.

Muffi: Yeah, I showed them the pictures.

Mrs. Muffi: Oh, okay.

DeFries: Yes, yeah. I got the official tour.

Mrs. Muffi: Yeah, it's a little busy.

DeFries: Aw.

Mrs. Muffi: So—

DeFries: Just one more question. (laughs)

Muffi: Sure.

DeFries: What are your thoughts or feelings on the war now?

Muffi: On the war?

DeFries: On the Vietnam War. What are your thoughts or feelings looking back on it?

[01:23:46]

Muffi: Well, I think that—(house phone rings)

DeFries: Okay, go ahead. Sorry. (house phone rings)

Muffi: I know that history will show that's probably the only war we lost.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Muffi: But in reality, we did not lose it because Vietnam has become one of our best friends in the world. We do a lot of trading with them. They've come a long way. They buy a lot from us; we buy a lot from them. We made the people feel safer. They're independent. There's a lot of Vietnamese have become citizens and well-respected citizens. We could've won that very easily. If you saw on that map downstairs, we had the Seventh Fleet; we had B-52s [Boeing B-52 Stratofortress] in Thailand and Guam. You know, if you want to mess up a Vietnamese bingo, all you do is call out B-52, you know, but Hanoi—a lot of people don't know this—Hanoi has a lot of dykes, okay, like New Orleans [Louisiana] does.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Muffi: So all you do is you drop a couple big bombs in the dykes and you flood them all out and the war would've been over, but Washington [DC] chose not to do that. We felt that in many cases that we were fighting with our hands tied behind our back, you know, and we still lost a lot of people. You know 58,000 doesn't sound like a lot. We kill that many in traffic accidents throughout the year, each year in this country. It's unfortunate, it is, but nobody counts those, but the ones that—that gave their life—we could've won it easily. They just wouldn't let us. If I were to do it over again, I'd probably start with Washington. (laughs) So that's my view on it, but right, wrong, or indifferent, got to have an opinion.

DeFries: Is there anything else you would like to share today about anything we've talked about?

[01:26:29]

Muffi: No, not really. Like I said, I've had a pretty good life. You know, I worked—I worked my tail off before I went there, I worked—actually, when I got out of Duquesne, I actually had money in the bank, which is unheard of, you know, but I worked at J&L Steel [Jones and Laughlin Steel Company] in the summers. That was preparation for Vietnam because it was hot down there too. (DeFries laughs) I worked right in the blast furnace, but we had a lot of good money and a couple of the guys I worked there with—so called white hats, the bosses—both Italians, of course—they said, Rocco, they said, We're going to schedule your days off to coincide with ours. And you know what we did on our days off? Two days a week?

DeFries: Unh-uh.

Muffi: We poured concrete. (both laugh) They were contractors, so—

DeFries: Oh goodness.

Muffi: So I made a lot of money in one summer. My mother used to say, "Why you want to—why you want to keep going to school?" she said, "You're making all this money." I says, "Mom, it's not going to be that way all the time," and I was right. That's it.

DeFries: Thank you so much for sharing your time and your memories today, and thank you very much for your service to our country.

Muffi: (speaking at the same time) You're very welcome. And thank your husband for serving too.

DeFries: Oh, thank you. (laughs) Thank you.

Muffi: Were—were you—

DeFries: Oh, go ahead.

Muffi: Go ahead.

DeFries: Oh, well thank you.

Muffi: Um-hm.

end of interview