

Interview with: Walter Deeks

Interview by: Richard Killblane

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**Killblane:** Walter, will you start out by telling me how you got to be a truck driver and how you ended up in Vietnam.

**Deeks:** Basically, I was drafted. I was in one of the first cycles in the lottery where they went by birth date and got a low number; seventy-two was pretty low. Anything below one hundred and you were drafted. When I went in they asked me a little bit about my work status and what I did. I put down that I drove a truck. I drove a lumber truck after high school. I think that's what got me into a transportation unit. I went to basic training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, then got orders to go to Fort Polk [Louisiana]. I was really upset that I got orders to Fort Polk because we all knew that that was little Vietnam. I'm complaining, actually swearing, and my drill instructor came up and said, "What are you all mad at?" I said, "I'm going to Fort Polk." He says, "You're a truck driver." I didn't know what the labels were or what the symbols were for. I ended up a truck driver and I think it had to do with my prior work.

**Killblane:** When did you arrive in Vietnam and where?

**Deeks:** I arrived in Vietnam in September. I don't know if I stated my service time, but I arrived in '70 and '71.

**Killblane:** How did you feel about going to Vietnam?

**Deeks:** I felt that it was my responsibility. I don't know whether I was naive or what, but I just felt patriotic. My dad served in WWII and he was in for the duration. I just felt that it was my duty and I had no trouble with it.

**Killblane:** Who were you assigned with and where?

**Deeks:** I was assigned with 545 Trans [545<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company]. I came into country at Phu Hiệp, just south of Tuy Hoa Air Base. I started out as a 5-ton truck driver and drove a truck for a little over a month before I was offered a driving job on the Paladin gun truck, which was an APC [Armored Personnel Carrier] mount. It was a 5-ton truck with a hull of an APC on it and 50-calibers [machine guns] on top.

**Killblane:** You said, "5-ton." 5-ton cargo?

**Deeks:** Yeah, 5-ton cargo trucks. By the time I reached Vietnam that's basically what they were using for gun trucks.

**Killblane:** What was your line haul mission? Where were your routes and destinations?

**Deeks:** From Phu Hiêp, 545 serviced an area as far south as Cam Ranh Bay. We had one little trip that was another 30 miles south of that; I can't remember the name. We went as far north as the harbor of Qui Nhon, so it was a pretty good area. It was very scenic. I'll tell you, I love palm trees. Over there it was loaded and it was beautiful. We traveled the coast in that part of my tour. It was beautiful and I couldn't understand why we had a war over there. It was something else.

**Killblane:** I've heard that, too. Were the roads paved at the time you were there?

**Deeks:** Yeah. In '70, I'd rate them as about 65% paved. You'd hit spots where a culvert was blown out and you'd have gravel and a new culvert there. You'd have washout areas that weren't paved. Certain areas off the main highway it would be firebase or just dust and graded.

**Killblane:** While you were driving trucks, what was your normal routine? What time were you getting up, what was your routine during the day, and how much sleep were you getting at night?

**Deeks:** Well, it was pretty much a real early start. I know it was dark. I guess it was 4:30, 5:00 [am]. I can't remember, but I know it was darned early. If you got up and felt like it, you went to the mess hall and got something to eat. Then you went down to the motor pool and they told you pretty much what all you had to do; where you had to go and pick up loads. A lot of times it was over at the [Tuy Hoa] Air Base. We would go load up, line up just outside the motor pool, and then kick off from there.

**Killblane:** About what time were you getting in?

**Deeks:** Oh boy, that varied. From Phu Hiêp, I'd say 20% of the time we'd RON [Remain Overnight]. If we went to Cam Ranh Bay, it was an RON. You'd never return. We did a lot of local stuff on Vung Ro Bay, which was a trip or two a day. It was a short trip and then we'd reload. Those were good days. A trip to Cam Ranh Bay was a full day; I'm guessing ten hours or better.

**Killblane:** What were you delivering to Cam Ranh Bay? It was a support base itself?

**Deeks:** At the time I was there we were actually hauling Air Force equipment and shipping it out because the Air Force turned Tuy Hoa Air Base over to the Army. So we shipped Air Force equipment and we shipped bombs. I think we were picking them up at Vung Ro Bay and bringing them over to the Air Base. I remember sending pictures home of a bomb sent in two

parts. From Phu Hiêp, a lot to do with Air Force-made Napalm cylinders - anything with the Air Force - but we also had port supplies.

We had paddles of beer and anything that supplied firebases or the Air Force.

**Killblane:** That you'd bring back?

**Deeks:** We'd pick them up at the port and bring them...

**Killblane:** Okay, so you were hauling down Air Force equipment and picking up cargo at that time?

**Deeks:** At that time we did because it was a change where the Air Force was turning Tuy Hoa [over to the Army]. I was really only down in Phu Hiêp for about four months.

**Killblane:** Four months? Who else was there? What other Transportation units were there? What battalion did you belong to?

**Deeks:** The only one was 545. We pretty much serviced that whole area there, the Tuy Hoa Air Base, and goods coming out of Cam Ranh or Vung Ro. We had a Korean compound that was close, but no transportation [units]. I'm pretty sure we were the only one.

**Killblane:** When did you get picked for a gun truck?

**Deeks:** There was a lot bearing on that. First of all, there was a question about me. I was very naïve. I never did drugs and never have to this day done drugs. I was there and young and the guys were wearing beads around their neck that looked cool. So I had a set of beads around my neck, and the actual first truck they assigned me to had "Mary Jane" on the armor plating of the door. The guy I rode with was training me a little bit on it. I said, "So who's Mary Jane?"

And he kind of had a smirk on his face and he said, "Oh, that was the last driver's girlfriend." They watched me closely and I couldn't figure out why. I said, "Why are the lifers watching me?" Then, somebody finally said, "Well you know what Mary Jane is. It's the code name for marijuana." I quickly painted that off because I was raised to be a decent guy. And there was a question right from there and that question was asked of me because I had a set of beads on. We had three platoons in 545, all truck drivers. Two of them were juicers or non-druggies. They watched you and would send you to the druggie platoon.

**Killblane:** They kept all the druggies in one platoon?

**Deeks:** Pretty much, yeah.

**Killblane:** Didn't that cause a problem?

**Deeks:** It helped the higher-ups because they could keep an eye on them. I think they tried to keep it under wraps.

**Killblane:** So, why did you get picked for the gun truck?

**Deeks:** Because there were guys that knew me and they said, “No, Deeks is okay, he doesn’t do that stuff.” There was a rule in gun trucks. I’ve heard other gun truckers say that they didn’t allow drinking or pot or drugs. Ours was basically no drugs, because on our gun trucks you were juiced or you drank. But you didn’t have problems either. You had to be a cut above the rest. You had to be a good driver, somebody that could be trusted. They told me point-blank, “We had a little trouble with you because...” I said, “I hang around everybody. If he’s a dooper, I’m big enough to say, ‘No, I don’t need it.’ And they offered, they kept trying to pester me, but I never did it.” And they said, “Well, that’s good, we thought you were decent.” He said, “Would you drive? We need a driver and eventually you’ll be a gunner.” So I said, “Yeah.” I honestly want to complement drivers. I drove for a short period and I want to complement drivers because when I drove, I felt very insecure. It was just me and my M16, and you had to get through the kill zone. I looked at the gun trucks and when you had three .50 calibers and all that fire power, I felt you had a better chance. I felt better in numbers, I felt better as a team. I’ve always been a team player, played sports in high school, so I just felt better about being part of a team. I wasn’t much of a loner, but a lot of guys were loners. They just assumed it be them and their truck. I give them a lot of credit because as far as bravery goes, I’ve seen as much bravery in a truck driver as I’ve seen in gun truckers. I’ve seen where truck drivers would pull off trucks on fire. They’d slow up and pick up drivers and we’d question, “Where the hell’s the driver in this thing?” The truck’s all blown up and the driver [of the next truck] slowed up and picked him up. They took care of themselves until a gun truck would get in. So I was much respected in this unit.

**Killblane:** How was driving for a gun truck different from driving your regular truck?

**Deeks:** You ran at faster speeds and with heavier trucks. Your trucks were loaded and the APC-mount gun truck was heavier. We had the armor plating and it was a little tougher to handle than the average truck. And it went at faster speeds to get up into a kill zone. You felt a little more responsible because if you crashed the truck or whatever, you just crashed the truck to take care of yourself and the three guys on the back. You had to be a good driver. We didn’t want anybody that didn’t know what they were doing.

**Killblane:** So, when an ambush broke out you, just automatically drove into it? Or did you wait for instructions from the supervisor?

**Deeks:** Instructions, yeah. You had to wait for your radio operator. He would get the contact, and then he'd say, "Come on, pass," and they'd be waving truckers to stop. They stopped what they had and left them behind the ambush and then you'd drive right into the kill zone. You just listen basically to your NCOIC, and he's on the radio. You kept the truck running. Then they'd toss you down the M79; ours had a 60 [M60] up there. You'd use an M60 up in the front. You kept it running and fired up the area the best you could.

**Killblane:** What was the crew for your gun truck?

**Deeks:** Our gun truck?

**Killblane:** The first one, the Paladin.

**Deeks:** We had three gunners and a driver. We had a luxury in 545. Very few times we ran without a full crew. I don't know whether it was a blessing or what, but a lot of guys said they only ended up with two gunners in the back and a driver, and that was a short crew. You wanted all your fire power. The way the Paladin was set up was two rear gunners and . . . it was just basically what our APC would look like.

**Killblane:** How long were you on the Paladin before you went to the Boss?

**Deeks:** I was briefly on the Paladin. I was on the Paladin for a month, it was very short. I really drove it most of the month and then towards that last couple of weeks they had a guy get short and offered me a gun. Then I was on that. We had moved to Tuy Hoa Air Base, and it was probably three to four months that cycled. I remember I spent Christmas at Tuy Hoa Air Base. It was the end of '70, just shortly after the holidays, when we got word that we were leaving and going up to Cha Rang Valley in the Central Highlands. Then they gave us a choice. It was really rare that they asked the crew, "What did you think of us?" And I had my input. It was a very top-heavy truck and very dangerous on the hairpin turns. Your driver really had to know how to drive to keep that thing because you'd build up speeds coming down a mountain pass and you could lose control. It was top-heavy, and we kind of said that much to the guy that built it.

**Killblane:** Who built the Paladin?

**Deeks:** It was Russ . . . I've got his picture in my mind.

**Killblane:** You can fill it in later. You moved to . . .

**Deeks:** Rusty Buckner.

**Killblane:** So, you moved down to Qui Nhon, right? Why did they move you?

**Deeks:** We had taken over the [Tuy Hoa] Air Base. I think we were in the early phase of '71 when they were starting to consolidate things. Like I said, we moved a lot of the Air Base out of there and a lot of the aircraft equipment from the Air Force too. We had done what they wanted. In fact, we did away with Vung Ro Bay and we moved everything out of there. I don't know if they closed that port or what, but they didn't use it anymore. It seemed like we were pretty much done. I don't know what their strategy was, but they just said, "We could use you up there in the Central Highlands and in Cha Rang Valley." Other companies had moved up north and we just got put in a slot in Cha Rang Valley.

**Killblane:** Your company moved to Cha Rang Valley?

**Deeks:** Yeah, 545 Trans moved to Cha Rang Valley.

**Killblane:** You kind of mentioned how you would have liked to get rid of the Paladin. How did you end up on the Boss?

**Deeks:** We had guys steadily DROSing [Date Returned From Overseas]. It seemed like we moved in a heavy cycle in 545 with a lot of young guys. They had moved into gun trucks and they wanted a gunner. I didn't like driving as much; it was hot and I wanted to be gunner. They said, "Hey, we've got an opening for a gunner, the guy wants to stay as a driver." You always drove first, then you got to be a gunner eventually. They had a gunner opening on the Boss and they gave me the rear gun, and that's pretty much what I did the rest of my tour.

**Killblane:** How did you like that job?

**Deeks:** I liked that a lot. You felt in control.

**Killblane:** How many ambushes were you involved in?

**Deeks:** We took sniper fire on numerous occasions. Sometimes a rocket or a mine went off. I can't count that. Really, when I break it down, I was in about five or six pretty notable, pretty rough ambushes that I really remember.

**Killblane:** Could you describe them?

**Deeks:** The very first one that we were in, I remember real well. We had just moved up to Cha Rang [Valley]. They had an engineering outfit that was going to move out of there. They were in a firebase up there, and they were moving southbound to Tuy Hoa. The 545 serviced that area and we had 5-ton cargo trucks, so we were in a troop movement. They just would always move them with 5-ton cargo trucks. We spent the night there and got to know the engineer guys. They

had what I call a pom-pom gun, and we watched that work out. It was eerie spending the night on a firebase, kind of out in Timbuktu, I can't remember where it was, but we went out there and picked them up. We waited and spent the night while they were loading up on our trucks. They had what we called a Quad 50 for their own protection, but they didn't have the trucks to move their whole company, so we loaded them up and were heading back down towards Tuy Hoa. I can't remember where we moved them to, but they [the North Vietnamese Army (NVA)] hit their Quad 50. Usually they tried to hit a gun truck or the trucks. I remember we drove up into the ambush. A driver was trained to stay with the truck unless it was blown up. If it was shot and blown up, they were to get it off the road and hop a ride with another guy. Well, it was unusual to pull into an ambush and see guys – GIs [Government Issue] - all in the ditches. They piled out of their trucks and got in the ditches, which was their normal response. And we went into the ambush saying, "Shit, look at all the green here, it's our own guys." You had to really be smart when you were firing.

It was a real trick because it was a command-detonated mine alongside the hill. There were cutouts in the road where a hill used to come down and they had cut it out so the road could wind around. Then there was an area with three houses. It was just beyond this cutout that the initial explosion had hit the Quad 50 and messed those guys up real bad. Then we pulled in there. It [the mine] had hit that and another truck and there were three or four dead. But it was unusual because you had these guys and had to really watch for them. We were firing up the area where the explosion came from. Later on we found out that the initial attack was a mine that was underneath a culvert. It was detonated from out on the rice patties. You could see the wire went out there, and the guys behind the dike on the patty command-detonated it.

I had been on a gun truck enough to know you didn't shoot the houses; you didn't shoot anything that you weren't receiving some fire from. You just didn't fire the area up unless it was bush. We had a young guy on there who had been training to be our driver at the time, and I yelled at him, "We're firing on the house and we're not getting any fire from there." At the time, we had heard the news about Calley [Lt. William Calley, tried and convicted for his part in the massacre of unarmed civilians at My Lai] and I didn't want my truckers in the wringer. I said, "Hey, we're not receiving fire. All I can see is that you're going to kill the occupants of that house." Honest to God, I don't know how they lived through it. After this was over a woman, a child, and a pig come out of that house and it looked like Swiss cheese. They must have been

pasted to the floor or had something underneath. We didn't have any locals killed, but they shot the roof - the clay tile roof - and every time we'd go by I remember looking at those houses. I felt sorry for them, but their problem was that the explosion had come from that side of the hill, and that's deceptive. I remember the worst ambush I was at was NVA and there was a mine and some small arms fire, and that's basically what this one was.

**Killblane:** What was your normal position in the convoy?

**Deeks:** Well, ours was a gun truck, so it was either the second or third gun truck in the convoy. We had Mickey Toms, which was a maintenance truck that tailed at the end, and basically you had a ¾-tonner jeep that led the convoy. So we were always in the middle, the second or third gun truck in the convoy.

**Killblane:** Tell me about some of the other ambushes. What happened?

**Deeks:** We had one in the Mang Giang Pass where there was another command-detonated mine. It had blown up one truck and it was on fire. We had pulled up right next to it. I hated having to Charlie/Charlie, or have anybody that was in command ride in your truck, because it was a responsibility. This guy had us pull up close to this truck on fire loaded with bombs. The front of the thing's on fire and it's loaded with bombs. He said, "Pull up there, pull up closer to check to see if a driver's in there." God, I'm sitting there in the back firing up the low side of the road with a mountain on the other side. It just made me nervous as hell to be next to that truck with the bombs on it. Eventually they just took another truck and pushed it over the side.

**Killblane:** Tell me about some of the others.

**Deeks:** That was the first time I had the gun truck hit. We had a bullet hole through the mirror after it was all over. We knew we'd heard the rounds fired at us. That was the closest and the first time I had one hit the truck. That was the first time our truck took any kind of hit. Thank God it never got hit with a B40 rocket or anything. We were very lucky to have a good record with the Boss.

**Killblane:** Tell me about some of the others. What about the one with Dahl [SPC4 Larry Dahl, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient for saving the lives of his gun truck members while sacrificing his own during an ambush near An Khe, Binh Dinh Province]?

**Deeks:** That was an unusual incident. Our truck had three different paint jobs on it. We changed the paint and the name always stayed the same. At the time our truck was being painted, we were down and had the day off. My good friend Raymond Weeks was on the Playboys. Their driver,

they called him Fat Boy, had clap, so he was on clap call. I don't know if that's necessary, you may want to . . . He was on sick call, let's put it at that. Raymond told me that was the reason they asked me to drive their truck. I hadn't driven in a long while, but you didn't turn anybody down. They would have done the same for me. I said, "Yeah, sure." I could have had the day off and I kicked myself in the butt, because it was the worst ambush I was ever in. It was the old adage, "You never volunteer for anything because it'll bite you in the ass," and this one did. I said, "Sure, I'll drive." So I drove the Playboys that day. We were heading north, and low and behold, we were escorting tankers. I hated escorting tankers and rarely did we do it because we were 545, a 5-ton cargo company. So nine times out of ten we escorted our own trucks. We were a spare truck that day - the Playboys - so they put us in. Actually, they used two of our trucks. They didn't have anybody for that day, and they used the Creeper in the front and the Playboys as the second one. And again we had the convoy commander, a Lieutenant, with us. I wish I could remember his name. I asked Raymond if he remembered, he doesn't. We were headed north and we had just gotten above the An Khe Pass. Notoriously, when you go through An Khe Pass your convoy stretches out and the trucks in the front of the convoy would slow down when they got at the top to let the convoy catch up. Well, they hit our first gun truck, the Creeper, right at that slow-up period just on the top of the An Khe Pass. This was worse because this was NVA, and this was the only time I was ever hit by the NVA. We were told later, and you could tell by their uniforms. These were uniformed people, and they were dug in. They had positions dug in all over the field. I can't tell you what strength they had. There was a ton of them out there, I'm guessing forty or fifty that you could see. I don't know what their strength was.

**Killblane:** What was your position in that convoy?

**Deeks:** We were Charlie/Charlie with Bravo Commander. We were third. The lead vehicle was the Creeper. We were the third gun truck, the last gun truck.

**Killblane:** Was the Untouchable there?

**Deeks:** Not that I remember seeing. I asked Raymond Weeks that one and he said, "No."

**Killblane:** The initial truck, the Creeper . . .

**Deeks:** The normal thing to say was, "Contact, contact, contact." What we heard out of Sergeant McEarchin was, "Help, help, they shot my tires out." We called, "Contact, contact." He was pretty nervous. We pulled up in there and on the way in we saw one tanker that was shot up and disabled, and the next tanker had bullet holes all along it. It was hit with a B40 rocket and was a

twisted mess. Then in front of that was the Creeper. On the way in, an NVA jumped up in the ditch and fired a B40 rocket right at me. I watched it and I must have slowed up and let off the gas enough, but they had the tendency to rise. I think he was awful nervous, that truck coming at him with all the guns. I give him a lot of credit. I would have never have done that, jumped up and tried to do that. It just cleared me, and I believe the guys in the back had to duck because they were another two or three feet ahead higher than me and he was aiming at the driver. They were smart. You got to knock the driver and the front of the truck out to stop it, because the armor plating. They knew enough that the armor plating was designed to stop it. So he was aiming at me, and thank God it rolled up over. And it sounded like . . .

**Killblane:** It sounded like a what?

**Deeks:** It looked about the size of a softball, and it was just a flame that you could hear crackling, like a rocket. They said it was RPG [Rocket-Propelled Grenade]. It blew off behind our truck. The guy which was behind me, which I believe was Loudon - we had two 50s [50-caliber machine guns] on either side - fired right over the top of me and I felt like I was driving an airplane because he shot right in and killed that guy. I remember it just hurt like all get out because of my ears. I couldn't hear for three days after that. And he killed them. Then we pulled up and we had to Charlie/Charlie. He'd get you to pull right up in next to these trucks that were blown up.

**Killblane:** The trucks were burning? These were tankers?

**Deeks:** The tankers, yeah. No, I think they were just knocked out. There wasn't any burning that I remember, but I remember them pissing out; luckily it was diesel fuel. You could go along and see bullet holes peeing it out. It didn't catch on fire, but the front of that truck that we pulled up next to was really tore up. [Ellis] McEarchin was there to help them, and we were there firing up the area. They were all over alongside the road. I could see them because I would stay there driving.

**Killblane:** McEarchin?

**Deeks:** Sergeant McEarchin in the Creeper. We could see his truck. All the tires were shot out of it and he was firing in that. So, we pulled within probably 30 yards of him. We pulled up close to the second tanker and he was shot up also. We pulled up next to the second tanker that was blown up, then we were firing up the area. We had pulled past the hill where the guy had fired the B40 rocket at us. That's the actual hill where Larry Dahl was killed. They pulled close to that

area and there was a guy up on top of that. But I'll get to that later. We pulled up close to there and were helping Mac [Sergeant McEarchin] to fire up the area and they were all over the place.

I remember looking out through the armor plating and seeing the hillside was on the one side here. There was a big, long area where there were trees and you could see ten, fifteen of them running from our fire. They had gotten the initial attack so there were trying to get away. We were firing on them. They had to toss me down the M79, and I was shooting the M79 out there at them. And it was long ambush because not all of them would run, they were just getting in a better area away from the road because the ones that were close were all shot. They were pretty much killed, but some of them were repositioning in that.

It lasted a long time and it was so evidently bad that the Lieutenant called for help, air cover, and they said, "We have a tank coming in." They brought a tank from up in the front of the convoy where we were headed. They always had tanks to guard culverts, and that tank came into the ambush. We also had air cover come in. We had choppers come in and work out, it was that bad. So, we had the air cover and the tank that had come in. I guess according to the word, they sent a convoy, or a convoy asked if they could help, and that's when Brutus came in.

I, for the life of me, believe they came from where we were coming from. Some people dispute that. It came from where we had just come from, so that tells me it was behind the convoy. So, it came from behind us, the convoy behind us. I remember them coming in and using their mini-gun. We were thankful for any help we could get. They were firing their mini-gun, and then we noticed that they weren't getting much out of it. We said, it cooked off. It was smoking or whatever and they were working on it. When they started working on it, I was looking at it because I wanted to see it working out. You could see two guys working on it. They pulled right by that ridge, a cutout, and from the top you could see a guy jump off and flip something into it. They said it was a grenade. I don't know why we thought it was a satchel charge. It went in there. I was watching the guy, and it blew up. It didn't cause it to go on fire, it was just gray smoke. We just knew they were messed up. We never knew that he [Dahl] jumped on it or anything like that. We knew that they were in bad shape over there.

Here's the thing of it: They had come in at a period when it was starting to quiet down, actually, then all hell broke loose again. We had actually slowed down our rate of fire and were looking for the enemy, but then it all started up again because there was an enemy hiding up there. Then we pulled up and were firing up the area a lot more. I didn't know until I first joined

the club [Army Transportation Association Vietnam] that he had jumped on the grenade. I never knew that happened. We knew that the crew was messed up, and we came to find out that the Brutus was messed up in that ambush. Brutus had quite a distinction. They had a reputation as seeing a lot of action. We just kept it in our memories that they were in our ambush and got blown away. Then I'd seen it on the Internet - Larry Dahl's site - that he received the Congressional Medal of Honor and they named a ship after him. It could have been one of the other ambushes, so I'm there checking the site out. I look at the date and I said, "Well, it was our ambush." I looked at my Bronze Star, because our truck was decorated, and it's the same date. We knew they got messed up, but we didn't know somebody jumped on that grenade. That's how we put one and one together.

To get back to when the initial thing happened, they got hit and we were firing the area up. Then it reached a period when the Lieutenant said, "We've got to do some things. It's quieted down enough." He said, "Somebody go on out there and check the truck out to try and find that driver because we've got to get out of here. There's nothing more, we've got to get that gun truck out of here, too." He wanted to make some decisions. "Let's get the hell out of here. We're not saving anymore drivers, why do we need to stay and fight?" That's the thing I got. So, the driver's job on any gun truck was to go out and get the wounded while the guys still stayed firing. I knew it was my job, so I jumped out. I never took a weapon with me, and I'm running alongside that truck watching that thing pee out, expecting it to catch on fire at any time. The truck was hit on the driver's side and had jack-knifed with the explosion. Something told me, "Don't look in there, it's going to be nasty." I don't know why I thought in my mind it was going to look better from the other side because it was tore up. So, I went around the front of that truck, and many of them [NVA] were alongside the road. I went around the front of that truck and there, underneath the wheel well, there was a little one. He looked awful young to me for NVA and he was looking out. He spotted me and he had the same look that I thought I had on my face: "Aw, shit!" I played basketball in high school and my pivot paid off. I knew I got to get out of there. I had no weapon, so I pivoted back around and just ran all the way back to the gun truck thinking, "I'm going to get shot in the back." Thank God I didn't. Running back I yelled, "There's one under that truck, there's one under that truck." And Loudon said, "There he goes," and he shot and killed him.

Man, I'm shaking like a . . . oh, unbelievable. Somebody said, "He's not up front, somebody said he's laying behind the trucks . . . the driver." I didn't have to go back around the front of that truck, so I went behind. It blew him out of that truck and he was laying there with so many wounds. He had a lot of shrapnel in his face. I noticed he looked like he had pepper in his face, he had so many wounds. I didn't have any medical kit with me, so I brought him back to the truck. The ol' "Army Carry." I picked him up and carried him like a baby; no military carry on this. I carried him over to the truck and I had blood all over the front of me from him. He was messed up pretty bad. They tossed me down the medical kit to try and patch him up, and every time I tried to do something he was moaning. I picked a couple of spots in the chest area that I felt were the worst wounds. He had a lot of shrapnel damage on him. I patched him up the best I could, not being a Corpsman or anything. I just patched the bad spots on him.

They had called in a chopper, a medivac. I yelled up, "Guys we got to stretcher him to get him over there." They said, "We don't have one on the truck." Our truck, the Boss, carried a stretcher. Theirs didn't for some reason. They asked me to go see if that tank that had since moved in had a stretcher. I'll tell you, that was a real fear. They were all battened down and firing. And you talk about the earth shaking! Would you want to run up to a tank firing rounds? It scared the shit out of me more than anything. I half ran, then yelled, "Hey, hey, don't shoot. Do you guys have a stretcher?" They didn't have a stretcher. But to run up to a tank that's engaging the enemy, I don't advise it to anybody; it was scary. So, I ran back. They said, "Don't worry, just try to patch him up best you can, we got a medevac coming in." So then I carried him to the medevac coming in, got him on the chopper and they took him out of there. By then things had quieted down. But just when you thought things were quiet, there was a guy hiding right behind a truck. I was never really sure with that amount of NVA in there. It was a bad ambush. I think they rated it as one of the worst in the period that I was there.

**Killblane:** How long did it last?

**Deeks:** Usually your average ambush was fifteen or twenty minutes. It was pushing an hour, I'm guessing, in the longevity of it. It was a long one. It seemed like an eternity. I can't tell you for sure. The medevac took off with that driver, and then I got back to driving my truck. Someone pulled up and said, "There's that other tanker. They [the NVA] wanted to get that set right in the middle of the road." I don't know how it was hit. It was still driveable, but it was blocking the middle of the road.

**Killblane:** Which truck?

**Deeks:** There were two tankers that were hit. The first tanker that we had passed wasn't in bad shape. We pulled up near the one that was really messed up. That's where we figured the worst part of the fight was. We knew the first one was kind of off the side of the road and was passable, so we pulled up by that second one. They were asking the whole group, "Anybody know how to drive a tanker?" I said, "No, I'm driving this one." That's where Raymond Weeks said, "I'll take care of it," and he volunteered to go out and pull that thing out of the ambush area.

**Killblane:** Who was Raymond Weeks?

**Deeks:** Raymond Weeks was our NCOIC, Sergeant In Charge. Actually, the person in charge that day was the convoy commander. So, Raymond volunteered to do it. I was shaking so badly I probably couldn't have done it. But somebody had to drive our truck, so he said he'd do it. He jack-knifed and literally turned that thing around. Then we followed it out.

Somehow, I don't know how it happened, the Brutus had driven out of the ambush. I don't know where they went, whatever happened, or how they got out. I can't remember that part. I know they didn't go past us, so they had to have gone back. I don't know how they got out or where they went to, that's why we didn't know much about them. We just knew they were messed up.

So, we go back there and we had to tail the convoy there. Then, the Lieutenant said, "I need to get a count on these trucks. I got to know what trucks were hit and what's left." He radioed in to McEarchin to tell him how many were there, and wanted to know if everyone was accounted for. They were all stopped back there, and I had to run back there and get a count of the drivers. They looked at me like, "God, where did you come from?" I had blood all over the front of me. I was so teed up and nervous that when I ran up to the drivers to get a count, I started throwing up. "Somebody, just tell me how many drivers you got, they want to know." They gave me a count and I ran that back. Then I kind of calmed down.

We were able to bypass. I remember driving passed it and continuing on. That's when we brought in infantry or somebody to clean up. It was quite a lot. I heard 33 [enemy] kills. That's a lot for a well-organized ambush. The hits couldn't have been all of ours. It could have been air cover or it could have been the tank. I'd be willing to bet we got a couple dozen. That was the worst one I ever had. Don't ever volunteer. We all were decorated. Raymond Weeks went into

spasms. I love this guy like a brother. We pulled by up to the check point and when we stopped, everybody's asking me questions and he started shaking. He was our sergeant in charge of the truck and the one that asked my to drive. The Lieutenant said, "This ain't good." They called in a medevac for him and flew him out of there.

**Killblane:** He was your NCOIC?

**Deeks:** Yeah.

**Killblane:** After driving the tanker out of there?

**Deeks:** Yeah, after driving the tanker he was as keyed up as I was. He had muscle spasms, he just couldn't control himself. I said, "We got to get you out of here and they'll give you something to calm you down."

**Killblane:** Who was the Lieutenant?

**Deeks:** That's the guy I wish we knew. It's got to be in the records somewhere. I'm guessing it's got to be whoever put us in for these.

**Killblane:** He was just in a regular jeep?

**Deeks:** He was in our truck.

**Killblane:** Oh, he was in your truck?

**Deeks:** They had their choice of where they wanted to ride in, and he chose a gun truck to ride in, and he rode in the Playboys. So we had the convoy commander with us that day.

**Killblane:** You said six ambushes. You've mentioned three, can you remember any others?

**Deeks:** There were a couple of others. We got hit in "Ambush Alley," I remember that one. That was when they shot up a couple of our trucks with sniper or small arms fire. They said it was 51-caliber, from way off on the ridge. It was called "Ambush Alley" because it was kind of out in the open, and the trucks had to slow up for an area in the road where it was just dust and all torn up. I believe it was between the two mountain ranges, between An Khe Pass and Mang Giang Pass. We received some fire from way off and we were firing up the area. It wasn't really involved, but a few trucks got shot. I can't remember the others.

**Killblane:** The others were more like that then?

**Deeks:** More like that.

**Killblane:** Tell me about your stress level. You mentioned in ambushes that your stress level went high. As far as being a driver, what phases did you go through until you finally got short?

**Deeks:** There's no doubt, you went through levels of anxiety until you got familiar with your job. Then you can't worry day-in and day-out. You just can't, I couldn't. You got to know what you were doing after I wouldn't say much more than two months. You worked yourself into, "Shit, it's another convoy." You just go on with, "Today's my day," and I never felt I was going to be killed. "I'm just not going to be killed." I knew it was dangerous. I just had confidence, just set what it was I was going to do if I felt I might die. I got it in my head. And not everyday was an ambush; we had days that we just drove. It was another convoy and it was more like work. I'd sit there when I was back on the 50 [50-caliber machine gun] and I had time to see things, see the country, just wondering why we're even at war, you know? That was pretty much a period after two months, for two or three months, and then you got into a period where it was just a job and it was exciting when some of your ambushes happened. Then when you got short, you realized, "Hey, I'm going to make it through this thing."

**Killblane:** When was that?

**Deeks:** Usually a hundred days.

**Killblane:** A hundred days?

**Deeks:** Yeah, you got down to a hundred days and got a short timers calendar. It was brought to your attention because it had a naked girl on it with numbers all over her body and the last of her private parts was your number one. You'd make that out and color them in as you went. Mine was pivotal because I'm from Ohio, and throughout this thing we had a gun truck the Cold Sweat that joined our company. You always were looking for somebody from home, and this guy was from Akron, Ohio. He reminded me of my one brother; just a good guy, best guy you'd ever want to know. We got to know each other and exchanged addresses. He was on the Cold Sweat, so I wasn't always with him, but we were close. He said, "Let's take our girls to see the point when we get out." We were getting close: I had four days left, he had twenty days left. He didn't tell me he was a couple of days from his birthday. I found out from his parents that he was within two or three days of his birthday, turning twenty . . . No, turning 19, he was 18. I had seen him the night before and I said, "Randy, you can get off to make time go faster and I'm going to go." I asked him to go over to the club. I said, "Let's go down to the club and get some . . . He said, "Naw, I just don't feel right." I don't know if it was premonition. I always thought that Tuy Hoa was a great run, because it stimulated my eyes. It was a beautiful run down south to Tuy Hoa. We were headed up north where you could get hit anytime. We always listened on the radios and

we heard that a convoy got hit. It was some of our sister trucks that got hit going south. We were listening and they said, "We have one KIA," and they were reading off things phonetically and they read his name off. He got killed.

**Killblane:** Twenty days out?

**Deeks:** He had twenty days left.

**Killblane:** What repercussions did you take once you were short?

**Deeks:** Immediately, I was really hurt and I felt bad. We had no closure on this; he was gone and we'd never see him again. That was a sad thing. We had a little chapel meeting, and we prayed and had a talk. I saw afterwards how messed up his truck was. And for closure, I got pissed. I said, "You know what, I'm not going to die for this." You had the option if you were down to 30 days to get off, they gave you that. So you went this far and you could choose a job where you did something around the camp. I had rank; I made SPC5 after 13 months in the Army. I think the First Sergeant liked me a lot. He said, "I want you to go on in, you've earned these ambushes." And he ran it quick, so they put it through and made me a SPC5. He wanted me to be a Sergeant. I said, "No, I don't want to be boss," so I was a SPC5. When Randy got killed I said, "I'm getting off the road in about 10 days to get down to 30." I said, "I'm going to get off, and I pulled CQ [Charge of Quarters, duty required after duty hours] from there on out.

**Killblane:** Did you take your R&R [Rest and Relaxation]?

**Deeks:** Yeah, I did.

**Killblane:** Okay.

**Deeks:** I wanted to see round eyes; I didn't want to see anymore Orientals, so I went to Australia and I liked it. It was pretty neat to go to another country. I never got out of the state of Ohio until I got drafted, so I wanted to see a little of another country. There again, anytime after the middle of your tour I think you were able to get it. So, I went to Australia. There again, fear set in because when we were up there on the C-130 they were testing it. I think we went out of Cam Ranh Bay, and there was an officer standing up by the two pilots. He was having them test the secondary jet engine assist, and he was jumping this thing up and down. I thought, "My God, we're going to die on our R&R."

**Killblane:** How often did you guys have to go out when you were on a gun truck?

**Deeks:** the only time you knew it was Sunday was when you showed up at the kick off point - the “Ponderosa” - and you’d see the chaplain with a jeep. You never knew what day it was the whole year, but you knew when it was Sunday.

**Killblane:** But you went out everyday?

**Deeks:** Every day we were able to. We had down days maybe, down at Tuy Hoa. We had our maybe a week or part of a week because it rained; I think it was a record rain they had that year. It rained unbelievable. We got days off for that. You’d get down time with your truck every once in a while

**Killblane:** How many was that?

**Deeks:** I can’t remember, I couldn’t give you a handle on the number of days.

**Killblane:** About how much sleep were you getting while you were on the gun truck?

**Deeks:** We got to sleep, the Boss being a gun truck. We’d pull into a staging area and our trucks got sent off to unload, so I had the benefit of being a gun trucker. You could grab some C-rations and you could sleep under the truck. It was a long day; you’d go from darn near dark in the morning, and I’d say it was pushing dusk by the time we got in on the long arm of Pleiku. The long days were when you had a turn around. The first convoys were able to turn around, and they’d go to Pleiku and all the way back. But not if you were the second or third convoy, which we were a lot of times because we were 5-ton cargo. The tankers would turn around sometimes.

**Killblane:** So, when did you finally leave Vietnam?

**Deeks:** I left Vietnam one day shy of a year, September of ‘71.

**Killblane:** How did you feel after a full year?

**Deeks:** I felt bad, but I felt glad. I just wanted out of it and I wanted it over. They offered to you to extend, but when Randy got killed I said, “I want to live.”

**Killblane:** What did you feel bad about?

**Deeks:** I felt bad about losing him, and I felt bad about losing the rest of the guys. I felt bad, but I said, “Hey, your time’s coming, too.” They’re our crew, they’re like brothers. And I’m looking for them to this day. We had a New Mexico gunner; a Hawaiian, my Charlie/Charlie, NCOIC. We called him coconut because he was from Hawaii; a little guy that was a gold glove boxer from Hawaii. Then me from Ohio, and our drivers varied because we had one Illinois driver.

**Killblane:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Deeks:** I'd like to bring up that this war was something else because in WWII, they all went over. A lot of times they drafted in states and you went over with them. We were such a wide variety of guys that you met a cross-country mix of them. You'd look for guys from your state. When you left, you're done, you never see them a lot of times unless you made arrangements. You lost your connection, whereas if we were in the war until it was over, I think we'd have gotten a little more. There's a bond and there always will be when you're under stress. But this was not the same. There was no good or bad in it.

**Killblane:** Thank you.