

Transcript: Steve Thompson

Today is Wednesday, May 30, 2012. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. Steve Thompson. Mr. Thompson is at his home in Midland, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. The first question, sir, that we pretty much always start off with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the Marine Corps.

Steve Thompson: Well, I had a pretty normal childhood. I was the youngest child of three siblings. I have two older sisters. One now has passed, and my older sister is still living, and she is my closest relative. My childhood was reasonably happy although my father died when I was six. So all I had was my mother, but that's really all I ever knew. She was an elected official so she wasn't home an awful lot, so I had to use a lot of imagination to kind of keep things going.

You grew up in Midland, Texas?

Steve Thompson: Uh-huh, yeah, I grew up, born and raised in Midland.

What office was your mom elected to?

Steve Thompson: She was county treasurer.

County treasurer.

Steve Thompson: Uh-huh. She was elected in '58, and she was county treasurer for 33 years, and she retired.

That's great. So you were saying, though, that you had to kind of keep yourself occupied a lot.

Steve Thompson: I did. I did. Like I said, my sisters were both older. My oldest sister, who is still living, and is here in Midland with her husband, was really gone from the time I was about eight. My next sister was four years older and she passed away in 1997 at the age of 50. She left reasonably early, although we were together at home probably 'til I was about 13. She would have been about 18, and she got married at that age. So then it was just my mom and I from that point on.

At what point, I believe you said to me when we talked earlier, that you went to military school?

Steve Thompson: I did. I went to public schools in Midland. Sam Houston Elementary, San Jacinto Junior High, and Midland High School, for a semester. I was a little, kind of a wild child. And my mother really was married to her job, and really needed to be. And she needed to maintain a respectable reputation. So rather than have an out-of-control son who's just reaching puberty, and would just get in the car and kind of getting' crazy, she offered me the chance to go to military school. And I did. I went to Peacock Military Academy in San Antonio which was established in the late 1800s, like 1899. It was closed and the property in San Antonio was donated to the Salvation Army in the early '70s.

What was that like for you going away from home and entering military school?

Steve Thompson: It was pretty traumatic at first. I did have some friends, however, that also attended that school that were my friends from Midland. One of 'em I'm still in contact with. We're still very good friends. A large number of 'em have passed. A surprising large number have passed. I'm a member of their alumni association so I do stay in contact with the ones that I knew. Seems like most of 'em graduated before I did because the Vietnam War was in full effect when I went to Peacock. A lot of these kids, like I did, as soon as they finished school, they entered the military service.

Was that something that you had thought about doing before or was it something that going to a military school kind of instilled in you?

Steve Thompson: I think military school instilled it into me, and I enjoyed the discipline, and I enjoyed the camaraderie. I enjoyed the appearance of the uniforms. We had really nice uniforms. And of course, the Marine Corps is known for their really nice uniforms.

Sure.

Steve Thompson: I have an uncle who was a Marine during the Second World War who influenced me greatly to join the Marine Corps.

That's right.

Steve Thompson: And so I kind of followed in his footsteps and never regretted it. I enlisted when I was 17, so my mother had to sign for me to go in. It was probably pretty traumatic for her because if something had happened to me, she would have probably felt pretty guilty that she had signed for me to go in at that age. Of course, I was only three months from 18, so it wasn't that big of a deal.

And this was in 1968?

Steve Thompson: It was. And I turned 18 in boot camp, as a matter of fact, at the end of May. I went in on the 31st of March, 1968, and was discharged at the end of February of 1970, with a medical discharge.

You've mentioned your uncle, Clovis Thompson, who was, there's no other way to put it, a hero. He was a Marine hero in World War II, in the Pacific.

Steve Thompson: Absolutely.

What all did he say to you, or what type of conversations did you have, if any, before you shipped off for boot camp?

Steve Thompson: None. Absolutely none. I did not even know . . . My uncle didn't talk much about it then. But I didn't know what a Silver Star was, even though he had it framed on his wall, and he had the citation there. It didn't really click, I guess, because in my mind, there was so much of a difference between the Second World War and the Vietnam War in the sense that when you went to war in the Second World War, you were in there for the duration. In the Vietnam era you served, of course, however long your enlistment was. But you served tours of 13 months in Vietnam, and in very few instances did you go over as a unit. You just went as an individual. So basically, I flew out of Oakland on a Continental jet, and I probably knew three

Marines on that aircraft of close to 200 Marines probably. When I got to my unit in Vietnam, near Dang Ha, just north of Da Nang, there was one person there that I had gone to Peacock with that was an administrative aide. But other than that, you came as one and you left as one. So there was none of that, what I would have called helpful, training together and having the camaraderie and the skills developed before you got there.

I think the military learned their lesson from that because I know when I went to Iraq with my battalion, we did everything together, and went together, and came back together, and that's have they've done it nowadays. I don't envy you at all having to be boot grunt getting sent over there kind of on your own. It's not a lot of unit cohesion.

Steve Thompson: Absolutely. Not only that, the old salts, or actually anybody who'd been there for a month or so, was considered an old salt because my battalion and my company, we were in action basically from day one. The third day that I was in Vietnam I was in my first firefight and literally knew no one but my squad leader, my fire team leader, and a couple of my squad mates at that point. So it was unusual and it took a while for the Marines who had been there for a while to accept you. Their reasoning was, and I would have felt the same way, they avoided us because they didn't want us to get 'em killed. They didn't want us to step on a mine that took them out too. And there was a lot of that. So they were leery to become your friend. Knowing a little more about it now there was other reasons for that. The fear of getting close to someone and then losing them.

That makes sense.

Steve Thompson: And you could lose 'em to anything. A friendly fire incident or an accident, and certainly a wounding or something in combat, but once they were gone, they were gone.

Sir, let me ask you to go back a little bit. When you went to boot camp at 17, tell us a little bit about that experience, especially in 1968 when the war is kind of getting to its worst point. It's unpopular with the civilian world and you've got a lot of draftees and that sort of thing. What are the memories that stand out the most to you? You went to San Diego, right?

Steve Thompson: Yes.

What are your memories of MCRD San Diego in 1968?

Steve Thompson: My memories of there were hurry up, hurry up, hurry up. Let's get you ready and get you to Vietnam. And boot camp before Vietnam, and this is just from what I learned later, had been a 12- or a 13-week boot camp, or close to that. By the time I went in, it was eight weeks, and so there were a lot of things that we didn't get, that we didn't have time to get, and it was just hurry, hurry, hurry, and it was pretty rough. It was pretty rough. There was no patience. The DIs had no patience and the Marine Corps was pretty notorious for their discipline and they were pretty liberal in the administration of that discipline.

Were there ever any problems with recruits in your platoon that were draftees that didn't want to be there?

Steve Thompson: There were some. Yes, that were very, really hated being there and, therefore, allowed that to develop into a hatred for the Marine Corps. Being drafted. And we had many,

several men in my company, who were college graduates and had children at home. One of the first KIAs that I actually read in my first issue of Leatherneck magazine, his name was Romero, he was a two-year draftee so when boot camp was over, he went to ITR and BITS, and then he went to staging and straight to Vietnam. Like I say, it was my first Leatherneck magazine which took probably about four months before I actually got it, and here's his name. And, of course, I could look at my boot camp book that we all got and there was Romero's face, and I remember him talking about his wife and children, and it really affected me. It just didn't seem fair to me and most of 'em were quite vocal. There were some that took it in stride and said, "Okay, I've got a job to do, I've been assigned to do this job. I'm going to do the best that I can," and they did. And they were outstanding Marines. Our company guide-on was the Marine that got the dress blues. He was top at the range, and he was a college graduate, a two-year draftee, and he took it seriously. Unfortunately, I don't know what happened to Bellamy. I've been unable to locate him anywhere. I know he's not on the wall, so I assume he's not dead, although he could have died from other causes and not be on the wall, of course. But we had a lot of people like that. Probably a third of my company were draftees. And a surprisingly high number of those draftees were college graduates.

That's interesting.

Steve Thompson: Interesting thing for myself and four other, we weren't Marines yet, but you know, the first three to four days of boot camp was a battery of tests. Just a big battery of all day long tests. Well, I did well in school, and I did very well on these tests, and my GCT was high. And we were called to formation, and there were about six of us in the company that were called out, and I was one of 'em. And they said that the company CO wanted to talk to us. And of course, we were scared to death, we didn't really know what was going on. But the bottom line was we were 18 or under, we had never been married, we had no dependents, and we scored high on our GCT. So we were offered the opportunity to go to Annapolis. We would have had to gone to one year of prep school, and then we would have had four years at the Naval Academy, and then we would have had seven years of active duty. I was only 17 at that time, and I was looking at 11 years of my life in the future, and I just couldn't see it. And frankly, that's always been a big regret of mine. I remember in high school, most people who went to the academies were appointed by a congressman and it was a big deal. But there were so many officers being killed and wounded that they needed to replace 'em. And of course, they didn't want to just put any Tom, Dick, or Harry in there. My test scores really, and the fact, the main facts, no married, no kids, no dependents, and all those things, all added up to an opportunity to do that.

How long did they give you to decide?

Steve Thompson: About an hour.

About an hour.

Steve Thompson: About an hour. We were allowed to call home and talk to . . . I was allowed to talk to my mother.

Were you able to get a hold of her?

Steve Thompson: I did. And quite frankly, as I said, I was kind of a wild kid, and looking back on it, I think my mother thought that I was full of it. 'Cause she too had seen photographs of

young high school graduates that had been appointed to one of the military academies, and they had been appointed by Congressman So and So, so I think she thought that I was FOS. I really do. And so after that 15-minute conversation, and particularly after me thinking that this is the majority of my life, three quarters of my life, at that point, would be in military, I turned it down. As well as did everybody else.

So no one took it?

Steve Thompson: No one took it. No one took it. A couple of 'em were draftees, 'course they were college graduates. And that surprised me. How you can take a college graduate and send them back to college. I guess they would have just gone under a different degree program.

Or maybe they could have just sent them at that point to Officer Candidate School after they had already gotten a degree.

Steve Thompson: Absolutely.

Get them commissioned.

Steve Thompson: Absolutely. That's probably exactly what happened, and they would have had their choice just like all Naval Academy graduates, of the Marine Corps or the Navy. And a lot of the Marines that went to the Naval Academy, or a lot of the men that went to the Naval Academy took the Marines Corps Aviation. And I always look back on it in kind of a self-serving way that had I accepted that, I probably would have been shot down over the north, would have been held POW, or would have not made it back to my carrier. I just had these . . . Those thoughts kind of helped me feel like I had made the right decision.

Yeah, worked the way it was supposed to.

Steve Thompson: Yeah.

So when you arrived there in Vietnam, you said that within the third day you were involved in a firefight.

Steve Thompson: Yes.

Let me ask you, you were a 0311 Rifleman, right?

Steve Thompson: Yes, I was.

How was that? Was that just given to you then in boot camp? They said you're going to be an 0311?

Steve Thompson: It was determined . . . All Marines first and foremost are riflemen. And once I turned down the Naval Academy . . . Now I had an aviation guarantee when I went in the Marine Corps, and I enlisted for four years but about halfway through boot camp, they called about 150 men into this huge auditorium and said, "We have too many aviation guarantees." So they basically gave us a list of other jobs that we could do, and there again, we had about 30 to 45 minutes to decide what we were gonna do. And, I mean, I had not a clue. There were . . . These things, it included computer operator, combat photographer. I mean there was just some amazing

things that I could have done but when they mentioned Sea School, there was something about the history of the Marines, they started as Marines aboard ship. And I thought a true Marine serves on the sea as well. So, I thought, "Well, I think I'll go to Sea School." And I did, and it was in San Diego. It was right by building 19 which was the administration building, and during that time there was a wait for the class ahead of me to graduate. So during that time I had about a month that I basically just did make-busy work daily. I was a chaser for the brig and all these kind of different things. But I finally was in my dress blues one day and a gunnery sergeant came by and called me over and he said, "How would like to wear those blues every day?" And, of course, it was "Sir, yes sir. Aye aye, sir." And he said, "Okay, I've got a job for you." And that job was to be . . . The commander of that base, Lyle English was his name, and he was the commanding general of MCRD, and I was his orderly, not his driver, not his aide-de-camp. Basically I served him tea in the morning, and anything else he wanted during the day, and I was just at his beck and call. I was more his aide-de-camp assistant. But that went on for about a month, and it was dress blues and shower shoes, as they say. And it was interesting. And then, of course, the graduating class of Sea School went about their business, and I joined up in the next class, and it was a month-long program, and when I finished that, I was transferred to Oakland, Naval Air Station Oakland, where there's also a naval base. And the Oriskany CVA-34, an attack carrier, was my ship.

Okay.

Steve Thompson: So, I was sent to it, and in two or three days I had a bunk. Four bunks deep, they pack 'em in there. So, I went WESTPAC first on this aircraft carrier and found myself again being an orderly to the XO of the ship on some days, and on opposite days I would work in the brig. And, of course, at night we would do whatever job they wanted us to do. And that often entailed being up on the flight deck in the middle of the night and in the middle of monsoons unloading, unhooking pallets of bomb fins off of Chinooks. And then those were, of course, taken by the Navy down the elevator into the hangar bay, hangar deck, and attached bombs. So, they always found something for the Marines to do.

How long did you end up spending on the Oriskany?

Steve Thompson: I only spent four months on that ship, and I realized that I had made a major mistake, and that was not what I wanted to do. And I had joined the Marines Corps to fight, and that's what I wanted to do. And I went to my first sergeant and I told him that, and he says, "You realize, of course, that if you give up . . ." Because I had to wait for a while to get a security clearance to even be on this ship. All of the Marines had to have security clearances because of the alleged nuclear warheads that we were told were there. Whether they were or not, I don't know. But, the FBI actually did, and I talked to them later, neighbors in my mother's neighborhood that had FBI agents knocking on their doors asking about me. And they did that with everybody. And, of course, they probably didn't go into a lot of detail, but once I got my clearance, then I was able to do some other things. But, back to the first sergeant story. I told him that I understood that if I left this ship that I would go to Vietnam on the ground because I was, after all, an 0311, a secondary 8151 which is embassy guard or guard. And I said, "Okay." Well, we were just about . . . We had already gone to Pearl and were on our way to Subic Bay, Olongapo in PI. And so when I got there, I packed my seabag and got on a bus and took the actual road that was the Bataan Death March road that led to Angeles, and to an air force base there, Clark Air Force Base, and was sent home. I got a short leave, and then I reported back to

Pendleton to a thing called staging. And that was like another ITR kinda. It was like a three-week ITR, and, boy, it wasn't long after that that I was calling Mom from the airport in Oakland saying, "Well, I'm waiting to get on the plane to go to Nam." And the rest is history, we should say.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about Alpha Company 11.

Steve Thompson: Outstanding company, outstanding organization. A very proud group of Marines, and a very dedicated CO, Jack Leonard, who I'm still in contact with. He's now the Adjutant of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. And I'm still in contact with three or four members of my squad. As a matter of fact, I spoke to one of them yesterday. But I try to stay in touch with them as best I can. But it was basically, "Keep your head down and do what the other guys do, and no matter what they tell you, do it because they know better than you." But then they'd turn around and have you walking point. With two weeks in country, you're walking point, and you don't know what to look for. So, luckily someone took me under their wing and helped me along with that, and saved me from tripping some booby traps, literally by grabbing my shoulder and stopping me and saying, "Look closely at that little piece of shrub there beside the trail." Of course, you don't walk on trails anyway but you can't tell Marines that. But there were several instances where parts of my body were saved because of people who cared enough to say, "Hold it. This is what you need to be looking for. And if you're gonna walk point, you've gotta see this stuff because if you trip this off, you're not just gonna hurt yourself, you're gonna hurt the person behind you and maybe the person behind them." And that happened, not with me, although it happened several times. It happened with our platoon sergeant of all people, tripped a mine and it wounded three people because it was a big mine. But it was basically beans and bullets from the start. I probably spent, oh, probably averagely one night every two weeks in battalion rear.

That's not very much.

Steve Thompson: Not very much. The rest of the time in the bush, and we would be resupplied by helicopter with everything from ammo, beans and bullets, and beer on Sunday, and we would go hot chow once every two weeks on a Sunday. A Chinook would come out with some green jerry cans full of hot food, and unload it and then fly off. And, of course, we'd suck it down but they'd actually bring out tubs of iced-down beer which were basically horse troughs, oblong horse troughs full of iced-down beer. It was different.

Was there ever a point, sir, when you were actually being a grunt there in Vietnam that you regretted your decision to leave the Oriskany or even to enter the Marines Corps?

Steve Thompson: Well, you know, from day one when I was standing on those yellow footprints, I was going, "What have I done? What have I got myself into?" But that passed quickly.

Yeah, I think every recruit experiences a moment of that.

Steve Thompson: Yeah. Oh, and then having your head shaved and going through the whole delousing thing. And, of course, it was timed out where you were gonna get about two hours of sleep that first night.

That's right.

Steve Thompson: And we didn't know that. Of course, we found out later it was all part of the grand scheme of things, to break you down to nothing and build you back up as a Marine. And we understood that after a while, the ones that had the sense to realize it. But, there was never a time that I regretted joining the Marine Corps, never a time. And I was proud that I had joined the Marine Corps over any of the other services, even though I had many friends . . . One of my best friends that was killed in Vietnam in 1967, was in the Army. And that had a strong influence on me enlisting. But never anything but the Marine Corps, and that goes back to my Uncle Clovis because he was the family hero, and, by gosh, he was a rough man. He was the youngest child of the siblings, and he was the toughest one. And, of course, see my dad died when I was not yet six, so when we went and visited my dad's parents and, of course, Clovis and all his siblings would be there, Clovis was the disciplinarian. And he was serious about it. You did not want to piss off Clovis. And I learned that quick. Now, of course, afterwards, after Vietnam, things, of course, changed. I wasn't a child anymore for one thing, but went quite a few years without talking to my uncle, and I guess because I just didn't talk to anybody about Vietnam. It wasn't a popular topic in 1969 and 1970. You didn't really admit it, particularly if you wanted a date. If a young lady found out that you had been to Vietnam, you were classified in that universal baby killer, My Lai, you know. I mean all of those things just were kinda lumped on you.

Yeah, that's horrible.

Steve Thompson: And so, therefore, it didn't matter what their attraction to you was, but once they found out that you had been a combat Marine in Vietnam, that was it. There was no more chances of visiting with this young lady again. So, I might've regretted it a little bit, joining the Marine Corps then, but, of course, I was thinking with the wrong part of my body at that time. But, no, I loved the Marine Corps, still do.

Yes sir.

Steve Thompson: And I'll always be a Marine, and I take that very seriously.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about your unit in terms of what you would do, kind of what your missions were, where you operated, that sort of thing.

Steve Thompson: We operated in what was called Dodge City in Arizona territory, and that was around Hill 155 and 151, and it was along the little and large _ rivers, I don't know if I pronounced that properly or not, but we at some points would have a week on a bridge over one of the other and guarded those bridges and checked all the trucks that came through and stole all the fresh fruit we could find on 'em. And, of course, we also had the job of standing on the bridge and using an M14, anything that floated toward that bridge got shot because the VC and NVA would try to float explosives up to your bridge. And so we would take these things out in hopes of detonating anything that might be there. But, by and large, our missions were search and destroy, and that's what we did. We were normally helicoptered out in a Chinook or two, depending on how many platoons went out, and we would find the proper locale and that was, of course, up to the CO and stuff, they had all the intelligence on that. But we would dig our fighting holes and form our perimeter and set out our Claymores and then from that point on for

several days usually, would run search and destroy sweeps, ambushes, just trying to draw fire. And it worked most of the time. The night ambushes were the scariest and the ones that I most tried to avoid.

Sure.

Steve Thompson: But we were a tight band. We had an outstanding mortar team, and we would . . . Ahead of our operation for one night, for example, we knew where we were gonna set up our ambush, and we would get with the mortar team and get our topos out and say, "Here's where we're gonna be and if we call in for some 60s, we want 'em right here." And so basically all we had to do was double-click our mike or say a predetermined word, and 60s were coming our way. And if it was bad enough, we would actually have already talked to one of the hills that was in range with 105s or 155s. Seldom did we require nighttime air operations, air support, but there were times that we did. But it was basically search and destroy, and that's what we did. We destroyed everything we found, and we destroyed the enemy as best we could, and we tried to break their will to fight. We looked for their stashes. We looked for their bunkers. We looked for their tunnels. We tried to disrupt them in any way we could, and we were always very adrenaline high when we would have contact.

Sure.

Steve Thompson: And the higher the body count, the better it felt, on their side, of course.

Sure.

Steve Thompson: But we were pretty lucky. We would normally inflict a lot of damage on the VC. We fought mostly VC. We did fight the NVA closer to Hill 155 which is the dead center of Arizona territory or Dodge City they called it, and they fought different and they fought well. They were well trained and they were the ones that you would be worried about maybe being overrun. So when we had intelligence or we felt by signs that there were NVA around or we had an RVN with us that had become a Kit Carson Scout, would interpret some of their radio chatter, we would go out and double or triple our Claymores, put them in different places. We would basically lay traps. We would move 100 meters away in the darkness and dig in new fighting holes yet act as if our original fighting holes were still occupied. In other words, hoping that the surprise would be when the NVA got up to our wire and up to our Claymores and got up to our lines, that we would be on their flank or both flanks in a perfect world, and would really get a high count. Of course, we had to watch for crossfire but . . . And we had to watch for the RVN too. The RVN were notorious for being forewarned that we were going to be doing night ops and doing night ambushes, and we'd be crossing a particular area and without fail, they would open up on us. Now luckily we would be half a click away from 'em and never suffered a casualty although we did suffer some wounded from them, but we had a real love-hate relationship with the RVN, and frankly, I didn't trust any of the Kit Carsons. I didn't trust any, I don't know if you use the term . . . I probably don't want to use a derogatory term that we had for them but . . .

Yes sir, I know what you mean, yes sir. So let me ask you too, I know you mentioned earlier that in 1970 you were medically discharged. Was that because you were wounded in action?

Steve Thompson: No, no. It was because I started having trouble breathing, and it got worse and worse. And we were on the Little _ bridge. And the next morning I was really having trouble

breathing so for the first time since I'd been in country, I went sick call, and that was at 1st Med in Da Nang which was about 25 miles away, roughly 25 miles away. And so we loaded up on a Deuce and a Half with Quad 50s up front, and, you know, we were prepared for whatever we might encounter on our way to 1st Med. But when I got there, of course, I got examined, and I was put in an air-conditioned tent which was just wonderful, but it did not straighten out my breathing. Well, long story short, they brought in a pulmonologist and he said, "Well, have you ever had asthma?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, you've got it now." And, "You're going to CONUS." And I didn't know what CONUS was. I thought it was the island where you went if you had the black syphilis, you know? I didn't really know where it was. I had to ask someone where it was. So I developed bronchial asthma in Vietnam, and was medevac'd to the naval hospital closest to my home and that was in Corpus Christi at the Naval Air Station.

Did they ever figure out what caused the problems?

Steve Thompson: Mold, yeah. It was an allergy-induced asthma, and it was introduced by the allergen mold. And, boy, if that's not a perfect place for mold, I don't know where it would be. I don't know where a better place would be for mold. But I received a small disability compensation that I drew forever it seems like, but yet my lungs continued to deteriorate over the years, and within the last two or three years, I finally went to the VA and filed a claim. And, of course, I was tested from head to toe, and at the end of it all I was told that I was awarded 100 percent for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, chronic bronchitis. I was given 50 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder, and I was given 30 percent for hearing loss due to explosive devices, and 10 percent for tinnitus, ringing in my ears. And I still suffer from all of those. But I've been treated fairly well by the VA.

Well, that's good.

Steve Thompson: So, I'm happy about that.

Yes sir.

Steve Thompson: I'm not happy about having trouble breathing and having to use oxygen a lot, but that's just the way it's gonna be and there's nothing I can do about that.

Yes sir. Well, sir, we really appreciate you taking some of this time just to meet with us and record for us and for posterity some of your memories. You know, with the Land Office we have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have Stephen F. Austin's original registro of all the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. Our goal is to add these interviews to that archive so that hundreds of years from now people can listen to these interviews and maybe learn something from them.

Steve Thompson: That's outstanding.

With that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to anyone listening to this interview years from now?

Steve Thompson: Well, I'd just like to say if the military is anything in the future like it is now, go with the Corps. Keep your butt down, your head down, and listen up. Concentrate at the rifle

range and make yourself a valuable part of your little part of the world of the Marine Corps. And Semper Fi means a lot to me.

Absolutely.

Steve Thompson: It always will. But I would say your country comes first. Of course, family. But as far as duty, it's your country, and if you don't take care it, someone else will not do it as well as you could.

Yes sir.

Steve Thompson: Hopefully things won't pan out that way but I'm not real good at quotes. But I would just say, "Be proud, and go where you think you can do the best. Be the best, and always, always remember and read and understand the Constitution."

Yes sir. Well, sir, again we appreciate your time but more importantly we appreciate your service to our nation. That's on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everybody here at the Land Office. We really do salute you for your service. In a few weeks, we'll send you copies of this interview on CDs for you to keep or give to friends or family or whomever, along with a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson.

Steve Thompson: Can you send one of my uncle's to me?

Yes sir, we'll absolutely do that.

Steve Thompson: I'd love that.

And then also if you know any veterans here in Texas that would be interested in telling their story, please have them get a hold of me as well. That's how we find these.

Steve Thompson: Okay, Texas vets only?

Yes sir. Well, they don't have to have entered from Texas, they just have to be living in Texas now. It's a very loose definition of a Texas veteran. As long as they are in Texas now, they're a Texas veteran. That's how we find most of the folks interviewed, just kind of word of mouth.

Steve Thompson: James, you're more than welcome for my time. I enjoyed it, and I hope someone gets something out of it. I'm not well prepared for this and really didn't know how to but . . .

Oh, it was a great interview. I'm off tomorrow for two weeks of my annual training. We're going to Fort Sill, but when I get back after a couple weeks, I'll be sure to get back in touch with you and make sure you get those CDs and everything from us.

Steve Thompson: Wonderful, James. Thank you so much.

All right, sir, take care.

Steve Thompson: You have a wonderful day.

You too, bye bye.

Steve Thompson: Bye bye.