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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Terry Grill
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Melissa Wark**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

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1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Terry Grill. Today is 21 March 2013. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University. Mr. Grill is kind enough to join me by telephone from his home in
4 Macungie, Pennsylvania. Mr. Grill, to begin the interview, I'd like to get some
5 background information from you if I could. Could you tell me when and where you were
6 born?

7 Terry Grill: I was born October 20th, 1946, in East Greenville, Pennsylvania, in
8 East Greenville, Pennsylvania, or the suburbs of East Greenville. It's a very small town.
9 It's a rural community about fifty miles north of Philadelphia.

10 KC: What were your parents' names?

11 TG: My father was Herman Grill, and my mother was Mae.

12 KC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

13 TG: I have one sister, Sandra.

14 KC: Okay. What did your parents do for a living there in Pennsylvania?

15 TG: My mother was a homemaker. My father was a welder, metal fabricator, you
16 name it, blacksmith, anything to do with metal or ornamental iron work.

17 KC: Well, I guess that would be the right part of the country to be in that sort of
18 work, I guess.

1 TG: Yes, it was very favorable at the time.

2 KC: Tell me about growing up there in Pennsylvania. What was life like for you
3 growing up in the 1940s and 1950s?

4 TG: Well, my parents were very conservative. Pennsylvania German. Both of
5 them spoke the Pennsylvania German dialect fairly well. My father was very proficient at
6 it, and I picked up some words here and there. Growing up, we didn't do a lot of
7 traveling. We kind of stayed at home, and my father was somewhat of a workaholic. He
8 spent many, many hours making the business grow and work.

9 KC: Tell me about being a kid growing up in the 1940s and 50s in Pennsylvania.
10 What was the atmosphere like there?

11 TG: Fairly comfortable. Going to school, meeting other children, having friends,
12 just like anybody else would have. Again, like I said, we didn't do a lot of vacationing or
13 anything like that. Occasionally, an old fishing trip or something like that with my father.
14 You know, we kind of relaxed. I don't know how else to put it.

15 KC: So, were you involved in—did you enjoy outdoor activities, hunting, fishing,
16 sports, things like that?

17 TG: I was always interested in playing sports. I was never very good at it.
18 Hunting and fishing, I tried. I didn't have the patience. My father took me small game
19 hunting. I got my share of games, but I never got very interested in it. Deep sea fishing,
20 the first time I went out I got seasick, but I did catch some fish. I think I went out a
21 second time, still the same result.

22 KC: Right.

23 TG: I just never caught onto it. Fishing by a sea and just waiting. No, I'm just not
24 into that.

25 KC: Right, right. Where did you go to school?

26 TG: Upper Perkiomen school district. High school, elementary school. First grade
27 I went to I say three one-room schools, but one was a double decker, so that doesn't
28 count. That's a two-room school. One in fact was quite remote and near a pasture, and
29 every morning, you'd hear the frogs croaking, so it picked up the name of Bullfrog
30 Academy. That was third grade, one-room school. Then after, I think it was fifth grade, I
31 ended up going to a large school in town, so that was kind of the experience there. My

1 middle school, or what was called at the time junior high, and high school. I graduated in
2 1964.

3 KC: Okay. Now, the chief issue of the 1950s and into the 1960s of course in terms
4 of global issues was the Cold War. What sort of things do you remember about growing
5 up during the early years of the Cold War?

6 TG: I wasn't that much involved in the news, but of course when you got older,
7 you paid a little more attention. I just remember practicing for protecting ourselves from
8 a bomb, taking cover in a hallway, laying down under a desk, or something like that. It
9 never really bothered me too much.

10 KC: You graduated in 1964, as you mentioned. Now, of course, the draft is
11 ongoing at this time in the country's history. Did you give military service a thought
12 outside of the draft? Were you interested in joining the military at all?

13 TG: Yes. My father was in World War II. He was a welder over in Germany,
14 Belgium. I think he got into France too a little bit. I always thought, "Sure, I'd like to try
15 it." After I graduated, I was thinking of going in the Coast Guard. I don't know why the
16 Coast Guard, but I just picked the Coast Guard. Then when I did go to get some
17 information at the Coast Guard office where I was heading, it was closed that day, and
18 the next day, I received Uncle Sam's draft notice.

19 KC: Is that right?

20 TG: Yeah. So, in some ways, I was happy to get out and see the world. Vietnam
21 didn't bother me at that point, but it was on my mind. I didn't know if I'd ever go there.

22 KC: Right. Now, you mentioned that Vietnam was on your mind, so you are
23 aware of what's going on over there. This would've been early really in the American
24 consciousness of what was going on in Vietnam. What sort of things did you know about
25 Vietnam by 1964?

26 TG: We touched base in like our senior year in school. I don't recall a whole lot
27 of it, just the teacher mentioning that there's this conflict going on over in Southeast Asia
28 in a place called Vietnam. Nobody knew where it was at the time. He said, "Some of you
29 may end up over there." We all just sort of looked at each other and said, "Okay, maybe."
30 That was about it. We knew that there were U.S. Forces over there at the time, but we
31 didn't think it would escalate to what it ended up being.

1 KC: Sure. Had you given any thought to college education?

2 TG: Not really. I thought about going to an architectural school at some point. My
3 sister had gone to school, but my parents were kind of wanting me to take over my
4 father's business or at least working for him, so there wasn't a big push for me to go to
5 any kind of college. The grades that I got in high school until I got in senior year weren't
6 that favorable. I barely made it sometimes from year to year, but once I had junior and
7 senior, I started straightening up and started getting A's and B's.

8 KC: What do you think prompted that change?

9 TG: I just got more interested in learning about things.

10 KC: Yeah.

11 TG: In general. In science, that was one of the best subjects. I got straight A's in
12 science and biology. In math, I never did well. I really struggled with that and English. I
13 was more technically inclined since I took shop class for several years and became fairly
14 proficient at using tools for woodworking and metalworking, which fell right in line with
15 what my father wanted.

16 KC: Sure, sure. All right, now, you are invited by Uncle Sam to join the United
17 States Army. When did you officially sign up?

18 TG: I was actually drafted on December 20th, 1965.

19 KC: 1965.

20 TG: December 20th. That's a little close to Christmas, isn't it? You're taking us
21 away from family and friends, but they put us on a bus, took us to the train in
22 Philadelphia, and we headed down to Jackson, South Carolina, where they put us in tents
23 because they were overloaded or overbooked, I should say. They didn't have any room
24 for us in the barracks, so we made best we could in Fort Jackson in tents. Didn't think
25 that it'd get that cold down there, but it did.

26 KC: I'm sure. Yeah. Tell me about your time there at Fort Jackson. Tell me about
27 basic training, as it was, late '65, early '66.

28 TG: Well, they didn't do basic training at Fort Jackson because, again, they were
29 overbooked.

30 KC: Oh, okay.

1 TG: They divvied out to different forts across the country, and I got picked to go
2 to Fort Riley, Kansas.

3 KC: Is that right?

4 TG: I did my basic training and AIT at Fort Riley, Kansas.

5 KC: Interesting. Tell me about basic training at Fort Riley then.

6 TG: Also, I thought when they said, “Oh, you’re going to Fort Riley, Kansas,” I
7 thought, “Gee, it’s going to be warm there.” Little did I know. The climate was windy
8 cold in the winter, and it did get hot in the summer, although we weren’t there that much
9 into the summer at that time. It was a good experience, basic. Pushing yourself to the
10 limit and seeing what you can get out of yourself. Instead of being what I was, six foot
11 one and a hundred fifty pounds when I graduated high school. I ended up eating better
12 and exercising better and ended up gaining some weight in muscle over there, so I kind of
13 appreciated it. It was a big time because the drill sergeants that we had weren’t regular
14 DIs [Drill Sergeants] at the time. They were pulled from other units and placed in our
15 basic training battalions. They did the best they could. We only had one true DI, and he
16 was our PT instructor. He made us work.

17 KC: I bet he did.

18 TG: Yep.

19 KC: What about AIT? You don’t have to go anywhere for AIT since you’re
20 taking it there at Fort Riley.

21 TG: Well, it’s kind of funny because after—I was in a AVM Platoon, and I don’t
22 even remember the unit that it was. I can’t recall. It was atomic demolition munition for
23 the Thomas John rocket. We ended up having to go to an engineering battalion or
24 company, and that was stationed at Fort Riley. They told us we were going to have to go
25 for training in Belmar, Virginia, to get that special training for being an AVM officer. But
26 then they disbanded the Thomas John rocket, and we were kind of sitting there at Fort
27 Riley, waiting for what to do, so they gave us honor details for old soldiers. We polished
28 up some 105 Howitzers. We did some creating, and hey, pretty easy for maybe a month.
29 All we had was a handful, maybe a squad. Maybe there were ten of us or so that were
30 going to be in AVM training. But because it disbanded like I said, we ended up kind of
31 waiting for orders to do something else, and they came. They said, “We’re going to have

1 to go to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to get engineer training.” We hadn’t had any VAT
2 yet, so we ended up going to, like I said, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, did a combat
3 engineer training, and then they shipped us back to Fort Riley. At that time, the 9th
4 Infantry Division was just reforming, and they put us in with all the new recruits that just
5 got through basic. They didn’t have any AIT yet, so we ended up going through a second
6 AIT for combat engineers. It did help because we had gone through it. It did help some of
7 the calvary to help them do the instructions. We had two AITs, which is odd.

8 KC: Yes, that certainly is odd. I wonder if you might tell me about this AIT for a
9 combat engineer. What did it consist of?

10 TG: Learning how to set explosives, all different types of charges, building
11 bridges with logs, how to know how to collapse the bridges, maps, using ropes, and
12 building a Bailey bridge and pushing that across the ravine, the floating bridge, which
13 was concrete that supported the planks that allow the vehicles to cross. It’s anything to do
14 with construction but also learning the combat ways too.

15 KC: Right.

16 TG: To defend perimeters as we’re doing our work. I ended up getting very
17 proficient at the M-79 grenade launcher, and that became my weapon. I also became the
18 demolition specialist.

19 KC: What kind of demolitions training are you receiving here? What sort of
20 things are you working with?

21 TG: Well, we trained with all your TNT, B-4, we did another called flexex and
22 DETCORE, detonation caps, how to handle it, and be safe with it, how they all
23 functioned with the job that they needed to do.

24 KC: Was this basically the same at Fort Riley as it was the first time through at
25 Leonard Wood?

26 TG: I think it was more intense at Fort Riley because I think they were knowing
27 that we were probably going to end up going into combat within the near future.

28 KC: Yeah.

29 TG: I enjoyed it, I think, more at Fort Riley. I enjoyed being in Kansas. I don’t
30 know why, but I felt comfortable with it more so than Fort Leonard Wood, which was

1 odd because the nickname for Fort Leonard Wood was Fort Lost in the Woods. It was
2 very rural. Fort Riley was close to Manhattan, Kansas, which is a college town.

3 KC: When do you finish up with AIT?

4 TG: Oh, boy. I don't recall exactly when I finished up with it, but it was kind of a
5 transition where after you were finished with AIT and the 9th Infantry Division and
6 fifteenth combat engineer battalion, we kind of just kind of melted into that at Fort Riley,
7 stationed at Camp Funston, I believe the name of it was. There were different camps at
8 Fort Riley. Custer Hill is where we took our basic training. Funston and—I can't think of
9 all the different names of the camps that are within Fort Riley. We kind of just ruled into
10 what we needed to be with the 9th Infantry Division. Then they told us that we were
11 supposed to take leave, and when we came back, we were going to start packing up our
12 gear, and the orders were going to come down that we were going to go to Southeast
13 Asia, but they didn't say exactly where in Southeast Asia.

14 KC: What did this mean to you at this time?

15 TG: Well, we all felt that it was going to be Vietnam, but they didn't come out
16 and say it. We were supposed to go over there and somewhat secretly. They wanted us to
17 take all of our patches and any kind of identification and not tell anybody where we were
18 going. We ended up flying out of Manhattan Airport, and it took us to Oakland,
19 California, where we boarded a ship, a merchant ship set up to hold all the troops. I'll
20 never forget—I think it was October the first of '66—that we left the dock at Oakland,
21 California, went under the Golden Gate Bridge. To our surprise, a lot of people seemed to
22 know we were leaving because they had confetti coming off of the bridge and people up
23 there waving at us.

24 KC: Is that right?

25 TG: Yeah. Yeah. The word got out.

26 KC: I guess so. What was it like for you to know that you're going to be going to
27 Southeast Asia, probably Vietnam? Did that give you any sort of pause that you're
28 possibly going to a warzone?

29 TG: Oh, yeah. We thought that that's where we were going. We were heading to
30 Vietnam but officially didn't say anything until we were halfway there. Then they said,
31 "This is where we're going." Then they started telling us about it. So, everybody was

1 scared and green and wondering what was going to happen, how it was going to look,
2 what we were going to do when we first got there. We all thought, “What are we going to
3 do? Hit the beach? We’re not going to hit the beach in this big ship.” How are you going
4 to handle? You’re always wondering. You don’t know what’s coming up.

5 KC: Yeah. I wonder if you can tell me about this trip over. This would’ve taken
6 probably three weeks to a month to get over there.

7 TG: Yeah, that’s another interesting story. First day out, I volunteered to be in the
8 kitchen to help get the—we called in the mess hall in the Army, but I forget what the
9 Navy called it at the time or the merchants. It was the first day out we got out of Oakland
10 and under the bridge. All I remember is that it got rougher and rougher. The ocean was
11 really churning up, and we were in for a pretty good storm. I was glad I was where I was
12 because everybody where the cots were were getting sick because it was so rough. We
13 did all right. All the guys that were in the mess hall did pretty good. We tried to get up on
14 the deck as much as you could to get some fresh air, but that was about it. It was a long
15 trip. It was over. We stopped in Okinawa for, I think it was, about eleven hours. We had
16 leave, so we could go off of the ship, so a lot of guys went into town and had to be back
17 on the ship, ready to depart. Some of them didn’t make it back.

18 KC: Is that right?

19 TG: They couldn’t find their way back. Then we left, saw a couple of large
20 volcanoes along the way once we saw land again. Everybody was looking forward to
21 seeing land, big land. We pulled into Da Nang Harbor. There were other troops that were
22 on the ship with us. I think there were MP Battalion or whatever. I don’t remember the
23 size of their unit. And Marines. I think the Marines got off in Da Nang. We were there for
24 one night, and you could see the explosions off in the distance in the hills, and you could
25 hear gunfire and artillery. It was interesting, though we were hoping we’d never have to
26 see that ourselves up close.

27 KC: Sure.

28 TG: We pulled out of there late the next day, heading south. We pulled in a Dung
29 Tao. They told us that we were going to go on-shore, and they were picking all the
30 soldiers to disembark, and we were going to have a parade for General Westmoreland.

1 We ended up getting in a formation, and he did some speaking. We stayed at attention,
2 and that was hitting the beach for us.

3 KC: So definitely different from what you probably anticipated, I guess.

4 TG: Oh, yeah. We didn't know. They told us we were going to go on shore. They
5 didn't give us any information. We just thought, "Why are they sending us on shore
6 without ammunition?" They told us that we'd be okay, that we're going into a really
7 secure area. It was. It was an R&R center, beautiful beaches, and that we were going to
8 meet Westmoreland there. That was quite interesting. Then we got back on the landing
9 craft and deployed. I realized, "Today's October 20th. It's my birthday."

10 KC: Is that right?

11 TG: It was quite interesting that they picked us up in an airplane—I think it was a
12 Caribou or whatever they call them—opened the back end up and flew us into Camp
13 Bearcat, which was about—I'm going to estimate—twenty-five miles north of Saigon.
14 That's where we disembarked the plan and headed into Camp Bearcat and set up some
15 tents and started building barracks. We didn't really see any issues at all during the time
16 we were at Bearcat. We did construction work. We built barracks, and we built mudholes.
17 You're doing kind of a construction engineer's work, not combat engineer. You're doing
18 a lot of hauling five-ton dump trucks, this, that, and the other things. Busy work. Making
19 Camp Bearcat suitable for the 9th Infantry Division, the remaining part of the large 9th
20 Infantry Division had come in at Camp Bearcat.

21 KC: As you mentioned, or as you alluded to, Camp Bearcat was not complete at
22 this point. There's a lot of construction that goes on at this early time. Can you describe
23 for me what Bearcat looked like when you arrived?

24 TG: I don't recall, but I don't recall seeing too many constructed barracks. When I
25 say barracks, they were little structures with screening and flat, and for the windows they
26 take a tent like a squat tent, or I forget what the size of it was, and drape it over to be your
27 roof. We had maybe a few mess halls but not many. A lot of the wooded area came up on
28 the north. It came in through the camp pretty close, and that's part of the job that we were
29 supposed to do was to help clear some of that area to get a real better field of fire between
30 us and the woods. But, as I said, we never experienced any kind of mortar attacks or
31 anything while I was at Bearcat. I recall one night that I was on guard duty, and I saw a

1 huge explosion in the direction of Long Bien, and I think it was an ammo dump in Long
2 Bien, near the airbase there. They did an ammo dump with a mortar rocket. That was
3 eight, ten miles away, so I just really saw the flash of it. Now, a friend of mine was
4 stationed right there, and it blew him out of the cot. He was kicking back and doing all
5 right, and he was actually there. Now, he's a friend of mine.

6 KC: That's really interesting. What were your impressions of Vietnam, the
7 country itself, when you first arrived?

8 TG: I think the first thing I come up with was there was a distinct odor or aroma. I
9 don't know which you would call it. It wasn't that pleasant, but I don't know. It was
10 never to the tropics ever before, and it was quite interesting. Again, I was learning so
11 much because I was quite naïve about what the world was like, and this was quite an
12 experience for me.

13 KC: Yeah. I wonder if you might expand on that for me. You say you were
14 learning things and coming over rather naïve. What sort of things were you picking up
15 on?

16 TG: Well, the people in general, the way they lived, how friendly some of them
17 were, but yet they wanted to keep their distance because they could get in trouble if the
18 VC [Viet Cong] were around, trying to earn a living, farming, children, trying to sell
19 things along the road. When you pull over, they want to sell you something to drink or
20 pineapples on a stick or stuff like that. You didn't know if you should trust it or not, but
21 you did, and you survived. I'm here to talk about it. All we thought about was just chase
22 the drink or leave.

23 KC: Right.

24 TG: The country itself is beautiful. I wish I had the opportunity, and if I get it, I'd
25 go back to see it now because it's a very beautiful country. One thing that I remember:
26 beautiful sunsets. That's always stuck in my mind. The different odors when we were out
27 on patrols or somewhere near population, there was a hint of—when I smell it today, and
28 when autumn comes, and people start gathering their leaves and burning their leaves—
29 and so I think it's some of the vegetation that they might've been burning for their fires
30 for cooking, things like that, for bathing.

31 KC: Yeah.

1 TG: That's my flashback. When I smell that, I think of Vietnam.

2 KC: Right. Were you—

3 TG: I don't know if anybody else mentioned that, but there's just that odor of

4 when you're burning wet leaves.

5 KC: Yeah, I've heard many times that some of the strongest memories are

6 triggered by smells that you remember from that time.

7 TG: Yeah, yeah.

8 KC: Interesting. Were you with the 15th at this time, or had they assigned you to a

9 unit yet?

10 TG: I'm sorry. What was that?

11 KC: Were you with the 15th Combat Engineers at this time, or had they assigned

12 you to anyone?

13 TG: Well, yes. We all went over there together. The 15th Engineer Battalion—we

14 all went over together. We were advanced party for the 9th Infantry Division, as I said, to

15 build up Camp Bearcat, so that the 9th Division could move in there and have room for all

16 their people. Then after we got finished at Camp Bearcat, just before the 9th started

17 moving in, they said we're going to move down to Dung Tam along the Mekong River,

18 and that's where I ended up for the rest of my tour.

19 KC: Okay. Take me through a typical day here at Bearcat. What would you be

20 doing say from the time you woke up through your entire day until your day was over?

21 What would a typical day consist of?

22 TG: Most of the time, we were doing construction work, building barracks,

23 carpentry work, mess halls. There was a big push to get mess halls done because they

24 needed to feed all the guys when they got there, and they wanted them to be in a good

25 environment when they arrived. The mud was another thing that you had to do with, but

26 we used to have to build walkways out of PSP or whatever you could get your hands on.

27 PSP is pierced steel planking. It's used a lot of times for roadbeds or airport runways. We

28 did that also. We built a runway for the airport. I did a lot of truck driving, dump truck.

29 We used to go to the latter ice pit off base and bring the trucks back in, spread it out, and

30 help building the other runway for the aircraft to come in. As I said, building barracks,

31 clearing bush out in the wooded area back away several hundred yards. There was all this

1 brush to clean up there too. I used to drive. I did a little bit of everything. I wanted to
2 experience everything because we had to drive truck 24/7 to keep moving. Sometimes
3 we'd need somebody on the night shift, and you end up driving truck and definitely
4 during the day, you get some time off, but then you might go and do carpentry work
5 again. It was quite interesting.

6 KC: Now, how long were you at Bearcat before you moved down to Dong Tam?

7 TG: I don't remember. We got there on October 20th, and I spent New Years' Eve
8 at Bearcat, and it was maybe January, February, maybe January, that we ended up going
9 down to Dong Tam.

10 KC: Now, did the whole engineer battalion move down itself?

11 TG: Not the entire. It was a couple of companies went down first. Maybe A, B. I
12 was in the Delta Company, D Company, and we went down. It had no barracks at all. The
13 only thing familiar was Dong Tam, but it was originally kind of wetlands, rice paddies,
14 whatever, and the Army started building it up. There were two dredges out in the delta in
15 the Mekong River. One of them was called the New Jersey Dredge, and they were
16 pumping the sludge, dirt, whatever they got off the bottom into an area just, oh, boy, it
17 would've been north of us and filling it in. It was very sandy, and it would drain out, but
18 it was very sandy. They just kept building it up, several feet, maybe five, maybe ten in
19 some places, ten foot deep. That's when it got really interesting because when we got
20 there, like I said, they didn't have any mess halls or barracks, so we lived in our pup tents
21 for, I think it was about, four weeks until we had several mess halls built. Then we finally
22 ended up building some two-story barracks, and we never complained because we were
23 in the tent because other guys were coming in and starting to occupy the barracks, but
24 finally we got into one. But I think it was at least a month, maybe a little more that we
25 were in the pup tent, which was terrible.

26 KC: Those would've been rough conditions, I would think.

27 TG: Yeah, that was bad. That was some of the worst living conditions that I can
28 remember.

29 KC: I wonder if you can tell me about these kinds of living conditions whether
30 it's the ground or the possible rain or the insects or wildlife or foliage. What sort of things
31 are you dealing with on a regular basis here?

1 TG: Basically, there was no foliage in our area because it was all built up of all
2 this filth from the dredges. It had dried out pretty well, but it always rained. Sleeping
3 bags and poncho liner, and everything was always damp, wet, and we tried to dig a trench
4 around the pup tent, so the water could at least drain into that and wouldn't flood you out.
5 We had air mattresses we'd blow up and hope we wouldn't float away. Lots of rain.

6 KC: Yeah.

7 TG: Lots of mud. Not there so much mud, but wet sand.

8 KC: Yeah.

9 TG: When it was naptime, they had the moonlight came, and you had to wash
10 your utensils, clean your—I can't think of the term now—canteen cup, and your mesh
11 gear and everything. You need that. You didn't have any other utensils, trays or dishes or
12 anything like that, so it was quite an experience. I think they were. That one was the
13 worst. The conditions and laying down at night, if you did lay down at night or whenever
14 you got the opportunity, it was always wet and damp.

15 KC: Here you are a young man from Pennsylvania. You're in Vietnam. You're in
16 this—

17 TG: Eighteen, nineteen years old.

18 KC: Yeah. Here you are in the warzone. Was this your idea of what a war was
19 going to be like?

20 TG: Well, up until this point, we hadn't experienced any hostile forces to our
21 surprise. You always expected it, but you didn't. Once we did get more established, the
22 perimeter guard became an essential thing. Before that, there were Army infantrymen that
23 were guarding the perimeter of our camp, but then afterwards, it became a need for
24 everyone to participate, so you always assumed every couple of days you had to be
25 perimeter guard. Again, it was a long time before we experienced any issues doing
26 perimeter guard. The only one that I recall is hearing off in the distance a *thud-thud-thud*
27 kind of a sound, and pretty soon, we heard this whistling going over our heads. We all
28 looked at each other, pretty late at night like, "What the heck is this?" The mortars were
29 coming in on us, and they were targeting the ammo dump behind us in the center of the
30 camp. They hit some of it, and some of it fell short, and one hit one of the trees. There
31 were some guys that were really close to a tree, and they got hit. Literally, late, not

1 necessarily anything else. Then they came running down to our position, and we did try
2 to shoot them away because they didn't smell too good.

3 KC: I'm sure.

4 TG: It was scary yet comical at the time.

5 KC: What is it like to be here at Dong Tam, and again a young man from
6 Pennsylvania, receiving mortar fire for the first time? What goes through your mind?
7 How do you react to that?

8 TG: You took cover, hoping that one didn't fall short, took your position. You
9 trained to take it the best you can and not too scared because you didn't know after the
10 mortar attack, were we going to get ground forces coming at us? The position I was in, it
11 wasn't likely because there was a canal, a fairly wide canal, between us and where the
12 enemy would have come. There was an incident where I saw—oh, I had the night-vision
13 scopes at the time binoculars—I thought I saw something across the way. We couldn't
14 tell. Everybody said, "Yep. It looks like a face looking at us." So we sent fire a couple of
15 rounds into that area, and I did, and it disappeared, so I don't know. Again, I said it was
16 late at night. It could've just been Foley that looked like a face, couldn't be too sure. But
17 we got permission to fire, and we did.

18 KC: How long did this mortar attack last?

19 TG: A minute. It doesn't take long once they start firing to pinpoint where they're
20 coming from, and that was the first night that I actually saw Puff the Magic Dragon,
21 spraying the area with M-50 machine gunfire.

22 KC: So, they called in Puff the Magic Dragon for this, then?

23 TG: Yep, yep.

24 KC: That must've been quite a sight for you.

25 TG: Oh, it was. How far away was it, it seemed like quite a good distance, but it
26 could've been a mile or two away from us. Yeah, you could see the gunfire and all the
27 tracers that come out of that, it looked like they were just spraying it with a water hose.

28 KC: Wow.

29 TG: It was quite an experience.

30 KC: Yeah, I would guess so.

1 TG: It probably lasted maybe ten minutes, fifteen minutes at that that we heard
2 the mortars going over our heads. It wasn't consistent. It was maybe three or four and
3 then nothing for a little bit. We figured somebody was observing to see where they
4 landed, and they gave them adjustment. Then maybe another three or four would come
5 over, and then maybe another three or four. This probably took place in maybe a fifteen-
6 minute span. But, as I said, then Puff the Magic Dragon came on the scene, and then it
7 stopped.

8 KC: Yeah. Well, now it must seem that you are officially in the war after you've
9 been—

10 TG: Oh, yeah.

11 KC: Yeah. What do you do in the aftermath of an attack like this?

12 TG: We clean up, look for any damages. Because we were engineers, we had to
13 maybe reconstruct something. I don't recall that there was too much damage other than
14 the fire caused by the ammo dump, and it wasn't that bad that I recall. The mess hall and
15 barracks, I don't recall any of them getting hit. We all had bunkers right outside the
16 barracks that the men could get in. The only other was the one that fell short. The mortar
17 that fell short that took the four-man machine. That was the only one. We all kind of
18 looked at each other and said, "Man, that one came close," because it was only maybe
19 twenty yards away from us.

20 KC: Wow. As an engineer, are you tasked with building the bunkers outside of
21 the barracks?

22 TG: Oh, yeah.

23 KC: Tell me how you would put together a bunker. How would you build one of
24 these things? What would go into it?

25 TG: Just start throwing sandbags, and it was basically all sandbags. You'd build it
26 up to about four foot high, maybe a little more. Then we'd get some timbers or some of
27 that PSP planking and run it across the roof. We'd pile it full of a couple of more layers
28 of sandbags to hopefully take a direct hit from a light mortar. You'd have room enough in
29 there for maybe a squad. The barracks that we had had maybe three or four squads in it. I
30 don't recall exactly. There were bunkers built that could hold two squads. I think that's
31 how we did it. One end of the barracks and one at the other. The downstairs guy would

1 go into one bunker, and the upstairs would go in the other. You had drills, and once in a
2 while you have incoming rounds. You could always tell incoming rounds from outgoing
3 rounds because they were constantly firing whatever it was, 105 Howitzer round out, but
4 you could be sound asleep, and you could tell when a mortar was coming in. There were
5 times that that happened. Definitely.

6 KC: Yeah.

7 TG: We ended up having to protect New Jersey Dredge. As I mentioned before,
8 there were two dredges. I don't recall the name of the other one. I ended up being
9 charged of the mission to go and protect the dredges. What we ended up doing was taking
10 a boat, and it was just a half pontoon. If you're familiar with the pontoons that hook
11 together to make a bridge. We had a half pontoon, and we put a sixteen or whatever
12 horsepower motor on the back of the thing. We'd take maybe a guy out. We never went
13 out alone because it was always at least one other fella. I have a schedule to go around
14 the dredges and drop small quarter-pound quarter-stick charges of TNT. We tacked them
15 because the one dredge did get damage by an explosive device that was placed there by a
16 VC that had, I guess, swung them out and put the charge next to or under the dredge and
17 damaged it. We had to constantly protect it.

18 KC: How often would you be in charge of protecting this dredge?

19 TG: Well, there for a while, it was every night, every day. Sometimes it's during
20 the day, but most of the time it was on at night. I did also run the boats out. There were
21 maybe three boats, and we would all run around go out and come back onto the Mekong
22 River. That was an adventure at time because the current was very swift at times, and I
23 recall one incident where I was piloting the boat. I was trying to get to the dock by the
24 dredge, but the current was so rapid, and my small motor couldn't steer away from the
25 dredge. We ended up hitting the dock of the dredge. I ended up flipping backwards into
26 the water. Luckily, an infantryman that was right there and saw this happen, put his rifle
27 down, and I grabbed ahold of it, and he pulled me back onto the dock, the bunk of the
28 dock.

29 KC: Good thing he was there, huh?

1 TG: Oh, yeah. My helmet ended up at the bottom of the river, so I had to find
2 another helmet. That was quite an adventure. That was close. You get sucked in under the
3 dredged by the current. They could end up dredging you up.

4 KC: Yeah, that'd be big trouble.

5 TG: Oh, yeah.

6 KC: Are you armed at all when you go out to—other than, of course, a TNT that
7 you were using?

8 TG: Yeah. I always had my .45, which was weapon of issue if you had a 79
9 grenade launcher. I always had a .45 with me at the time. Luckily, I had that strapped to
10 me. I wasn't going to lose that.

11 KC: Right. We should make mention, I guess, that the reason you were dropping.
12 Or you should tell me. Why were you using these quarter sticks of TNT and dropping
13 them outside around the dredge? What would be the purpose of this?

14 TG: Well, if you have an divers that are going under water, and you drop a
15 charge, the concussion or the shockwave would burst their eardrums or do damage to
16 their body if they were within a certain range. I don't know what it would've been, but
17 we usually dropped a charge toward the rear and then around the side one or two, and
18 then we'd go around the front, drop one. It circulated at least once or twice at a fair
19 speed. The fellows that were on the dredges would tell you if you're too close because
20 they'd feel the shockwave.

21 KC: I'm sure that they would let you know.

22 TG: Yeah.

23 KC: How big a dredge was this for somebody who's not initiated with the size of
24 these things.

25 TG: I don't know how you go by size, but it's huge. It's bit. They used to invite
26 us up to have leftovers if they had a meal up there, and they saw we were down there
27 risking our lives to protect them. They'd invite us up for taking some of the meals that
28 they had. I recall one time, well maybe several times, the food was always good, but there
29 were some kind of beetle or insect or something we would get in it. When you're eating
30 mashed potatoes, that's what you saw. They looked like raisins in your mashed potatoes.
31 You'd push them aside and get rid of them and eat the potato. Another good experience.

1 KC: I guess, depending on your definition, I guess.

2 TG: What kind of bug it was that was all over the place on the dredges. I don't
3 know why they hung there. Maybe they liked the light or something, but they ended up
4 finding their way into the mashed potatoes. I remember that vividly.

5 KC: Did the dredge run twenty-four hours?

6 TG: Yeah.

7 KC: Which would make sense given the size of the task that they were trying to
8 accomplish with the building up there at Dong Tam. Tell me about your typical pace of
9 life there during the day in addition to building things, building bunkers, putting up
10 barracks, protecting the dredge. What other things would you do, say, when you were not
11 on duty?

12 TG: Well, I would go to the day room, play cards. I didn't partake in alcohol at
13 the time. I didn't like beer where a lot of guys did. I used to drink, you know, soft drinks.
14 We had a pretty good mess sergeant who would sometimes whip up some French fries
15 and bring them up to the day room, and guys would partake. We had a television and
16 radio and all kinds of games that you could play. Then we had a projector. Every night, I
17 think we had movies. Sometimes we saw the same movie over and over and over again. It
18 was a lot of Elvis movies and a lot of Marilyn Monroe movies. I remember Elvis. We
19 didn't have that many films to watch, so you just watch them over again. You'd put it in,
20 and the guys would see what it was and get rags.

21 KC: You mention the television. What sort of programs would be on television?

22 TG: Just Armed Forces. Whatever we could pick up. Yeah, it wasn't anything
23 special. I don't recall watching it that much.

24 KC: What about music? Did you have a chance to listen to say, Armed Forces
25 Listen Vietnam?

26 TG: Yes. Yeah. All the time. Good Morning Vietnam. He, I think, was there, but
27 he left just as we arrived or shortly thereafter—

28 KC: Adrian Cronauer.

29 TG: Adrian Cronauer. Yeah. But, yeah. There was a girl that was the announcer
30 when I was there, most of the time. I can't remember her name. And then you always had

1 Hanoi Hannah. She was always on the radio in Saigon, I guess it was. Or not Saigon,
2 Hanoi. Hanoi Hannah.

3 KC: What kind of music comes to mind when you think about this time?

4 TG: Oh, all the good music from the 60s. I still love them. Rock n' Roll. A lot of
5 the guys were into listening to country and western. I had a couple of friends that were
6 tuned into their radio. I think it was on Armed Forces Radio, the Grand Ol' Opera from
7 Nashville, Tennessee. That was a popular one. And we all enjoyed it. Fellas in the
8 barracks, they were always playing records or elaborate tapes of music. Again, we'd hear
9 them over and over again. I think they got etched into your mind.

10 KC: I would imagine so.

11 TG: I mean any movie that you watch, they're usually playing that kind of music.

12 KC: Right.

13 TG: The Temptations. Four Tops. Stevie Wonder. All of those. Typical.

14 KC: Mr. Grill, I hate to stop us after just getting started today, but I'm going to
15 need to stop here for today.

16 TG: Okay.

Interview with Terry Grill

Session [2] of [3]

Date 26 March 2013

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Terry
2 Grill. Today is 26 March 2013. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
3 University. Mr. Grill is kind enough to join me again by telephone from his home in
4 Macungie, Pennsylvania. Okay, Mr. Grill, when we left off last time, we had you there at
5 Dong Tam. You were explaining the setup of things down there, and you were talking
6 about this one mortar attack that you suffered while you were there. I wonder if you can
7 pick up the story there. What was going on down in Dong Tam, and what was going to be
8 the role with your unit down there?

9 TG: My role was to support the infantry. When they'd go out on a mission, they
10 would send a certain amount of combat engineers that had demolition training. I was one
11 of them, and we would accompany them on several small missions that I recall were
12 somewhat close to camp, Dong Tam, and really didn't get much action until they started
13 to put us on a helicopter and put the whole infantry unit and ourselves several miles out
14 into the jungle somewhere. We didn't know where we were going exactly, but we tried to
15 get a seat by the door, so I could see the scenery. Maybe that wasn't such a good thing.
16 The door was always open while we were flying. One of the first missions that I recall
17 that I went on had somebody firing. I don't know if it was from snipers or what, but we
18 had set up a perimeter after we had left the helicopter. We set up a perimeter, and some of
19 the infantry went out, as I recall. I was kind of very green. I got along with everybody.
20 They went looking for the sniper, and evidently, they caught up with him. I'm not sure.
21 Evidently, they did hit someone in our unit, and we set up for the evening body bags right
22 alongside where I was going to settle in for the night. It was a little scary situation,
23 feeling sorry for those soldiers that got killed in that action. Like I said, it could be very
24 light at the time, only a few shots, and I guess the enemy sniper's a pretty good shot.
25 Another mission that we went out on—one of the first that we came under heavy fire—I
26 was behind the infantry, and I was kind of alone with a few guys off to my blank but
27 maybe twenty or so yards behind them. Our infantry guys started firing, and I hit the
28 deck. I could see the shells going through the grass right alongside of me. I didn't know if
29 I should roll one way or another because the firing was coming pretty good, waving past

1 your body as you lay there, and you could actually see it, like I said, skimming through
2 the grass. I must've been at the low point where they were hitting the ground. That was
3 quite a scary situation, one of the ones that I remember pretty freshly in my mind.

4 KC: I wonder if you might be able to take me on one of these missions from the
5 very beginning, from say the night before if you know you're going out. What sort of
6 things you're doing to prepare, then saddling up as it were, getting on the helicopters,
7 going up. Can you take me through an entire mission, say from the night before?

8 TG: Well, just make sure that you had all your gear and everything ready to move
9 out in the morning, get all your orders, what you were supposed to be performing, what
10 you'd have to look out for. Usually, it's kind of a routine preparation. I don't remember
11 all the details, but in the mornings when we woke, we had to set the explosives that we
12 were going to be carrying in a sack. There were usually about forty or fifty pounds of
13 some type of explosives including from DETCORE, Claymore mines, blasting caps.
14 We'd go through wherever we had to pick that stuff up and head down towards the
15 helipad and prepare to take off with the unit. As I said, when we get there, hopefully it
16 wasn't a hot zone because sometimes we'd land in those where you'd have to jump out,
17 and the helicopter didn't really come to a landing. It just hovered, and you'd have to jump
18 out. Some of the details I don't recall everything, but as we go on the mission, it depends
19 on if it's a hot or a cold landing, regroup in a jungle area with the unit that you were sent
20 out with the platoon or the squad. You tried to stay with the officer, lieutenant, radio man,
21 medic, chaplain, and myself, and maybe a few other individuals. We'd get our orders to
22 move out, and if they found any booby traps, they were mine to take. You usually had no
23 issues with anybody falling into any or stepping into anything. I don't recall anything
24 right alongside of me were in the vicinity that I could see that anybody was stepped in a
25 booby trap, pongee pit, things like that. They were pretty rudely made, or crudely made, I
26 should say. But if we found one, we'd just take a small charge or hand grenade and toss it
27 in to make sure it's broken up, so that no one could get injured.

28 KC: I see.

29 TG: There were bamboo ears. They were usually only large enough that if you put
30 your leg into it, you would cut your leg or something. Like I said, I never saw anybody be
31 injured by one of those. We'd also run into bunkers, and if they were unoccupied because

1 we'd run across them, we'd get an infantry guy. He'd hold my legs because I was long
2 and skinny at the time. I wouldn't fit now. But they put a charge near the roof just enough
3 to lift the roof and break it back down again. They were just usually made out of, you
4 know, sticks and mud, very crudely made also. If you want to cross any issues with—I'm
5 trying to think of the times that we had found ammunition that was either left behind or
6 we confiscated it in one way or another. It could've been shells, cartridges. It could've
7 been some small rockets or mortar rounds, Claymore mines, anything that the enemy
8 would've had, and we'd put it in a pile, and it was my job to put a charge into it and blow
9 it all up. That's about what a normal day would be out in the field until we met the
10 helicopter came in and hopefully gave us some hot rations. If not, we'd have to use our
11 C-rations. We could heat them up with some of the explosives that I was carrying, so a
12 lot of the infantry guys would come over and get like a small marble size piece of
13 explosive, and you could heat your C-rations and have hot food that day. That made us
14 pretty popular.

15 KC: I'm sure.

16 TG: All the engineers had that same experience.

17 KC: How many engine—

18 TG: If we were going to be staying overnight, then you'd set up your air mattress,
19 poncho liner, whatever you had, make yourself comfortable, and hopefully you weren't
20 chosen to be on any kind of a watch that night. Those were times where I had to be on an
21 outpost just as a security, a listening post.

22 KC: About how many of the combat engineers would go out, say, on a platoon
23 size sweep or company-size sweep?

24 TG: Usually two. There could've been myself because I was the ranking one at
25 the time and another fella going out with the same platoon but with a different squad. I
26 was usually with the officer because I had M-79 grenade launcher. I was with the others,
27 but for some reason, the officer would always think to pick me against those others guy
28 considering the structure of the grenade launcher because there was some other incidents
29 that came up where he wanted me to lay a couple of rounds into an area, and I hit it pretty
30 good with the first, second, and third round.

1 KC: Yeah, you mentioned before that you had become pretty proficient with the
2 M-79.

3 TG: Yeah. I was able to use the old Kentucky windage kind of thing. I didn't need
4 to site too often. Some of the guys did, but we got to the point where we knew pretty well
5 how to angle the 79, so we'd get it to the place that we wanted and make up for the
6 trajectory that it takes because it curves slightly like a baseball would curve because of
7 the spinning action. I know one time, Officer said put one in that window of a shack out
8 in the middle of nowhere where we did run into some enemy forces, and he said, "Can
9 you put a shell, a 79 round in that window?" I said, "I'll try." Well, I think the next time,
10 I hit just above it on the roof, and then the next time, it hit right on the dining room table.
11 There was no one in there at that time, but he just wanted to make sure.

12 KC: Right. Sure.

13 TG: Then another one that came up one time we were out on a mission, and we
14 were set up for the night, raining pretty hard, and we got to the point where I was pretty
15 relaxed in my poncho and air mattress, and I heard somebody running. It was like it was
16 running right past me or jumped over me or something, and here, evidently it was one of
17 the VC hiding in the perimeter in a shack that he was hiding all day while we were in that
18 area, and then when it got dark out, he thought that he could make a run for it. He
19 must've jumped right over me and then jumped into a canal that was going by, and
20 everyone opened up fire into the canal. I threw a couple of hand grenades. It was too
21 close to fire a 79. We don't know if we got him, but I think they said they found him
22 floating the next day down the river somewhere. So, there are some pretty hairy moments
23 when I think if I would've been sitting there, I would've done something, but I blended in
24 pretty well with the surroundings because I was laying down in my poncho covered up.

25 KC: Can you describe for me what it's like for you, a combat engineer, to go out
26 on one of these missions? Talk me through the geography there. What was the geography
27 like? What's the flora like? Describe the weather. What's it like to go out on one of
28 these?

29 TG: Well, in the area that we were was pretty flat and muddy, as I said before, a
30 lot of rice paddies. When you did walk, and you had to go through a rice paddy, you
31 always went up on the berm even though you shouldn't have. Trying to go through the

1 rice paddies was like, as you can imagine walking through mud that goes above your
2 ankles. Other than the flatness of the terrain, the jungle really had these banana trees and
3 palm trees and all kinds of shrubbery that you had to make your way with. A lot of times,
4 we stayed on trails, but you have to be very careful there too because of some type of
5 booby trap that might be set up or snipers. You'd get to some areas where there were, not
6 necessarily canals, but little streams, and they just had a log that they put over to cross the
7 stream. You had to walk across this. After fifty or sixty guys get ahead of you, it gets a
8 little wet and slippery, so the trick was to get a pretty good running start and take as few
9 steps as you had to to get across to keep your balance. There were some incidences where
10 some guys did slip and fall in. That's a mess. If you did go in the water, you'd come out,
11 and a lot of times, you were full of leeches. They somehow attached themselves to your
12 legs and your body, and they'd get onto you. You had to have somebody pull them off. If
13 they were on too long, they were sucking away, and the medic would have to treat you a
14 little bit, clean the wound up. That wasn't too nice.

15 KC: I'm sure. What kind of toll does this take on your body? I mean, granted
16 you're a young man here, but what is it like to go through this day after day?

17 TG: Like everybody else. Hopefully, you were in shape, and the Army put you in
18 shape before you went over. I was six one and probably weighed a hundred and sixty
19 pounds, a hundred and eighty pounds, somewhere in there. I did all right keeping up with
20 everything. I had a pretty good load with the—not the ammunition—the grenades and
21 Claymore mines, and like I said about fifty pounds of explosives, C-3, flexex,
22 DETCORE, things like that.

23 KC: Yeah.

24 TG: You were in pretty good shape, so it didn't affect me too much that I know
25 other than the results now that Agent Orange got caught up with me and got diabetes. I'm
26 getting coverage for that from the VA [Veteran's Administration].

27 KC: Yeah.

28 TG: Several missions that we went out on. One that sticks out in my mind the
29 most was June 19th. I'll never forget that one. June 19th comes around, and I always have
30 flashbacks about that day. I lost my best buddy that day. He was in some boats. We had
31 all the canals that we were going up and down and things. They had some small boats

1 where maybe five or six guys would be in the boat. We'd be on land, and for some
2 reason, he was on the boat, and they got ambushed, and that was probably the worst
3 battle that I can recall that I was in. I was in the RAC Guy, I think it's called.

4 KC: RAC Jaw, maybe.

5 TG: (talking at same time). It was probably the worst day of my life because we
6 were really pinned down. The enemy was well-positioned in bunkers. We had our boats.
7 The one with the .40 millimeter canon came up the canal to try to take out a bunker that
8 was the one that was initially responsible for taking out the boat. From what I heard, they
9 had a .50 caliber-sized machine gun in that bunker, and that's what took the boat out that
10 my buddy was on. We were very close, and we shared a lot of things. I don't know if I
11 recall telling you about the barges that we were living on at the time. The Bien Hoa was
12 one and the Cow Tree was the other one. We'd be on those for about a month and then
13 we'd go off with the armored troop carriers and make out landing. We didn't need the
14 helicopters anymore at that point. They may pick us up occasionally to move it to a new
15 location, but coming back to the barge, it was a troop barge. It set up the house, the
16 battalion. It was nice to get back there because it was nice and dry, and we had good
17 meals the Navy put on for us. But every time we went out on a mission, we'd be out for,
18 like I mentioned I think before, we were out for the most was three days, but it was
19 always nice coming back to them.

20 KC: Sure.

21 TG: Getting back to the June 19th battle that we were in. Alpha company ended up
22 with a huge amount of casualties along with B company. I recall that I was with C
23 company, and we had several casualties. In fact, we were just ready to sit down for a
24 noon meal that our lieutenants said, "We'll move up into this location by this hooch, and
25 we'll take a break and have lunch." Just as he finished saying that, we got fired upon.
26 That's when the day started. It was quite traumatic to say the least. This is the same battle
27 that I sent the information about that you have. The Chaplain.

28 KC: Right.

29 TG: I don't recall his name, but I know there was a chaplain there, and I was right
30 beside him, refer back to that letter that he sent to his wife.

31 KC: Right.

1 TG: That explains a whole lot for the day. He said it as well as I could've said it.
2 The officer that I was with, he got shot but in the hand. It was into the hand, a wound, a
3 minor wound he said, but he kept fighting. We had a radio man that got hit. I think I'm
4 the only one out of the five or six of us that were with the lieutenant that didn't get hit,
5 but I know that it came close because the shell hit the heel of my boat. I believe it was
6 from the same fella that was firing at us from a hooch about a hundred yards away. That's
7 when I stood up and fired as many as I could rounds of M-79s into that area of the hooch,
8 hopefully getting whoever was firing at us. I don't know. You never know. The officer at
9 that point—we needed a radio man, so I pulled the radio off of the fella that was
10 wounded. It was a gut shot, and I commenced using the radio to call in for airstrikes,
11 what the officers had told me. The helicopters were coming in, and they were scraping
12 the area. In fact, they scraped to the fact that they thought we were some of the enemy, so
13 I stood up and waved. They could tell because I was so tall, I guess, that I was an
14 American soldier. They stopped firing, but the rounds were hitting all around us. Then
15 they started to bring in the jets, and they were dropping bombs. The approach that they
16 had to take was behind us, so when they drop a bomb, it was a couple of hundred yards
17 behind us, and it would go right over our head, and we could just see this bomb, heading
18 to the bunker and heading to the area where the VC were, which was a hundred yards or
19 less away from us, so that was something to see, those bombs coming down, and
20 hopefully they didn't drop too soon because you swear you could just throw a stone up
21 and hit them. That's how low they came to be. That was quite a time. Because we had so
22 many wounded, the helicopter started coming in to do medevac, and the first one that
23 came in, got some wounded soldiers in it, and I remember it taking off. It didn't get up
24 very high, and they must've got hit somehow because it actually flipped upside down,
25 and we could see some of the wounded soldiers that were in there falling out. It might've
26 been about thirty or forty feet off the ground at the time. That helicopter crashed,
27 needless to say. Another one came in, tried to do the same. He didn't get very far. He
28 spun around and came down. He didn't get up more than five feet, so when he got hit, it
29 just spun him around and hit the rice paddy. So, knowing that we need to get some people
30 over there, I grabbed as many weapons as I could because we had so many weapons
31 laying there, and I didn't want to leave them from the guys that were wounded at the

1 berm where I was. I hurried over to where the helicopter had come down, and that's
2 where I probably was right alongside Chaplain Miller at the time, and we tried to lift the
3 helicopter to get some of the wounded out there, the pilot and co-pilot. We were running
4 out of ammunition, so they said, "Pull the ammunition for the .50 caliber"—not the .50,
5 the M16 machine gun because the helicopter had quite a bit of that, so we kept trying to
6 select and leave the wounded, and there were no helicopters willing to come in anymore,
7 so we tried to carry them the best we could over to the boats that were waiting for us to
8 retreat back. We could put them on there, and they could get some medical assistance. It
9 was just one thing after another. I ended up staying on one of the armored personnel
10 boats with some of the wounded fellas, and one of the guys needed my weapon, so I
11 loaned it to him to the sergeant I knew was responsible. I did get it back. Luckily enough,
12 that evening, it was getting dark out at the time. I recall sitting in the boat, facing another
13 soldier—I don't remember who he was—but evidently, a bullet or a piece of shrapnel hit
14 right between us on the floor of the boat and sparked whatever it was. It ended up
15 peppering him with small pieces of shrapnel. Luckily enough, I didn't get anything. I just
16 count my blessings that I made it through that day.

17 KC: Yeah.

18 TG: Again, like I say, that was probably the worst day of my life.

19 KC: About how long does this engagement last?

20 TG: Well, it was around noon when we were going to stop, and it lasted until it
21 was dark out. So, depending on when the sun was setting, by six o'clock in the afternoon.
22 Through the evening, there was still some battling going on but not nearly as much. It
23 was sporadic. It was just leftover. From what we understood and what we were told was
24 that the enemy came up, and they high-tailed it out of there before we got it out of there.
25 We sort of believe that we did get quite a few. I don't remember the number.

26 KC: This is a pretty long engagement for this kind of activity.

27 TG: Yeah, all night. Then the next morning, I found out that my best buddy was
28 missing, and we were pretty sure that he got it. I was in talking distance with him when I
29 was walking on the bomb, he was on the water with the other infantry guys in this boat. I
30 may have even hollered over to him and say something to him about how lucky he was

1 that he was on the boat and dry where I was covered in mud because we had been tracing
2 through the rice paddies. Little did I know, he'd lose his life that day.

3 KC: What was your friend's name?

4 TG: Dennis. Dennis Adamski. He is from Appleton, Wisconsin. Many years later,
5 I visited Kansas City on business, the company I work for now. I knew that his brother
6 had lived in Kansas City because we had visited there one time on a weekend leave from
7 Fort Riley. I picked up the phone book while I was in my hotel room, and I thought, "I
8 wonder if he's still in the area." I go in, and I find his name. I called, and his wife
9 answered the phone. I told her who I was. She didn't remember me by name, but when I
10 mentioned that I was Dennis' best friend, she did remember me. She didn't remember my
11 name, but she remembered meeting me when I went with him to their home. I ended up
12 at their house, and they invited nephews and uncles and cousins, and we had like a family
13 reunion because they were wondering exactly how he met his fate. They were told one
14 thing, and I hopefully set them straight.

15 KC: Do you know what—

16 TG: He was hit by a mine or a land mine. I said, "No, he was not. He was hit by a
17 machine gun displacement." Hopefully, I set them straight. They said they would not tell
18 his parents. I think it was—his mother was still living, but they said they wouldn't tell
19 her. She was still up in Appleton, Wisconsin. But they were so thankful for me coming to
20 meet them and talk to them that evening.

21 KC: It seems that that would've been a difficult meeting. What was that like for
22 you?

23 TG: Oh, yeah. It was interesting to meet them. I had met the one that was a baby
24 at the time, and when I got there, he was grown up and an older teenager at the time. It
25 was interesting. I don't know how else to put it.

26 KC: Can you take me back to this engagement on the 19th of June?

27 TG: Yeah.

28 KC: Explain to me what it's like for you to be or for anyone to be in this kind of
29 heavy contact, heavy firefight, especially when it last this long. What's going through
30 your mind? How are you reacting? What are you thinking about as you're going through
31 this?

1 TG: You want to get the enemy. You want to get them to stop firing. You want it
2 to have it all stop. You know, you talk about being scared. Yes, you are. It's just you're
3 prepared for it, and you do the best you can. I don't even know what to say.

4 KC: Yeah.

5 TG: After that battle was over, the officer that was in charge that I was with at the
6 time, put me in for an Army Commendation Medal and Valor because it was in combat.

7 KC: Did you receive this award?

8 TG: I received the award, maybe several weeks later. Yeah.

9 KC: Yeah. After being in an engagement like this and losing a very good friend
10 that you had and receiving a medal for your efforts there, what kind of feelings and
11 thoughts do you have on this? Is it something you feel the medal validates what you were
12 doing? Is it something that seems inconsequential? Is it a mixture of the two? How do
13 you react to that?

14 TG: Well, I was definitely honored to receive it. I don't think I did anything out of
15 the ordinary, but because I stood when we were getting fired at, I was a pretty good
16 target. At the time, I was pretty skinny, so I didn't make too big of a target for them. I
17 don't know. I feel sorry that Dennis lost his life and all the other soldiers that were with
18 us that day who got wounded and injured for life and lost their lives. Like I say, it was a
19 terrible, terrible day.

20 KC: Yeah.

21 TG: I don't know how else to put it. I'm thankful that he was looking after me
22 that day and meant for me to keep moving on.

23 KC: Yeah. When this engagement is over, do you go back to a base camp or are
24 you on the barge? Do you go back to barge that night?

25 TG: No, I didn't—

26 KC: You stayed there?

27 TG: I spent the night on that armored boat, and the next morning, I rejoined my
28 group. They were wondering what had happened to me. They were worried that I was hit
29 too somewhere, but they realized that I got involved with the assistance on the helicopters
30 and getting the wounded guys over to the boats, so they could get some better medical
31 treatment. The next day, we kind of just cleaned up the area and got all the soldiers that

1 were killed in body bags and helicopter after helicopter and body bag after body bag. We
2 put them into the helicopter, and they'd take off with them. There were too many to
3 count. I actually don't recall. I just remember seeing a whole lane of them. It was quite
4 traumatic. You know, you think back now, today, and it brings tears to your eyes.

5 KC: So, when you're there the next day, are you coming back? Are you helied
6 back after everything is policed up?

7 TG: I don't recall. I think they took us back to the barge. I don't recall. After a
8 while, it's kind of a blank as to what happened.

9 KC: Yeah.

10 TG: I just don't recall. It must've been just a relief that we knew we were going
11 back to dry boats again, but we knew in maybe another day or two or three, we'd be back
12 out in the bush again.

13 KC: What do you do when you go back after this engagement? I mean, is there a
14 period where you decompress, where you collect your thoughts?

15 TG: Oh, yeah.

16 KC: Tell me about that part of the experience.

17 TG: You get back on. Clean everything up, especially yourself. Kind of relax.
18 Meet with the guys. Share magazines, a lot of Hot Rod magazines that we were into at
19 the time. We'd visit some of the infantry guys that kept the combat engineer group delta
20 company, who I was with, a little bit separated from the other infantry guys. We kept us
21 kind of together. Get good meals. Like I say, get cleaned up. Write letters to home. Then
22 I had the officer or my squad leader at the time for the engineers came up to me and said,
23 "You need to collect Dennis Adamski's belongings and anything that you shared. Keep
24 your items that you shared." We had a tape recorder that was probably one of the only
25 major things I had. It was just a small portable tape recorder, so we could tape messages
26 home. I was supposed to go through his things and pack them up, so they could be sent
27 back, and I was told that I might be accompanying the body back to the States for the
28 funeral, but that was then cancelled, which I was looking forward to having the
29 opportunity to actually be sent back on United States grounds again, but it didn't happen,
30 so we just kept moving forward. And like you say, decompress, just kind of relax and
31 take it easy, wait for the next orders.

1 KC: What is it like to deal with the loss of a close friend in combat, Mr. Grill?

2 TG: I don't know. It was very traumatic to know that he had lost his life when we
3 found out for sure that was what it was. We hadn't seen, but we were told that he had
4 passed away. Just like anybody else with news that's close to you. We had met in AIT,
5 and we went through two AITs, as I mentioned before when we got back to Fort Riley.
6 We just remained very close, visiting his family in Kansas. It's through a hardship.

7 KC: Yeah.

8 TG: Things that happened leading up to the moment when he was killed, I keep
9 thinking back because you take turns on the boat. One day, he'd say, "I'll take the boat.
10 Today, I want to stay dry. I want my feet to stay dry." And then I'd say, "Okay," so the
11 next day, I'd tell him, "I'd like to stay on the boat today." We kind of got into a routine
12 where we'd mix it back and forth. "Okay. It's your day to go on the boat." For some
13 reason, that day, he wanted to go on the boat because he said he wanted to stay dry. His
14 feet were bothering him. I said, "Okay, and I'll stay on the land." I think it could've been
15 the other way. Just like that, it could've been the other way.

16 KC: Yeah.

17 TG: I'll never forget that. That's hard to stomach at times.

18 KC: Yeah, I'm sure. Can you tell me what the pace of your mission was like?
19 How often are you going out? Are you going out on these missions that are basically the
20 same? You're working off the boats. You're working with the 9th Infantry. Explain that to
21 me.

22 TG: Well, we'd be on the barges for about four weeks, and we'd go off with the
23 boats. You'd stay out. Sometimes it was only for one day. You'd do a sweep of an area
24 and find nothing and everything was hunky dory. They'd let us retreat back to the barge
25 at night, take us back on an armored personnel boat. Then other times, you knew you
26 were going to go out for two or three days even though you might not run into anything
27 even though sometimes you did snipers. There were lulls. We used to say, "It must be
28 pay day." They used to be the end of the month, and we used to say, "It must be their pay
29 day," because that seemed to be when we hit the most combat situation, the heavier fire.
30 Other times, it was sporadic or boring as all get out. You'd just be walking across the
31 bush, come across villages. You'd see all the children and women, but you didn't see any

1 young men. You might see some old men. We didn't do anything. We'd just pass on
2 through. They'd offer you something to drink or something to eat. It was fairly friendly.
3 Little did we know that maybe the young men that were out in the bush waiting to
4 ambush us or sniper. Who knows? Sometimes it was very calm and peaceful, and then
5 other times it was all hell breaks loose.

6 KC: Yeah.

7 TG: It was hard to know what was going to happen. It was boring at one point,
8 and then, like I said, all hell breaks loose.

9 KC: All right. Now, you've talked about this one particular fire fight that you're
10 involved in, engagement you're involved with in June. Do any other of the missions stand
11 out to you that you recall?

12 TG: One that we had in the Rung Sat area. That was Rung Sat Special Zone if
13 you've ever heard of that.

14 KC: Yes, sir.

15 TG: We had to go out into the jungle area and set up for the night. We didn't
16 really run into anything, didn't have any issues. But in that area, the tide would come in,
17 and it would be knee-deep water, so you'd lash your air mattress up, so it wouldn't float
18 away and stay close to a tree or something oriented you could lash up to. One night, we
19 set out all of our perimeter security things. I had a Claymore mine that I put out to my
20 front. That night, we heard an explosion. We didn't know what it was, so we thought it
21 was the enemy that threw a hand grenade or something into our location because it was
22 fairly close. Then we found out it was one of the infantry guys. He actually pulled the pin
23 because he was scared he might've heard something, pulled the pin on a grenade but was
24 holding it and was ready to throw it. He didn't see anything or hear anything, so he fell
25 asleep. His hand released, and the grenade went off, so that's what we heard. Then we
26 had to bring in a helicopter to do a medevac for him, but before that happened, we didn't
27 know what this was. So they were going to call in an artillery garage. The artillery was
28 behind us, the enemy in front, so they called in from Rung Sat, and it was so wet that
29 when the shells it, it kind of shook like jelly on the land where we were. That was one of
30 the most terrible sounds that I ever heard was an artillery shell going off over your head
31 and landing fifty yards, maybe closer, in front of you. It sounded like a freight train

1 coming down the track. When these rounds came in, the Sergeant that was calling them
2 in wanted them to correct and elevate because they came in too close. Well, for some
3 reason, they didn't elevate. They dropped a little bit, and they came in closer. They were
4 right on top of us. These were, like I say, 105 Howitzers coming on us and just screaming
5 as they were approaching getting close. When they hit, we didn't know who was going to
6 get hit next because it was just all around us. Luckily, because of the muddy and wet
7 area, none of the shrapnel went horizontal. Most of it just went up, so you got hit by a lot
8 of mud and debris and things. Then, like I said, after that was all over, and we figured
9 there was no enemy in the area and in real life it was this guy's grenade that went off,
10 they got the helicopter in. Here's the helicopter coming in as low as they could overtop of
11 the trees, spotlight on. We're thinking, "Oh, my god. The enemy's going to see this and
12 hear this." For the rest of the night, nobody slept. We kind of stayed awake because we
13 didn't know what was going to happen. Then in the morning, when it started getting light
14 out, I got brave enough to get up out of my position. I walked over to where I had my
15 claymore mine, and I don't remember how long the cord was, but maybe twenty-five or
16 thirty feet, I just don't remember how long the cord was, maybe fifty feet. Needless to
17 say, the claymore wasn't there anymore because it was around, evidently, where it hit
18 during the night with one of those artillery shells. That tells you how close they were.
19 They were right on top of us. That was quite a night too. I'll never forget that one.

20 KC: Yeah.

21 TG: Although there was no enemy combat going on. It was all our doing.

22 KC: Right. Well, it would make it no less terrifying, I would think, when you
23 have 105s screaming in at you.

24 TG: Absolutely.

25 KC: Well, I wonder if you might tell me what the morale of your unit was like
26 there, whether it's the combat engineers or the infantry support or the infantry troops that
27 you were supporting. How were they dealing with this kind of war?

28 TG: Everybody seemed to be just fine. When you were out in the bush, you tried
29 to watch your buddy's back and try to get back safely. When you were back to the barge
30 or to the post, you were watching movies and having a good time and drinking beer,
31 playing cards, trying to get back to some type of normalcy.

1 KC: Yeah.

2 TG: Everybody kind of did the same thing. Pretty good morale, I must say.

3 KC: Can you describe for me these barges that you were on? Were these LSTs?

4 TG: Oh, boy. I have a book here that has a picture of one. It may say. You could
5 be right saying LST. Here it is. Let's see. Yes. Converted LST Bien Hoa was the one, and
6 that had a helipad on the top. The other one was the—I don't see that one. I see the Bien
7 Hoa one, but I don't see the other one. The other one was just a, it almost looked like a
8 box. The Bien Hoa looked more like a ship. I don't know if it was self-propelled or not,
9 but the other one was just a floating box almost. I think it was called the *Colson*. I don't
10 recall.

11 KC: That's fine. Where would these be docked? Where would they be anchored?

12 TG: Well, they'd be floating right out in the middle of the Mekong River. They'd
13 be anchored out there, and if we had to relocate for some reason, they'd pull them—the
14 one that I was dealing with—they'd pull it with the tugboat. They were never docked at a
15 dock per se. It was always out in the middle of the water, in the river.

16 KC: Describe these LSTs for someone who may not be familiar with it. What
17 kind of size are we talking about? What do they look like? What kind of facilities do they
18 have? How is it being operated?

19 TG: Well, like I said, the one, the Bien Hoa, or the—there's another one. Let me
20 look for it. It looks like a ship. The first one that I stayed on was very box-shaped, and it
21 could hold double, like a whole company, at least a company, maybe two of infantrymen
22 plus us the engineers. A lot of just barracks—not barracks, but cots—just like any ship
23 that you'd think of. They'd stack them on top of each other. They were maybe about four
24 high. I just—I don't know how else to explain it. They were, oh boy, I'm trying to see if
25 they had some dimension or something on them.

26 KC: That's okay. We don't need a—

27 TG: About a hundred and some odd—oh, no, more than that. They were maybe
28 two-hundred feet in length. I just don't recall.

29 KC: Yeah, sure.

30 TG: I'd have to look at something and measure it up.

1 KC: These, of course, were operated by the Navy, but you guys were coming in
2 from the boats and spending a couple of three days there to get resupplied and
3 decompress a little bit to get orders to go back out again. That's kind of the pace of it?

4 TG: Yeah, that's pretty much it. I wish I could find the picture that I'm thinking
5 of the one that I was on.

6 KC: That's fine. That's fine. You kind of alluded to some of the things that you
7 would do when you were back on the LST. What sort of things would you in particular
8 do?

9 TG: Listen to music and write letters to home.

10 KC: How often did you write home?

11 TG: Every opportunity that you got. Every time you were back on the boat, you
12 would at least send a letter. Maybe not every day, but as soon as you could, you'd write a
13 lengthy letter and send it home because you knew you were going to be going out again
14 in maybe a couple of days.

15 KC: Right.

16 TG: So, you tried to keep in contact. Then we also did the talking letters with that
17 tape recorder that I mentioned that I shared with my buddy. We'd send tapes home, so
18 they could actually hear it. If there was any activity going on outside, we made sure that
19 they could hear it. A couple of times there were some incoming—or outgoing, I should
20 say—outgoing artillery rounds. They could hear it. My dad enjoyed hearing that. He
21 knew what it was like.

22 KC: Yeah.

23 TG: That's about the extent of it. At the time, I didn't indulge in alcoholic
24 beverages. Maybe I mentioned before I'd only drink beer if there was no soda pop
25 around. A lot of guys like to party.

26 KC: Right.

27 TG: But listening to music, writing letters to home, and getting some good meals
28 and some good sleep.

29 KC: And, of course, preparing for the next time out, which like you said, maybe
30 two days later, maybe three days later.

1 TG: Right. You never knew. It was usually, they'd give us a day back, and then
2 the next day, you'd hear it. "Okay. We're going out tomorrow." So, two to three days
3 back. You'd pull your time on that barge out in the Mekong River for maybe four, maybe
4 six weeks, and then we'd go back to Dong Tam, and another group of infantry and
5 combat engineers fellas would go out. Maybe another squad or platoon to help the
6 infantry. So, when we were back, then we'd do the routine things that we did when we
7 were back: building bunkers and pulling perimeter guard, as I probably mentioned before,
8 protecting the dredges, and running the infantry guys out to different positions with the
9 boats that couldn't get there by land because we had some locations that were quite
10 remote, couldn't get to them, so we'd take them out on the boat.

11 KC: And you'd be back for what? Say, four, six weeks, something like that?

12 TG: Yeah. Same thing. We'd just take turns.

13 KC: Right. Was it difficult to go back out?

14 TG: Yes. You always hated to see it coming because you knew where you were
15 going to see combat.

16 KC: Right.

17 TG: More so than when you were in camp. I think the only bright side was the
18 better meals. You always got better meals on the Navy boats. For some reason, they
19 tasted better, and they were cleaner conditions because the barracks were in the mess
20 halls that we had at the camp, it was okay.

21 KC: Yeah.

22 TG: It was a lot nicer on the boats.

23 KC: What kind of food would they serve you on the boats?

24 TG: You name it. Steak, ham, and eggs. I was one to always make breakfast. I
25 always enjoyed my eggs on boats, at camp and on the boat. Mashed potatoes, gravy,
26 turkey, chicken. You name it. They always seemed to have better selection and better
27 quality of food than we did when we were back at post. Although, our mess sergeants
28 always did the best to do what they could. One of my favorites—because I was raised in
29 the country, farmland, we were raised on liver and all the food that a lot of other soldiers
30 couldn't quite like. When they had liver on the menu, I got all that I wanted. That was the
31 best. Some of it didn't look too good, but you cover it up with ketchup.

1 KC: Well, how did you guys in the Army get along with the Navy guys, get along
2 with the sailors?

3 TG: I thought the calls went well. I mean we were protecting them, as much as
4 they were—they were more of our transportation and lodging. They didn't have any
5 issues with us. We always got along well with them. None at all.

6 KC: Now, you also mentioned the Vietnamese that you would occasionally
7 encounter when you're going out on one of these sweeps. What was your impression of
8 the Vietnamese?

9 TG: They were farm people. They wanted to farm their land, and the children, the
10 women were all scared, but they did what they could. They had to watch what they did
11 because they'd be in trouble if they saw us, if it was known that they were too friendly to
12 us. We never had any issues with them.

13 KC: Yeah.

14 TG: I felt sorry for the conditions that they had to live under.

15 KC: Were you involved in any sort of MEDCAP operations, going out to the
16 villages, helping them in terms of upkeep of help, or building buildings or digging wells
17 or any of those sorts of things that we hear about?

18 TG: I wasn't directly involved in any of those other than sweeping, mine
19 sweeping. We'd get reports that children maybe stumbled upon something, so we'd go
20 out and look for a mine that might've been planted somewhere. We used to do the
21 highway all the time because, again, as combat engineers, we had the mine sweepers,
22 metal detectors, whatever you want to call them, to go out to look for things that might've
23 been planted on the road.

24 KC: Can you tell me about doing this? Going on a minesweeping mission. How
25 would you go about this?

26 TG: I'm sorry. What?

27 KC: How would you go about a minesweeping mission whether it's a road or a
28 field or whatever it might be? Take me through that.

29 TG: Well, every morning before traffic would start, make sure that it was clean. A
30 lot of us would volunteer to go out because it was pretty good duty. You would just
31 sweep across, and if you think you did find something, you'd set a charge, a small one, to

1 blow it in place. They didn't want you to mess with it. I remember one time it was really
2 close to a school, and all the children were out. I did find something that was sticking out
3 of the ground, and it was metal. We didn't want to put any pressure on it, so I just
4 evacuated the school. We got some of the infantry guys that were there with the other
5 engineers. Everybody moved back, and I set a small charge. I just blew it in place. It was
6 something because the explosion was bigger than what the charge I put there, but after
7 that was gone, all the kids came running around and, "GI Number One! GI Number
8 One," because they could've gotten injured.

9 KC: Oh, yeah.

10 TG: Even though it was probably a personnel type thing, the weight of a person
11 couldn't set it off, it would've been a vehicle or something, but they set it where they did.
12 I can't believe it. Anybody could've tread on it.

13 KC: Right. What kind of things would you find in the ground? What types of
14 mines?

15 TG: Again, we didn't mess with them. If we found something that we detected,
16 we'd just blow it in place.

17 KC: Okay.

18 TG: Only one time we found wires that were going to something that was buried
19 on the side of the road, and it looked like for an electrical charge that somebody would sit
20 back and detonate as a truck was going over it. Again, we didn't investigate too much
21 because we didn't know if it was booby trapped.

22 KC: Right.

23 TG: So, we just kind of put a charge as close as we could and blew it in place. I
24 never saw an explosive device, but we thought there was something there, so we'd do it.

25 KC: And how would you go about doing that? Are you digging a hole close to it?
26 Are you just setting something on top of the area where you found it? How would you go
27 about that?

28 TG: Just setting something as close to it as possible or on top of it.

29 KC: And what type of explosives would you use?

1 TG: Well, at the time, I think it was B-4, C-3. It could've been flexex that you
2 wrap around a blasting cap and just have a one-minute fuse that you cut for it and blow it
3 in place.

4 KC: Very interesting. Why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Grill?

Interview with Terry Grill

Session [3] of [3]

Date 11 April 2013

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Terry
2 Grill. Today is 11 April 2013. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
3 University, and Mr. Grill is joining me by telephone again from his home in Macungie,
4 Pennsylvania. Okay, Mr. Grill, you were talking about the time there at the Rungsat, and
5 you're mentioning a couple of other missions that you were going out on. Could you
6 please pick up the story for me?

7 TG: Yeah. The one that sticks in my mind is the June 19th battle that we had.
8 There were others afterwards that were somewhat gray. It's just really fuzzy in my mind
9 to remember all the details, but I recall one time when we were walking across a field. It
10 was a pretty nice day. Everybody seemed to be enjoying the walk that we were having,
11 and we hadn't run into any snipers or any of the enemy. But off in the distance, we did
12 hear some explosions and gunfire, but it was well, well off in the distance. But yet, when
13 we were walking across, one of our men said, "I'm hit. I'm hit." Well, we didn't hear
14 anything, so we all hit the deck because we didn't know where it was coming from. Did
15 they have a silencer on their weapon? Was it a blow dart or what? Nothing else
16 happened. He suffered a leg wound. The medic attended to him, and they saw that it
17 came down at a very sharp angle almost like seventy-five, eighty degrees. Was it a stray
18 bullet from the other battle that was going on or something that we just didn't know? All
19 the while, he did get it in the lower portion of his leg, and there was a shell of some type.
20 As he was going out, putting on one of the armored troop boats, and he just waved at us
21 and said, "I'm going home." They might patch you up, but maybe you won't come back
22 again because of a leg wound.

23 KC: I wonder, "Had he fired his weapon at all?"

24 TG: No, no. Everybody was just walking. We'd remember hearing a whooshing
25 sound, but when he got hit, it's like, "Okay. Are they shooting at us with blowguns or
26 silencers or whatever?" The only thing that we can imagine would be that it was a stray
27 bullet from where the other fighting was going on.

28 KC: I'll be darned.

29 TG: It's one of those, "He was at the wrong place at the right time."

1 KC: Yeah. That's kind of crazy when you think about it.

2 TG: Yeah. Like I say, there were other battles, but I just don't recall some of the
3 details on them. Once we got short, we didn't have to go out anymore. If it was within
4 twelve weeks of going home, they didn't make us go out in the field anymore, but they
5 did put us on mine sweep detail. I think I mentioned earlier that we were doing some of
6 that, some of those that get a little well-travelled, and some of it—I think I mentioned—
7 was a couple of yards of some shade anywhere. Other than that, that was pretty much the
8 gut of it. Once we got our orders that we were going home, we pulled right into Dong
9 Tam at the camp, building bunkers or whatever. They didn't put us back out in the field. I
10 think it was like four weeks, something like that.

11 KC: You mentioned being short. I wonder if even though your duties out on
12 patrol may have been curtailed somewhat. I wonder how aware were you of being short.
13 And did being short affect the way you approached your day to day activities?

14 TG: Well, you were a lot more careful of what you did or tried to do. You had
15 orders that you would follow, and you did what you had to. You lived day to day until
16 that last day, and then you knew you were going to get on a plane and fly up to Saigon,
17 get on a jet, and come home. At Tan Son Nhut Air Base we had a whole bunch of guys
18 from my unit that were going out because we all went home together pretty much at the
19 same time. There were a lot of us that were friends, and we knew that we weren't going
20 to see each other again because some of us left maybe a couple of hours earlier on one
21 flight and some came back on a different. I recall when I got on the jet at Tan Son Nhut,
22 we were thinking, "Please don't have them shooting at us as we're taking off. We want to
23 get out of here." That was it. We knew we were heading to San Francisco to be landing,
24 and we had a good pilot flying the plane. They were playing the music that we wanted to
25 hear, and the flight attendants were more than happy to see us going home and
26 entertaining and getting us pretty much all the beverages that we wanted. I don't think I
27 slept the whole flight home. I don't remember how long it was, but it was first stopping
28 in Guam. I recall seeing the bombers lined up there—B-52s, I think it was. We had
29 maybe a four-hour layover for refueling and whatever in Guam and then took off. We
30 made the hop into San Francisco, which was maybe six, seven, eight hours. I don't
31 remember, but it seemed really quick. I guess I must've dozed off. I don't recall.

1 KC: Yeah.

2 TG: The treatment—they just when we got into San Francisco, and we could see
3 the lights out of the plane. Everybody was cheering. Pandemonium set in on the plane.
4 They were playing a song *Going to San Francisco*. I don't know if you recall that one.

5 KC: Yes, yes indeed.

6 TG: They played that on the plane as they banked. Everybody in the airport, and
7 everybody was cheerful, glad to be home. They did think that we might go in and meet
8 some protestors on the tarmac, as the plane pulled up, but I don't recall seeing any.

9 KC: Okay.

10 TG: That was the time that it started getting, you know, a lot of protesting going
11 on over there. I just don't recall seeing it at that time. I got on a bus, and I think they took
12 us to Oakland where I think we got mustered out. We got our remaining food, and we left
13 in a cab and headed for the airport and get a plane on home.

14 KC: So, you were officially finished with the Army then, almost as soon as you
15 got in.

16 TG: Pretty much. They gave us an early out because we only had like a couple of
17 weeks left. We got back in the beginning of September, I think it was, and we were going
18 to be getting out in the beginning of October, so we got a month drop.

19 KC: Right.

20 TG: They said we had to pull into Reserve Training, but it's not expected to get
21 called up because we were on active duty. Those on active duty, we didn't expect to get
22 called. I think that was for another four or six years. I never got called, but when they did
23 get back, I met my wife, and we got married. I was working for my father, I think, I'm
24 actually at the time., the Metal Fabricating Shop. I just left the service and the comradery
25 and the guys and also an income, and if I suck it out for a good twenty years, I could get a
26 pension there. Doing the Army Reserves. I think it was six years there until I got into the
27 position of where I work now at a Chocolate Factory. I went ahead and left my father. I
28 got the position at the Chocolate Factory that was being built, and I just didn't have the
29 time to put in for the Reserves because they wanted you there almost every Wednesday
30 night. Although, we met once a month at normal training, and then summer camp. The
31 position I had was the Unit Battalion Chief, and it required that you be there almost every

1 Wednesday night to put some time in, and I just couldn't afford that. I was putting too
2 many hours in at the Chocolate Factory.

3 KC: Right.

4 TG: I decided to get out after six or eight years that I put in there.

5 KC: So, I wonder if you could tell me what was your overall experience like with
6 the military? How much did you enjoy it? Was it a positive experience for you? What
7 was your time in the military like for you?

8 TG: Yeah. I enjoyed it for the most part. I'm glad I had the experience, glad I got
9 to see what I did. As I had mentioned way in the beginning, we didn't go on vacation, see
10 a lot of the road, got to see very much of the world. Maybe not some of the best parts, but
11 I gained a lot of friendship with a lot of the other guys, and we keep in touch when we
12 can on the email and occasionally a phone call. My best friend, Don Gamin, who lived in
13 California, is in the VA Hospital quite too often. I wish him well. I don't know if it's
14 Agent Orange-related at all or not, but he's suffering quite a bit in there. I like to see him.
15 We have a plant in the San Francisco Bay area, which would be about maybe two- or
16 three-hour drive from where he lives. Someday, I'd like to get out there and see him.

17 KC: Yeah. Now, Mr. Grill, did you continue to keep up with the Vietnam War?
18 Were you reading the newspapers, watching the news? Were you still following what was
19 going on over there?

20 TG: Very little.

21 KC: Very little?

22 TG: Very little. I heard what was going on, but I didn't get into it much at all. I'm
23 paying a lot more attention to Gulf War, Afghanistan, and all that. Now, every day, I'm
24 watching what's going on in Korea. In some way, I wish I could help, but I can't.

25 KC: Now, shortly after you came home, the Tet Offensive in 1968 kicks off.
26 What do you remember about that?

27 TG: Again, not much. I knew something was going on, and I was home. I was
28 blending in, raising a family. I didn't pay too much attention to it. I think it was about a
29 year or so after I got back, I did marry. That was the only thing on my mind, not the war.
30 I left that behind me.

1 KC: Interesting. Well, I've only got a couple of more questions for you, Mr. Grill.
2 The first one is a pretty broad question, so feel free to answer it as you see fit. As you
3 look back on your time and your experiences in Vietnam, how do you think that most
4 affected your life?

5 TG: Oh, tremendously. A lot of guys say they can put up with more because
6 they've been to hell and back. I use that expression sometimes jokingly, but I think that
7 had a lot to do with what you do with the rest of your life. I would love to go back to
8 Vietnam and see the country now because it was such a beautiful country and get to see
9 and understand more of their culture and the people. I grew up. I grew up a lot. A lot of
10 people when I got back had read the story, and I finally got my Army Commendation
11 Medal, and they said, "Where'd you get the guts to do that?" "I don't know. I just did it."
12 Think about it.

13 KC: I've got just a last question for you, again, a rather broad question. As you
14 look back on the American experience in Vietnam, the Vietnam War, what do you think
15 will be the last legacy of the American experience in Vietnam? What is the legacy of the
16 Vietnam War for this country?

17 TG: Oh, boy. That's a tough question. At the time, we thought we were doing
18 absolutely what was necessary to fight back communism, but there were other underlying
19 issues that we probably didn't know about that came out later that kind of upset you. But,
20 I don't know. I think you have to know and be much more careful as a way to get
21 involved. Sometimes you think over in the Middle East, what's going on over there, and
22 you think what happened here if people don't come help us. We're trying to help the
23 world, and a lot of people say we should just stay home, but I know you can't do that.
24 You have to defend freedom for people. If that's what it takes, that's what it takes. That's
25 all I can say.

26 KC: Well, Mr. Grill, is there anything else you would like to add before we close
27 the interview?

28 TG: Not that I can think of right now. I appreciate what you're doing out there.

29 KC: Well, it's certainly our pleasure to do so.