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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with David Martin
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
March 9; April 21, 2000
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

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.

1 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with David
2 Martin on the 9th of March, the year 2000 at 10:45 A.M. in the Special Collections Library
3 interview room. Mr. Martin, if you would, start by giving us a brief biographical sketch of
4 yourself; when and where you were born, where you went to school, and then we'll talk about
5 training and preparation for Vietnam.

6 David Martin: Okay, I was born and raised in Lubbock, Texas. I went to P.F. Brown
7 Elementary School, went to O.L. Slaton Junior High, went to Coronado High School until the
8 10th grade and that's when I quit school and volunteered to go into the Army. While I was
9 growing up in Lubbock, virtually, I guess the main thing that I did as a teenager was roller-
10 skating in Carlisle and play with the roller hockey team there.

11 SM: Why did you decide to leave school in 10th grade?

12 DM: I would say that I was probably a little bit rebellious and I thought that I knew
13 everything.

14 SM: Okay, and why did you decide to join the Army, of the services?

15 DM: The Army specifically? My father was an Army veteran of World War II, my
16 grandfather was a World War I veteran, so it was virtually a family tradition.

17 SM: Wow, okay. When you joined did you anticipate going to Vietnam? What year
18 was this that you joined?

19 DM: I joined in 1967, March of 1967. I knew that there would be the possibility of
20 going to Vietnam. At that point in time I don't think there was a big build up in Vietnam like

1 what happened later, I mean, I know there was a lot of men there but it was in the back of my
2 mind that I might have to go.

3 SM: And how old were you when you made this decision?

4 DM: I was 17.

5 SM: What did your parents think of your decision?

6 DM: They would have preferred that I stayed and finished high school, but with my
7 determination they blessed my decision and supported me.

8 SM: Now since you were 17 did they have to bless your decision by signing?

9 DM: Yes. At that point in time if you weren't 18 your parents would have to sign for
10 you, so yes.

11 SM: Was there any discussion, or did they try to seriously persuade you, or did they
12 realize you had made up your mind and that was it?

13 DM: We had some discussion but I think, especially with my father we were very close
14 and he being a veteran, and like I say at that point in time I felt that I knew everything, I was
15 somewhat rebellious. Not the best teenager around; not the worst! But I think that he felt that it
16 would be a good learning experience for me, and teach me some discipline.

17 SM: Were they worried about you going in at that time with Vietnam going on?

18 DM: I think they had reservations knowing that the Vietnam conflict, but there again,
19 you know, after we had discussed it and everything I think we all decided that it was probably
20 going to be the best thing to do and hopefully I wouldn't have to go to Vietnam at that point in
21 time, was our thoughts.

22 SM: When you enlisted what did you enlist for? Was it to be infantry, or...

23 DM: I originally enlisted for airborne, and I couldn't make airborne because of my back
24 problems, so the Army was kind enough to send me to artillery school at Ft. Sill Oklahoma...

25 SM: Okay.

26 DM: ...once I completed basic training.

27 SM: So when did you actually enter service and enter basic training, what month and
28 what year?

29 DM: March 19, 1967.

30 SM: Okay, and you went to Ft. Sill?

1 DM: I went to the reception center in Amarillo, Texas, bussed us to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma,
2 beautiful Logan Heights and that's where I had my basic training.

3 SM: At Ft. Sill?

4 DM: Right.

5 SM: Okay, and...

6 DM: Ft. Bliss.

7 SM: I'm sorry, Ft. Bliss.

8 DM: Right.

9 SM: Okay, Ft. Bliss. What was basic training like?

10 DM: It was a rude awakening especially for someone who thought he knew it all. I
11 realized real quick that, you know, you learn team work real quick and so it was a rude
12 awakening to go into the discipline of the military routine.

13 SM: What was the hardest thing about basic training?

14 DM: Probably at that point in my life was getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning.

15 SM: Okay, so early wake up call?

16 DM: Right.

17 SM: What was the next hardest thing?

18 DM: I think that the rigorous activities while you were training because you did go from
19 5 o'clock in the morning until 6 or 7 at night, sometimes longer than that, and even though
20 you're young, you know, it takes a little getting used to.

21 SM: Okay. You mentioned on our questionnaire here, you were talking...I asked you
22 about discipline and you mentioned that that was a difficult thing to grapple with, the new
23 discipline of the Army. You mentioned the teamwork in that response that you gave. I was
24 curious if there was any kind of physical contact between drill instructors and trainees. How did
25 they treat those soldiers that weren't so pliable?

26 DM: You had people that if they didn't do what the drill sergeant said they were
27 disciplined, I don't think there was any...I never saw any physical contact between someone in
28 training and a drill sergeant. There was plenty of verbal abuse and we had a couple of guys not
29 make it through basic training, you know. That was, I think you had drill instructors who would
30 pick out the weaklings of the bunch or what he felt was the weaklings and would go. But I had
31 a, I was fortunate in not having a rigorous a basic training as some because I found out after I

1 was in basic training, two weeks into basic training, that my drill sergeant had been stationed in
2 Okinawa with my brothers and they got along, thank God!

3 SM: So did you notice the difference?

4 DM: Excuse me?

5 SM: Did you notice a difference when...

6 DM: Oh certainly.

7 SM: ...when before you knew, well, before this drill instructor knew that you were a
8 friend's brother and then after he knew that you were a friend's brother, was there a difference in
9 the way that he treated you?

10 DM: Definitely, definitely. I had a friend that was in, that I met going to basic training
11 that was from Oklahoma when we found this out. All of a sudden when Sergeant Galvan would
12 have CQ duty he'd call me. Well if you had CQ duty you got off the next day, you didn't have
13 to go do your training. So every time Sergeant Galvan had CQ duty, I was CQ runner.

14 SM: Okay.

15 DM: And my buddy kind of was on my skirt tail so he got out of a lot of that, the normal
16 activities that you would have to do. A good example of that would be going to the firing range,
17 coming back, cleaning weapons. Sergeant Galvan would tell me, 'Martin, you and [?] give your
18 weapons to someone, have them clean them, you check the weapons in.' So we would check
19 everybody else's weapons.

20 SM: Did the other soldiers you were going through basic realize?

21 DM: I don't think so. I don't think they ever realized it, other than [?].

22 SM: Yeah, you're buddy that also happened to benefit from your association.

23 DM: Right, right.

24 SM: Did you ever feel guilty that you were getting special treatment?

25 DM: No, not at that point in time! I was thankful. Like I said, I'm just thankful that the
26 Sergeant Galvan and my brother had had good relations as opposed to bad relations, which
27 would have made it miserable.

28 SM: How did you find this out, how was it, how did it come about that...

29 DM: My brother was stationed at Ft. Bliss also at the time and he came up after two
30 weeks after I was in basic training and saw Sergeant Galvan and they started reminiscing. So
31 basic training, as far as I could say, was pretty nice. I think I had, I mean, I pulled KP, the stuff

1 that you did back then. It's not like the Army today where you don't pull KP, but was somewhat
2 easier.

3 SM: Back to the question about discipline, though. Would they use different techniques
4 like push ups and squat thrusts, was it physical?

5 DM: Mainly it was like push ups were really dreaded. It was probably the...for minor
6 infractions, you know, smiling at the drill sergeant, 50-100 push ups, whatever. If someone did
7 something really bad in the barracks on Logan Heights they were built in a rectangular pattern
8 around a paved area that they used as a morning formations drill field, etcetera, and it was paved.
9 Needless to say, that time of year was very warm in El Paso, and for major infractions someone
10 might be told to run around that area 20 times with their rifle up above their head which was bad.

11 SM: That was the worst punishment that you saw, that you witnessed?

12 DM: I think that that's the worst that I saw people get. I mean, you'd have guys that
13 would pass out and stuff from doing that.

14 SM: What about group punishment?

15 DM: There again that's how you [?] your team work.

16 SM: Were there ever incidents where you were...

17 DM: Oh yeah, the squad would get in trouble for something and you couldn't leave your
18 barracks, you know. Weekend passes pulled for someone doing something in a squad, so that
19 was not unusual, that was a way for them to train you to do the team work and work together and
20 you learnt real quick that if you had some stragglers you did your best to keep them going.

21 SM: Speaking of stragglers or, I guess, guys that had a hard time adjusting, were there
22 ever any incidences of blanket parties, or...

23 DM: Short sheets, I mean, you know, that's probably the worst thing that I ever saw,
24 short sheeting someone.

25

26 SM: No GI showers or anything like that?

27 DM: Not in ours.

28

29 SM: Okay, what was the most important thing you learned from boot camp, or from
30 basic training, excuse me, going on into the Army, do you think of in terms of its effectiveness in
31 getting you ready for the Army?

1 DM: I think the discipline I developed when I was in basic training, and that was
2 definitely something that I needed to learn.

3 SM: Okay, anything else?

4 DM: And well, the second thing I would say the team work, learning to work as a team.

5 SM: Okay, so you left basic training and...

6 DM: Went to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma.

7 SM: This is still in 1967?

8 DM: '67, ah huh. Went to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma for artillery, AIT and didn't make it
9 through the first round because I caught pneumonia, it was during the summer and somebody
10 caught pneumonia, so went back and finished AIT, artillery AIT in November of '67 and got
11 orders for the 6th Cavalry Regimen at Ft. Mead, Maryland which was a very rude awakening for
12 a young man from Lubbock, Texas.

13 SM: Now about your artillery AIT, what weapons systems did you get trained on there?
14 Was it artillery generally, or...

15 DM: 105 Howitzers.

16 SM: The 105 specifically?

17 DM: Right.

18 SM: Okay, no other weapons, or...

19 DM: No. At that point in time the Army was using the 105 Howitzer for its artillery
20 training and virtually when I left there then I was put into tanks when I got to Ft. Mead,
21 Maryland.

22 SM: Okay. The 105, this was the towed version of the 105, they don't have a self
23 propelled version, did they?

24 DM: No, it was the tow version.

25 SM: Okay. And what was the most difficult part of that training?

26 DM: Worried about getting your hand cut off shoving the shells into the 105.

27 SM: Okay, so in your training you were basically focusing on maintenance of the
28 weapon, loading it, firing it?

29 DM: Yeah.

30 SM: You didn't have to worry about doing calculations?

31 DM: No because you had officers that was the...the officers would do the calculations.

1 SM: And you would be responsible for inclination and declination?

2 DM: Yeah, just setting the 105 up to whatever coordinates, the range, and then like I say
3 just loading the weapon and firing it.

4 SM: Was that fear about getting your hand cut off the general fear of most of the soldiers
5 that were in training with you?

6 DM: Yes, that was probably the worst thing that could happen. I mean, there's other
7 things that could happen, the weapon could blow up you know! But because of the way that you
8 shoved the rounds in, if you, I mean, you had to use your fist and because they're locking and
9 loading it as you're going up there, so it was a great fear for everybody. One that the instructors
10 constantly reminded you of because of the danger.

11 SM: Were there ever any incidents of someone getting injured?

12 DM: Guys losing fingers and stuff, yeah.

13 SM: In training with you?

14 DM: Yes.

15 SM: A lot, or was it a couple of people?

16 DM: Two or three, you know, probably during the time, I think that was an eight week
17 training class.

18 SM: What would happen to the guys that got injured like that? Were they shipped home
19 or would they heal up and continue training?

20 DM: The first thing they do is take them to the hospital!

21 SM: Well that's good, that's good! Okay, so they take them to the hospital, they sew
22 them up, would they put the fingers back on or was that not possible at that time?

23 DM: I don't even remember. Virtually if it was for something that minor, you know,
24 hey, you just recover and get back out there and go. It's just like when I had pneumonia, I mean,
25 you know, you just get out as soon as you're out of the hospital and you're in the next training
26 unit. It's the Army, you don't have time to sit around and watch soap operas.

27 SM: Right but there's a difference between having pneumonia and recovering from that,
28 you're not minus any digits and of course you might need those digits that you lost to perform in
29 the military, trigger finger, that kind of stuff. So I was just curious...

30 DM: Like I say, I really don't know what happened to those guys because they would be
31 taken out, if something like that happened they were taken out so we, unless you were real close

1 to them, you'd never see them again so you don't know if they were released from the military or
2 what.

3 SM: Were there any guys in your class that had been recycled from previous classes that
4 had lost digits, that you were aware of?

5 DM: No.

6 SM: Okay. Anything else about AIT that stands out as interesting or important in terms
7 of preparing you for service in the Army and especially service in Vietnam?

8 DM: Well that was my first AIT.

9 SM: Then you went to Ft. Mead? But this time this is still '67?

10 DM: December of '67.

11 SM: Okay.

12 DM: Ft. Mead was very cold, very cold. Ft. Mead was nice and one aspect was you
13 could go into D.C. and drink if you were in uniform, so at 17 I was able to go into town in
14 uniform and I was allowed to drink which at that time the drinking age in Texas was 21, and in
15 D.C. it was 18, right?

16 SM: Uh huh.

17 DM: If you had a military uniform on most bartenders wouldn't card you.

18 SM: Okay.

19 DM: So it had its advantages.

20 SM: Yeah, so actually a quick question again about training, for basic and the AIT.
21 During those training periods did your instructors ever invoke or talk about Vietnam as part of
22 your training? The potential that you might find yourself in a combat situation and these are the
23 lessons that we learned. Were any of them Vietnam combat veterans?

24 DM: No Vietnam combat veterans through AIT or basic or AIT at that point in time.

25 SM: Any discussion during training?

26 DM: They would discuss, you know, if you go to combat you're going to need to know
27 this. It wasn't at that point in time they weren't using it as when you go. It was if you go. That
28 changed when I went to AIT for helicopters.

29 SM: Okay, why don't you go ahead and talk about that.

30 DM: It was early May or June of '68. I took an early out and reenlisted to get into
31 aviation.

1 SM: What made you decide to do that?

2 DM: I was in Camp Drum, New York in the middle of the winter and I saw a helicopter
3 fly over one day. Our tank was broke down and I was freezing. I saw a helicopter fly over, a
4 general's helicopter, that had the doors shut, I figured they had a heater in it and I asked my
5 sergeant, 'What do I have to do to get into aviation?' And it was simple, sign here and four years
6 of your life and we'll let you do it, and I said, 'Fine!' So after a little over 10 months in the
7 Army I took an early out and re enlisted for 4 years which got me into aircraft maintenance
8 school in Ft. Eustice, Virginia. Virtually once you got there it was a matter of fact you are going
9 to Vietnam. In fact it was so matter of fact as that you will probably go to Vietnam as soon as
10 you finish training here because of the need for door gunners, crew chiefs, in Vietnam.

11 SM: And the demand for the helicopter in Vietnam vs. there's not a whole lot of demand
12 for tanks.

13 DM: Right.

14

15 SM: That was never a consideration for you as far as when you were thinking about
16 switching over?

17 DM: No, I was told...

18 SM: That you were going to be hot! I mean, you were going from one extreme to
19 another!

20 DM: I can stand the heat, I can stand the heat. The cold I could not stand.

21 SM: And so, but you weren't worried about that, that you were going to Vietnam?

22 DM: When I made that decision it was not thinking about, well, I'm going to go to
23 Vietnam. It was how much nicer my time in the Army was going to be.

24 SM: Okay.

25 DM: For me.

26 SM: Okay. So you went to AIT, second AIT, for aviation for crew chief, for helicopter
27 maintenance in May of 196...

28 DM: [?] mechanic I think is what they called it.

29 SM: And what was that training like, what did that allow you to do to those helicopters;
30 and it was exclusively on the Huey? Is that right?

1 DM: It...yes, at Ft. Eustice was Huey. Virtually you had to learn a lot about flying. I
2 think that AIT was 12 weeks long, and a lot of classroom for the first 8 weeks. I don't think we
3 even saw a Huey until the 9th week. It was more learning about [?] and the various aspects of
4 helicopters but it was very bookwise learning. A lot of the guys out of that would decide, 'Well
5 hell, I want to be a pilot,' you know, because they had gone through so much book training and
6 everything for flying, so. And you went through and I think at one point in time we were
7 rebuilding jet engines, simulated jet engines so that we couldn't screw them up too bad. And
8 then the last four weeks was actual flying, doing maintenance, doing firing runs, M-60s [?].

9 SM: When you finished that, at that point when you finished your first bout of
10 maintenance training, were you actually...did you feel qualified and confident that you could do
11 whatever it took to get...to keep a Huey maintained and to work on it?

12 DM: Yes. Very confident.

13 SM: In how much depth could you actually go into working on a Huey, was it...

14 DM: Everything except for rebuilding the engine transmission.

15 SM: Okay.

16 DM: You know, because there again you had technical manuals that you had to learn to
17 read and use, but anything other than a major overhaul, you know, I felt very confident in fixing.

18 SM: Did that include things like rotor replacement, stuff like that?

19 DM: Yes.

20 SM: Okay.

21 DM: Because it wasn't uncommon to get rotor blades nicked up and stuff and you were
22 pulling them up all the time. Like I say, the biggest, I guess the biggest thing that you'd
23 probably want...and that's why they had maintenance detachments to do the major repairs, but
24 anything for up to 100 hour preventive maintenance inspection we were qualified to do.

25 SM: And that was the general maintenance routine, 100 hours of flight...

26 DM: Well you had a 25 hour, I mean, you've got your daily inspection, then you'd have
27 a 25 hour preventive maintenance inspection every 25 hours and then every 100 hours.

28 SM: And that was 25 hours of flight time, 100 hours of flight time.

29 DM: Correct. Where you do 25 hours flight time, 50 hours flight time, 75 hours flight
30 time, 100 hour flight time.

31 SM: Okay. And then you'd go back to the 25?

1 DM: 25, right.

2 SM: Okay, so you finished you're second AIT at Ft. Eustice, and where did you go from
3 there?

4 DM: Well when you finished AIT it was just a matter of, 'When am I going to
5 Vietnam?' I was one of the few who did not get shipped directly to Vietnam from Ft. Eustice. I
6 was very lucky, and I was shipped to Ft. Hood, Texas. Actually we were at Grey Army Airfield
7 which is outside of Ft. Hood going towards Copperas Cove. I was shipped there with an aviation
8 unit.

9 SM: Okay.

10 DM: And virtually when you got there they had various aircraft there that...various
11 functions, it was pretty much a holding facility for people going to Vietnam. I got put into a unit,
12 I think it was 55th Aviation Battalion to begin with and then what they did, they would set up
13 units to be shipped to Vietnam. I was from 55th Aviation Battalion, I was put into one unit, okay,
14 Ft. Hood was the 576th Transportation Company was the first unit I was with, that was in June of
15 '68. Then they assigned me on July the 18th a month later, they assigned me to 551st
16 Transportation Detachment, and these were just the kind of holding companies. In September of
17 '68, on the 13th of September 1968 I was assigned to F Troop, 15th Cav and that would
18 eventually become B Troop, 2nd of the 17th Cavalry. They were redesignated on the 25th of
19 October '68 to be Packet, 2nd of the 17th Cav and eventually when we went to Vietnam in March
20 of 1969 that's when it became officially B Troop, 2nd of the 17th Air Cav and virtually in
21 September of '68 once we became F Troop we had received our new aircraft, the aircraft that we
22 would eventually take to Vietnam. We had a, I mean, it was set up as an air cav unit at that time,
23 and we began flying maneuvers and exercises at Ft. Hood.

24 SM: What aircraft were these?

25 DM: We had two UH-1B Hueys, one was a maintenance ship and one was a command
26 and control helicopter for the major of the unit. We had five Huey UH-1Hs and ten LOHs.

27 SM: Now what were the Huey...the second Hueys that you just mentioned?

28 DM: The UH-1H Hueys, they were used in the air cav operation we would use them to
29 carry the infantry.

30 SM: Okay. Troop transport.

1 DM: Right. Then we had ten LOHs, which is Low Observation Helicopters, egg shaped
2 type helicopters.

3 SM: Who made those?

4 DM: Hughes.

5 SM: They were Hughes?

6 DM: I believe the name was [?] was the name, we just called them LOHs, then we had
7 ten cobras, gun ships.

8 SM: Were the LOHs armed?

9 DM: Yes. Two door gunners.

10 SM: They had two door gunners as well?

11 DM: Right.

12 SM: Hueys had two gunners...

13 DM: No, the LOHs had one door gunner.

14 SM: Okay.

15 DM: Crew chief. Crew chief door gunner.

16 SM: Okay. And the cobra gun ships had both pilot and...

17 DM: Copilot.

18 SM: ...copilot weapons?

19 DM: Yeah, right, armament.

20 SM: Armament, and that was armed with all kinds of stuff?

21 DM: Yeah, they could either be...

22 SM: Rockets?

23 DM: ...many guns, rockets, grenade launchers, the little grenade launchers.

24 SM: Do you know if that was a 40 millimeter grenade launcher?

25 DM: It was. Yes. And I think that was the main armament on our aircraft was the
26 rockets, the mini guns and the grenade launchers.

27 SM: And those are 2.75 inch rockets? Something like that?

28 DM: I'm not for sure.

29 SM: Yeah, okay. Now, did you get these new aircraft, these were new aircraft?

30 DM: Brand new aircraft.

31 SM: Brand new, off the assembly line?

1 DM: Right.

2 SM: Okay, when you received those aircraft, were there technical representatives from
3 the corporation that came with them to help you?

4 DM: No, virtually they had a pilot fly them in from Bell Helicopter and you know, they
5 might bring two-three a day until we got all the aircraft. For the Hueys, now I don't know where
6 the other aircraft came from. But they would just have a pilot ferry them in and that was it.

7 SM: Okay.

8 DM: Because there again, we already had a transportation detachment with us, so we had
9 the military personnel that were qualified to do anything on the aircraft.

10 SM: Okay. So December of 1968 to March of 1969 you're doing preparations for going
11 to Vietnam, with your unit...

12 DM: Actually from September.

13 SM: September, excuse me, September of '68 to March of '69 you're doing preparations
14 with your new unit, first F Troop, then Packet, then eventually B Troop, 2nd of the 17th.

15 DM: Right.

16 SM: To go to Vietnam. What preparations were those, what did you do, what was the
17 important stuff?

18 DM: We ran a lot of insertions of the infantry unit. Just what I would call air cav type
19 operations, you know, looking for, you know, they'd have mock enemy and our LOHs would go
20 in and then we'd put the infantry in and the cobras would provide cover fire and just virtually
21 what we ended up doing in Vietnam but with a different terrain.

22 SM: Okay. Were there many combat experienced members of your unit? Vietnam
23 combat experience?

24 DM: We...the...I'm going to say we probably had 10 senior NCOs and officers that had
25 been to Vietnam. Most of the pilots were about our age. You know, the pilots back then, there
26 were many 19-20 year old pilots coming out of flight school and I don't remember any of the
27 pilots that had had previous experience in Vietnam except for Sergeant Holdige who was, he
28 wasn't actually Sergeant Holdige at that time, our maintenance test flight officer who had been a
29 Green Beret in Vietnam prior to going to flight school.

30 SM: Wow.

31 DM: And Mr. Thompson, I believe, had been to Vietnam prior to going with B Troop.

1 SM: Okay.

2

3 DM: I'm going to say it's no more than 10 experienced Vietnam veterans at that time.

4 SM: And what size was the troop?

5 DM: The troop strength was approximately, for some reason, 243 to 245 was where I
6 remember it at, I don't remember the exact number but it was 243-245, somewhere in there.

7 SM: How many officers and NCOs, do you know?

8 DM: I'm going to say over half the unit was officers because of the pilots. We had about
9 30 infantry and over 100 officers, so that left them like 100 aviation personnel; crew chiefs,
10 maintenance, etcetera, somewhere in those proportions.

11 SM: Okay. The training that you were doing with the troop before going to Vietnam, a
12 lot of that live fire exercises, or was much of it live fire exercises, any of it?

13 DM: I don't think in any of our training exercises we had live fire, I mean, you know, we
14 did live fire training for 60s, the cobras would do their training, the LOHs with their crew chiefs
15 had to go through M-60 training.

16 SM: But this was standard range work, you go to the range, fire your weapons?

17 DM: Right, right.

18 SM: You didn't actually do coordinated live fire exercise training with all things
19 coordinated working together?

20 DM: No.

21 SM: That didn't happen until you got in country?

22 DM: Right.

23 SM: Okay.

24 DM: Rude awakening.

25 SM: Do you think you would have benefited from some kind of coordinated live fire
26 exercises?

27 DM: I think it would have been a great benefit because in reality when you, as much as
28 in that point in time I had thought about Vietnam, knowing that once I...in September, well, as
29 soon as I got to Ft. Hood actually before I got out of AIT I knew I was going to go to Vietnam
30 because I had over three years left in the Army, I had an MOS that was very Vietnam qualified,
31 and being young and experienced, I think live fire exercise in the United States prior to going to

1 Vietnam would have been a great asset to realize that it's not a game. Because until that point in
2 time I really, in my mind, I think we still thought it was a game. You didn't realize, it was a rude
3 awakening when you got your first incoming rounds in Vietnam. When you got into a live
4 exercise that someone's trying to kill you, it was a rude awakening.

5 SM: During your training prior to going to Vietnam, did those combat veterans, those
6 Vietnam veterans that were in your unit, did they talk about things about Vietnam and try to help
7 you understand the kind of fighting you would be doing?

8 DM: Yes.

9 SM: What did they tell you?

10 DM: Normally it would be encouragement that 'These are the things you need to start
11 learning to come back from Vietnam.' I mean, just a reality check, that this is, you know, you do
12 need to do this, you know. This is why you need to do this.

13 SM: So at least that gave a degree of legitimacy or validity to certain elements of your
14 training, I mean, they could invoke, 'This and this will save your butt.'

15 DM: Right.

16 SM: 'This isn't just training for the sake of training, this is training that could save your
17 life.'

18 DM: Exactly.

19 SM: And then that did help?

20 DM: Yeah.

21 SM: Any specific lessons that you can recall them invoking, things that would help bring
22 soldiers back, bring you back?

23 DM: I think, if anything, the pilots were helpful to us in an...when you're flying of
24 course we were the pilots eyes and ears behind them, they couldn't see the back of the aircraft,
25 etcetera, and that became very crucial in Vietnam in tight spots when you're trying to get
26 someone in or out of an LZ that you're knowledge how to get the aircraft in, talk the pilots
27 through it, and I think we had an advantage because we trained with our pilots at Ft. Hood prior
28 to Vietnam so we were fairly, you know, I would say very comfortable with each other or if the
29 pilots weren't comfortable with the crew chiefs that were assigned to the aircraft they wouldn't
30 be on the aircraft very long.

1 SM: Okay. Were there any major transitions that you were aware of? I mean, as far as
2 having to remove crew chiefs or remove personnel and move them around?

3 DM: Not any major changes that I'm aware of, you know, because they're...and I think
4 that that came from the training aspect as the pilots really worked with the crew chiefs, it wasn't
5 an officer/enlisted men relationship as you normally see in lieutenants, captains, feel that an
6 enlisted man is a little bit lower than them or something. I always perceived that. I would say
7 that with norm not in that situation where as warrant officers the norm was being closer to the
8 enlisted men because they relied on the enlisted men to help them.

9 SM: And most warrants were prior enlisted, no?

10 DM: No, no because most warrants were pilots.

11 SM: Okay.

12 DM: It was not unusual for an enlisted man to go to warrant officer school to get into
13 aviation or to become a pilot, but typically at that point in time warrant officers were fresh out of
14 Ft. Walters and pilots.

15 SM: Okay, so you found in your unit the relationship between enlisted men and warrants
16 was better, stronger than the relationship between enlisted and officers, or...

17 DM: Yes.

18 SM: Was that, did that situation continue through Vietnam?

19 DM: Certainly, yeah. Because I think it got stronger when we got to Vietnam because
20 being under fire and everything, I mean, you...a crew chief or a good door gunner that could talk
21 the aircraft in, you could save an aircraft from crashing or, you know, you had to be the eyes and
22 ears for the pilots, you know, they were worried about instrument gages and things like that and
23 you were having to watch and look to see if you're going to start taking incoming and if so,
24 where? Are there aircraft approaching? You know, you had to let the pilots know.

25 SM: The communication was a very important part of your job.

26 DM: Very. Very important.

27 SM: Did you always get along well with the pilots that you worked with?

28 DM: Yes, yes.

29 SM: Okay.

30 DM: They were a little crazy, but...

1 SM: What do you mean a little crazy?

2 DM: I think you met Conrad Graph. Somewhere I would say eccentric, young, I'm
3 trying to remember the word that'll...I think a good word to describe them would be a helicopter
4 jockey, you know, some were more flamboyant than others, I'll say.

5 SM: Okay. Do you feel that the training you received in both your second AIT to be
6 Huey maintenance and crew chief through to your Ft. Hood experiences in preparation for going
7 to Vietnam, do you think they did prepare you for Vietnam?

8 DM: Yeah, no doubt in my mind. They...as good as they could, without live fire
9 exercises.

10 SM: Is that the, with that exception, you know, the lack of live fire exercises, was there
11 anything else that you thought of after you got in country that you wished they had talked about
12 and done in training?

13 DM: No, you just kind of wish that, you know, maybe I'd have paid better attention in
14 basic, or something like that. Then you started realizing, you know, these guys weren't just
15 doing it to do it. When you got in country you had a different outlook, and when you come back
16 from country and people always want to know, 'Oh, what was it like?' and everything, the best
17 thing to tell them was, 'You need to start listening and learning,' because you use everything that
18 you'd learned through that point in time as a survival skill.

19 SM: Okay, so how did you get to Vietnam? You left Ft. Hood...

20 DM: We flew our aircraft when we knew we were going to be going to Vietnam, we
21 flew our aircraft to Sharp Army Depot for shipment to Vietnam on ship. We were flown back by
22 commercial airline to Ft. Hood, went on leave for 30 days, then we were back at Ft. Hood and it
23 was just a matter of the Army saying, 'You're going.' When that call come, we were bussed
24 from Ft. Hood to Bergstrom Air Force Base, put on a commercial airline, and flew to beautiful
25 downtown Danang.

26 SM: Okay. Now did you know when you were told, 'Okay, get your stuff ready to ship
27 off to Vietnam,' did you know at that point where in Vietnam you were going?

28 DM: No, we had no idea.

29 SM: Okay.

30 DM: We...to my knowledge the, you know, like I say, we flew the aircraft out there, it
31 was a forward detachment that went with the aircraft that probably knew the ships destination as

1 being Danang, we didn't know that. Now, not to say that officers didn't have that information
2 but enlisted men had no idea where we would be going until we landed in Vietnam, we knew we
3 were in Danang and it was the next morning we were told where we were going from Danang.

4 SM: That 30 days leave that you got before going to Vietnam, what was that like?

5 DM: Reckless. You just...I got stopped 30 times in Lubbock for speeding, at least 30,
6 and I always...I had a good trick, see. I found out real quick that I could use it, so a cop stopped
7 me for speeding. I had just bought a brand new '69 Mustang Mach 1 and, so needless to say at
8 that point in time I didn't know if I was going to get back from driving or not! But when a
9 policeman would stop me and he'd start, you know, 'You was speeding,' you know, start going
10 through the ritual, and I'd say, 'Well, you know, would it be okay if my parents come pay the
11 ticket for me?' And the cop would say, 'Well,' you know, 'Aren't you going to be here?' and
12 I'd say, 'No, I can't be here, I'm going to Vietnam.' 'Well son, take care,' you know, and they'd
13 let me off! So I learned that after a couple of days on leave and so I used it to my advantage.

14 SM: You didn't get a single ticket enforced?

15 DM: No.

16 SM: Every single cop that you came in contact with...

17 DM: ...let me go.

18 SM: And you never came in contact with the same cop twice?

19 DM: Nope! I was lucky!

20 SM: What about interacting with your friends and family, knowing that you're going to
21 Vietnam?

22 DM: It was high, I would say, at that point in time my wife Ginger was pregnant.

23 SM: So you were married?

24 DM: Yes.

25 SM: Okay, when did you get married?

26 DM: December of '68.

27 SM: Okay.

28 DM: You know, it was just a matter of fact that you were going, there was nothing you
29 could do to stop it, I mean, emotionally for the family it was a very trying experience. But I
30 knew I had 30 days to enjoy before I went to Vietnam and I had heard things about Vietnam but I

1 really didn't know what it was going to be like so I wanted to make sure I enjoyed my last 30
2 days of freedom as well as I could.

3 SM: When did that leave start? Do you remember? Well, when did you leave for
4 Vietnam, and so it's about 30 days before that?

5 DM: Well we arrived in Vietnam on March 25, so the leave would have started
6 sometime in early February because we were at Ft. Hood just waiting and we found out later that
7 once they had the aircraft ready or within a couple of days of having the aircraft together in
8 Danang that's when they moved the rest of the unit.

9 SM: Well then, at that...by the time you went on leave, Tet 1968 was going on...

10 DM: Right.

11 SM: ...which was a pretty big deal. What was, what...did you and your family members
12 talk about those types of things, or what was actually going on in Vietnam, the fact that in 1967
13 you have General Westmoreland telling the American people and Congress, 'This war will be
14 over pretty soon, the light's at the end of the tunnel,' then all of a sudden the explosion of TET
15 '68, a lot more cynicism and a lot more concern, did y'all talk about that kind of stuff?

16 DM: You had it on news every night, I mean, it had just become a reality, and it was
17 like, there again, and because of the emotions and everything we really didn't talk a lot about it.
18 You know, my dad and I would talk but leave the female members out of the conversations.

19 SM: Okay, what would you and your dad talk about?

20 DM: You know, things like his experiences during World War II, because, you know,
21 he'd been in combat and everything so, you know, I'd ask him things on how it was for him.

22 SM: Did you find that helpful?

23 DM: Yeah, I mean, if nothing else it gave me reassurance that he had made it through
24 World War II to give me some confidence that I would make it through Vietnam.

25 SM: Was he...

26 DM: And I think at that point in time it was all, with the casualties in Vietnam,
27 especially with TET, the question had not, you know, from earlier times when I had first gone
28 into the Army, 'You might go to Vietnam,' then when I got into AIT, 'You're going to
29 Vietnam,' and now it's gotten to the point that its, 'Well, will I make it home from Vietnam?'

30 SM: So very emotionally trying time?

31 DM: Yes.

1 SM: Your dad's experience in World War II, was that in Europe or in the Pacific?

2 DM: Pacific.

3 SM: Okay, so he was able to relate some experiences in Asia and dealing with Japanese
4 fighters that were perhaps a lot more similar to what you were going to experience than, say, if
5 he was in [?].

6 DM: Yeah.

7 SM: So that was probably helpful?

8 DM: Yeah.

9 SM: So you go to Vietnam, you finally get in country. What's your first...

10 DM: 2 o'clock in the morning we arrive in Danang. We get off the commercial airliners,
11 leave the beautiful stewardesses, you line up to get your bedding. I'm getting up towards the
12 front of the line to get my bedding and the clerk is behind the counter and he's telling some guy,
13 'Well hey, 6 o'clock in the morning, there's a bunker down here, y'all go to it because we're
14 going to get rocketed.' And I'm sitting back there, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, trying to scare the
15 newbees.' 6 o'clock in the morning the sirens go off and I start running to the bunker. Welcome
16 to Vietnam.

17 SM: And you were rocketed?

18 DM: Yes. So you started to learn to listen to people real quick. Or I did!

19 SM: Did you feel comfortable, confident with the guys you were going into that situation
20 with?

21 DM: Yes. I think, there again, by being able to train as a unit many of us had been
22 together for as long as ten months training together or in different units together and there was a
23 strong brotherly bond.

24 SM: Alright, so you get in country, and this is what month in 1969?

25 DM: March 25, 1969.

26 SM: The day! March 25, 1969. And you go and pick up your equipment, why don't you
27 tell us what that was like. If there was any problems, or you get your helicopters.

28 DM: No, because we had...there were no problems with the aircraft because we had an
29 advanced attachment go over with the aircraft to make sure that they would be ready once we
30 arrived in Danang. So after we received our Vietnam welcome by rocketing that morning, we

1 had chow and virtually went out to the fly line, picked up our aircraft, and flew to Camp Eagle
2 which is just northeast of [?].

3 SM: What was your first experience at Camp Eagle? What did you do when you first
4 got there?

5 DM: Virtually you go find your bunk. Our company area was brand new, our hooches
6 had just been built, they had not been sandbagged, so you virtually just got up there and got
7 settled in on the 25th and probably for a couple of days we were just getting the transportation
8 detachment set up. I don't think we flew the first 3 or 4 days other than flying up to Camp
9 Eagle. So it was virtually they gave us a couple of days to get settled in. The crew chiefs got
10 acclimated to the maintenance areas, and did a good check of your helicopter and everything and
11 got your live ammunition and things like that. Just getting prepared for being put into action.

12 SM: And how long was it from the time you got to Camp Eagle until you went on your
13 first mission?

14 DM: We arrived at Camp Eagle on the 25th of March, we were flying by April 1st, we
15 had our first KIAs on April 5th.

16 SM: And these were guys that were in your troop that were killed?

17 DM: Yes, it was after we'd inserted the infantry unit into a hot LZ and virtually they
18 took incoming, friendly incoming. Killed 5 of our infantry guys.

19 SM: Friendly?

20 DM: Friendly fire.

21 SM: Where was this friendly fire coming from?

22 DM: It was 105 Howitzers. Bad coordinations. So, needless to say, that was a rude
23 awakening for the whole unit at that point in time. You know, 10 days in country, 11, and had 5
24 KIAs.

25 SM: And your first casualties were the result of fratricide, what did that do to morale?

26 DM: It killed it. Well, there again I think it was an experience of learning Vietnam, and
27 that you couldn't. I hate to say this but it's true. You start getting survival instincts, and you
28 start to feel that you can't trust anybody. You became, even though we went over as a unit the
29 Huey crew chiefs were in one hooch, the cobra crew chiefs in another. Even though you had
30 close friends prior to going to Vietnam, it almost became as if they'd been left in the United

1 States. When you went you didn't see them because you were doing your job. You become very
2 close to very few people that you felt would take care of you in a desperate situation.

3 SM: Now the guys that were inserted on this hot LZ that eventually suffered the friendly kills,
4 this was your 30 man recon platoon?

5 DM: Correct. It was our infantry platoon.

6 SM: And when you went in and picked them back up after this, what was their frame of
7 mind, what was their state of mind?

8 DM: At that point in time I don't know that, you know, it was a bad situation.

9 SM: Did you ever talk to them?

10 DM: It's one of the things in Vietnam you just started...it became a part of daily life was
11 people dying so you just, you didn't talk, you know, you don't talk about it, you know. I mean,
12 the whole unit was talking about, you know, how it was bullshit that the guys got killed by
13 friendly fire and everything else, but the reality is you couldn't do anything about it, you didn't
14 have time to dwell upon it because you were worried about saving your ass. So it was, you
15 know, it was talk for a day or two and that's about it. Then you move on.

16 SM: Do you remember any of the specific individuals that were on that round, by name?

17 DM: No, I do not.

18 SM: I didn't know if maybe some of them were part of the B Troop association now.

19 DM: Well Baltizar would have been there and Ed Blair would have been in with those
20 guys.

21 SM: Okay, so that's J.R. Baltizar and Ed Blair?

22 DM: Right, right.

23 SM: You mentioned, I asked the question on the questionnaire, weapons and equipment
24 your unit used and whether or not they were adequate, and you said you have the general
25 compliments of an air cav unit but mentioned something about maybe using or having a bigger
26 gun. Do you think that, you know, actually I think it's a very important point about looking at
27 the Vietnam War in terms of tactics and strategy. Do you think having bigger guns or killing
28 more people would have helped?

29 DM: Well, back to the guns. I think that being in an air cavalry unit we had access to
30 probably, you know, the best weaponry in the world at that time. We could call in phantom jet
31 strikes, Navy artillery from ships off coast. So, you know, really I think we had adequate fire

1 power. Naturally if you had killed all of your enemy, you know, you would have been more
2 effective, but because it was a guerilla warfare type operation you didn't know who your enemy
3 was. So that, you know...

4 SM: How much of that did you understand at the time when you were in Vietnam, as far
5 as that, you know, what was going on in Vietnam in terms of this insurgency aspect, the guerilla
6 warfare, the interaction between north and south forces, the Viet Cong and PAVN, how much of
7 that were you made aware of?

8 DM: Well politically I was, I was not as educated as I wished I had been. The reality
9 was that in daily life in Vietnam you become to not distinguish between South and North
10 Vietnamese, they were all the enemy, and that is when I talk about survival skills that is one of
11 the things that people who survived that I talked to learned, and acted as any Vietnamese is your
12 enemy.

13 SM: And when you say any Vietnamese and they all, are you including women, children,
14 old people?

15 DM: Certainly. I was probably more scared of children and women than men.

16 SM: Why?

17 DM: I had a mental thing about guys, it wouldn't bother me to blow a gook away in a
18 minute. Excuse me for my terminology, but at that point in time I considered them gooks. I'd
19 have blown a guy away in a New York minute, I didn't know if I could do that with a woman or
20 a child. Hence I became very more, a lot more cautious of women and children and I think one
21 of the things that was pound into our heads as a crew chief, you know, we had heard the rumors
22 about kids coming up, dropping a hand grenade, blowing a helicopter up. So you wouldn't let
23 gooks by your aircraft. We flew ARVNs, Army of the Republic of Vietnam, we had to move
24 some of their units at times, really didn't like that either. You know, as far as I was concerned
25 they were just too afraid to fight their own battle. When they get on an aircraft they try to steal
26 your medical bags that had morphine in them so you were having to watch them. You'd go into
27 a hot LZ, come out, they wouldn't all be off. You'd get them off as soon as you could after
28 getting out of the hot LZ, but it was a different experience.

29 SM: You had experiences when taking ARVN units into combat they would, if the LZ
30 was hot, they wouldn't get off the aircraft?

1 DM: Some of them wouldn't. So when we'd get out of the immediate area no longer
2 firing the M-60s, we'd get the gook and throw him off.

3 SM: Did that happen, how many times did your unit support those types of operations
4 with ARVN? Was it frequent, or infrequent?

5 DM: We, prior to going to [?] which was in May 15th, so from March, April, and May,
6 we probably flew at least one ARVN mission a week.

7 SM: Okay, and when you would fly those missions would that type of stuff happen a lot
8 as far as the ARVNs...

9 DM: Oh very frequent, very frequent.

10 SM: Wow.

11 DM: And that's why the crew chiefs learnt what to do.

12 SM: Would you and your fellow soldiers talk about those types of things? I mean, here
13 you are...

14 DM: Certainly, certainly. No doubt about it.

15 SM: What would you...why would you talk about it?

16 DM: Because, and here again we're young, we don't know the political situation, but it
17 was just heartening to know that even the South Vietnamese...we felt the South Vietnamese did
18 not want to fight for their own cause. So then we got a mind set of, 'What's it all about? Why
19 are we doing this?' And you get real quick into a mind set, I mean, you forget about all of that
20 because the one thing you're trying to do is survive one day at a time.

21 SM: Any other interesting missions from your Camp Eagle days?

22 DM: Well from Camp Eagle we of course flew to A Shau Valley, which was triple
23 canopy jungle type atmosphere. We'd do long range reconnaissance control, insertions,
24 extractions.

25 SM: These were the guys in your units, your cav platoon, or these were other LRRP
26 units?

27 DM: No, no, LRRP.

28 SM: 75th rangers...

29 DM: LRRP were LRRP, man. They were a different breed of cat. They were almost
30 like the Australians, born to kill, and they loved what they did.

1 SM: How much interaction did you have with them, besides picking them up, flying
2 them, and bringing them home?

3 DM: Typically the only way you got in with LRRP or, I'll say Australians, is if you went
4 in and got them out of a hot area and then they were somewhat appreciative and you might have
5 a few beers with them if they saw you someplace and they'd buy you a beer. But virtually really
6 no close interactions, I mean, we knew what LRRP did and respected them for that and we'd try
7 to do as much as we could to help them.

8 SM: What else did you do in the A Shau?

9 DM: Just normal, well, and I say normal, normal for Vietnam missions. You know,
10 we...fire base support, you know, we might re-supply fire bases, it was virtually whatever you
11 were called to do. But mainly we were search and destroy type operation, try to locate the
12 enemy, and once they're found then we'd insert the infantry platoon and hopefully get a body
13 count for the day. That was our goal.

14 SM: When you say body count, would that be an on the ground confirmed account?

15 DM: Confirmed.

16 SM: Confirmed how?

17 DM: Like, a lot better if you can confirm it, and even better; you get an A+ if you bring
18 the bodies back.

19 SM: Okay. And would that be bodies with weapons, or just bodies?

20 DM: Bodies, weapons, anything that you could find. Naturally you wouldn't leave
21 anything on the ground the Viet Cong might have access to that they could use against you. In
22 the A Shau it was nothing to see a cobra put rockets through an elephant. Water buffalo, blow
23 them up like grenades. They were pack animals for the Viet Cong so you wanted to get rid of
24 them, it was no worse than blowing up a truck.

25 SM: What was the first experience you had with enemy contact? Barring the first
26 experience with casualties from friendly fire, what about your first incident with enemy fire,
27 enemy contact?

28 DM: First hot LZ, I mean, probably within that first week because that was, there again,
29 we were to find enemy and typically if we were putting our infantry in that's because we had
30 found enemy.

31 SM: And what kind of resistance did you meet?

1 DM: Normally we'd have small arms fire. Then sometimes...we call them [yak yak]
2 guns, they were double something, I guess anti-aircraft type weapons. But I think the majority of
3 my flying experience with weapons was small arms fire.

4 SM: What about RPGs?

5 DM: We had, typically your LOHs were hit with RPGs because they were lower to the
6 ground and everything and of course they'd be more accurate so, you know, but it was definitely
7 always a concern.

8 SM: Was there a particular weapon that you grew to fear most; enemy weapon that you
9 grew to dread most flying in a helicopter or was it just anything that they were firing at you?

10 DM: It was definitely that one little bullet coming, you know. If that was the one that
11 got ya, that was the one that you'd be most worried about. I mean, they were all to be worried
12 about. Just like us, being in aviation, we had a flack jacket, we sat on ours because typically
13 when we were shot at it was from below.

14 SM: The reason I ask is because, you know, in previous wars certain weapons were
15 dreaded most like in World War II, the German 88, I mean, ground infantry dreaded that weapon
16 the most. So it's just, I was curious if there was one that helicopter pilots, crew chiefs, if there
17 was one particular weapon that you grew to fear because you knew that that was it. If you got hit
18 with one of them then it was all over.

19 DM: No, because, you know, an AK-47 round could down a helicopter which could kill
20 everyone inside. So, you know, it was just as deadly, it could be just as deadly as say an RPG.
21 Naturally if you're going to be shot at, the smaller the bullet, you know, that would've been my
22 preference.

23 SM: The first couple of months that you were in country and you were doing your
24 operations in the A Shau, what was the most difficult operation that you undertook? The one
25 where you met the most resistance?

26 DM: Well, I'm going to say in early May just before the Hamburger Hill, we were
27 working, well Hamburger Hill was started May 11th I think, which we were in the initial assaults,
28 and that was building up to be a major battle. I think that was the most fire power I had seen the
29 Americans put into in operation since coming to Vietnam. Then on May 15th we were shipped to
30 [?] for temporary duty assignment in [?].

31 SM: Any major aircraft losses during your time in the A Shau?

1 DM: Well, our 10 LOHs that we went over with, within the first 60 days all 10 had been
2 shot down.

3 SM: Wow.

4 DM: It was not unusual to have a LOH shot down and recover it and continue to fly. A
5 lot of them were destroyed when they crashed also. I mean, you were always getting new LOHs
6 in because they caught the heaviest ground fire because they were the ones that found the
7 enemies for us, and they flew treetop level. So of course when they did crash, they weren't
8 falling that far so that was an advantage for them. Not to say that's a good advantage!

9 SM: Less time to auto rotate though.

10 DM: Right, but if you're falling through trees and stuff it kind of broke the fall. You
11 know, we'd go in and recover an aircraft, it was nothing to see the infantry guys walking out
12 with the tail wing or something like that in their arm, you know, because whatever we couldn't
13 get out of there you'd go in to recover. If an aircraft got shot down we'd have to put our infantry
14 in to recover the crew and any equipment, especially the radios, things like that and then if you
15 couldn't get it out the cobras would end up blowing it up.

16 SM: Because you didn't want to leave anything for the enemy?

17 DM: Exactly.

18 SM: Okay. And while you were working in the A Shau and doing your helicopter
19 maintenance and taking care of your aircraft and everything else, at that point were there any
20 kind of technical representatives from the helicopter companies working with you, trying to help
21 you solve problems with aircraft, things like that? Or was it all just Army in house stuff?

22 DM: At that point in time it was all Army. If you needed tech reps and stuff like that,
23 civilian tech reps, you would take typically, the preferred solution was to get the aircraft to
24 Danang. And that's typically for the northern eye corps, that's where your civilian tech reps
25 were. Then again, flying all day, I wasn't in the rear to know if these guys came or not. I'm sure
26 that they did since we had a transportation detachment that could perform any major function on
27 an aircraft so I'm sure there's times when we had to get tech reps in.

28 SM: So you got assigned this temporary duty in [?]. What was...why did your unit get
29 [?] with that, what was the major operation you were doing down there?

30 DM: The Americal Division had gotten heavy resistance from NVA and they needed
31 additional air cavalry support. There again the air cavalry unit can get into an area and out

1 rapidly and so they needed that type of support. So we removed to tents in between in July.
2 There was two found runways, Marine runways in July. We slept in tents in between them. In
3 July they put us in tents in between the runways in July and that's where we'd stay at night. We
4 had a staging area in [?] so that we'd be closer to the area of operation so that we could respond
5 quicker so our daytime was spent in [?] waiting to react. Our maintenance detachment was left
6 at Camp Eagle at that time so any major maintenance, that would be a hundred hour PMI, we
7 would fly the aircraft back to Camp Eagle for that maintenance.

8 SM: How long would that take flying it back to Camp Eagle?

9 DM: Camp Eagle was probably a couple of hours flight time because Camp Eagle was
10 like an hour from Danang, and it was probably about another hour down to [?], flying time.

11 SM: Quick question back to your time and while you were working the A Shau Valley
12 and the first 3 months that you were in country. We talked about the body count, hopefully
13 getting bodies, hopefully getting weapons. Did you find that your body counts were at times
14 high, or what was the most that you recall?

15 DM: 5 NVA, that would be a high body count, confirmed body count.

16 SM: And would those be bodies you brought back?

17 DM: Yes, yeah.

18 SM: And these are NVA regulars wearing North Vietnamese Army uniforms, you know,
19 we're not talking about Viet Cong and black pajamas.

20 DM: No, we're talking hard core NVA, you know, that would be a high body count.

21 SM: Okay, did that change when you went down to [?]? Was there more action in [?]

22 DM: There was definitely more operations and resistance at that time in that area, not to
23 say, I mean, you know, at various times in the A Shau Valley there was heavy resistance, but at
24 that point in time there was very heavy resistance, NVA resistance, in that area.

25 SM: And when you worked the [?] area in support of the Americal Division, this was
26 primarily inserting them into areas? What kind of operations were you talking about?

27 DM: No, and you had Marines in that area also, there was I don't remember how many
28 Marine units but we used the Marine mess halls while we were down there. But you had the
29 Americal...the Americal Division had heavy infantry units in the area of operation, we were
30 providing support for them whereas if they got into some resistance or something we might put
31 our infantry unit in behind where they thought the enemy might be or something like that.

1 SM: When you were going into those types of situations and combat, were you briefed
2 on what kind of unit you might encounter? Did you know, for instance, if it was a PAVN, or if it
3 was Viet Cong, or was it just enemy?

4 DM: Well that was one advantage of being in the air cav unit, we had radios and of
5 course being a crew chief I had a head set, helmet, and we virtually listened to the majority of air
6 traffic from our aircraft so if we had a LOH that was on the ground we might be 10 minutes
7 away or 5 minutes away, if they got shot down we knew it, immediately. So we were very aware
8 of resistance when we went in, by the time that they would take the Hueys into an area. Whereas
9 we knew when we were going into an LZ with pretty good certainty whether it was going to be a
10 hot or a cold LZ.

11 SM: But you wouldn't know whether or not you were going to be encountering a hot LZ,
12 the opposition was going to be hard core North Vietnamese PAVN, or Viet Cong; you wouldn't
13 know the make up, the disposition of the force on the ground that's opposing you?

14 DM: No, no and you wouldn't...there again a hot LZ, you know, you're receiving
15 incoming as your going in, you don't know how much, how hot that LZ is going to be.

16 SM: Okay, now was it during your time down there in [?] that you were involved in the
17 Lamar plane? The operation? Why don't you discuss that, and I guess the other major
18 operations that were significant for B Troop in the [?] area?

19 DM: We were there strictly for operation Lamar plane, was what we were taken in for.
20 And you know, there again we were support for the Americal, we provided support for the
21 Marines when necessary. You know, when we worked the A Shau Valley, typically if you had
22 wounded you would have Medevac ships. The casualties were so great in the area when we were
23 in [?] that we ended up pulling a lot of Medevac missions. So we would, and more than, I would
24 say, in the A Shau when we were there. I mean, typically, you know, depending on the wounded
25 etcetera, there's sometimes when the closest helicopter would go in to get the people. You
26 know, where as if it's casualties it wouldn't really matter you just get the first aircraft in that you
27 could. We did seem like we pulled a lot more Medevac operations in [?] area. And of course at
28 that time I also flew...when our major's aircraft was down, Major [?] aircraft was down for
29 maintenance he would use my aircraft for command and control, so I had the opportunity to fly
30 with him, and flying with him you knew exactly what was going on because you had a lieutenant
31 in the back with a bank of radios for communications to run artillery, phantom jets, air, you

1 know, artillery from the Navy, whatever, so when you flew with him you knew exactly what was
2 going on.

3 SM: Did that happen frequently, did you get to do that a lot?

4 DM: Well yeah, because there again his aircraft every 25 hours had to be down for at
5 least one day, and Major [?] I compare him to Marlon Brando in Apocalypse Now, he really was
6 like that guy. But he seemed, and I'm going to say at that point in time in my life he seemed
7 glory hungry. But there was one good thing about [?] he would never make you do something.
8 He would always ask you, 'Do you want to do this?' You know, but being a spec 5 crew chief,
9 how are you going to tell the major who's flying your aircraft, 'No, I don't want to go into this
10 area to do something.' You know, but it was interesting flying with Major [?].

11 SM: Can you give us a specific example maybe of one of the, I guess, crazier types of
12 requests he made of you?

13 DM: We were working in an area and we got into a village that we could see some
14 weapons and stuff on the ground but they were scattered out, and in fact in the [?] area we
15 recovered quite a few AK-47s still wrapped, they had never been used. So souvenirs were nice
16 to have. But Major [?] asked me, you know, he says, 'Martin, if I set down, you know, if I put
17 down will you go pick up these weapons and stuff?' I had to think about it for a minute, you
18 know, what am I going to tell him this time? Because I really didn't want to do it, because you'd
19 heard of all the booby traps where they'd put weapons out like that and you go to pick them up
20 and boom! You're dead. So I told him, I said, 'Well, Major [?], if you'll keep the aircraft on the
21 ground while I go out and get them I'll be happy to.' He didn't do it that day, you know, so.

22 SM: Okay.

23 DM: But I was flying with Major [?] when I got my DFC, I mean, he was just, you
24 know...

25 SM: What were the incidents surrounding that, when you got your DFC? You're talking
26 about the Distinguished Flying Cross, is that right?

27 DM: Right. We were...we heard a call for a Medevac and of course there weren't any
28 around and we were close. It was a Marine battalion that had been pinned down, had heavy
29 casualties. So there again, don't ask. All the crew we all want to do this. And of course our
30 response was, 'We're the closest ones, let's go.' So we went into the area, it was hot, I mean, it
31 was heavy resistance. When we got in we couldn't make a landing because the tree stumps and

1 everything had been blown away by stuff and it was just tree stumps up in the air that were
2 broken off and stuff. So I had to get out on the skid and load three wounded patients on board
3 and we took them back to the medical hospital in [?] and then we went back and the Marines
4 were of course pinned down and they couldn't move because they had casualties. So since we
5 had already been in the LZ and knew the situation and the LZ with being able to lend a hand and
6 stuff, we went back in to find more casualties again.

7 SM: For that action you were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross?

8 DM: Right.

9 SM: Wow.

10 DM: Because I had to get out of the aircraft under enemy fire and all that. You just do
11 what you did, you know, I'm not a hero, you know. I did what I had to do to get out of the
12 situation and I think anybody would have done the same thing.

13 SM: How long were you working in the [?] area?

14 DM: We ran operations in [?] from May 15th until the end of August and at that time I
15 was transferred to Company B, 158th Aviation Battalion at Camp Evans.

16 SM: Okay, what did you do there?

17 DM: Well when I got in up there they asked me if I wanted to be a crew chief and I'd
18 been crewing for about 6 months by then and I said I really, you know, it was either be a crew
19 chief or go into night maintenance and I went with one of the guys that had been with...a friend
20 of mine that had been with me at Ft. Hood all the time so we both went up there and they had a
21 spot where we could both do night maintenance. We'd seen enough action by that time that that
22 sounded awful sweet to us so we opted to do night maintenance while we were up there.

23 SM: How long did you do that?

24 DM: Until right at the end of December and then I took a crew chief, I became a crew
25 chief for a colonel that was over at Chinook battalion, he'd just gotten a Huey and needed a crew
26 chief so I volunteered to do that. So I did that my last month and that was it.

27 SM: Okay, and then you left Vietnam when?

28 DM: When?

29 SM: When did you leave Vietnam?

30 DM: January 5th, 1970.

1 SM: Okay. I guess in your overall experiences in Vietnam what was the most heroic,
2 most brave thing you witnessed?

3 DM: You know, then again that's hard to say, Steven, because there was so many
4 incidences that it become to where you felt it was just part of life or part of your daily routine for
5 people to do things.

6 SM: What examples stick out?

7 DM: You know, from, you know, a lot of times we weren't, you know, I guess if
8 anything I felt compassion for the guys that were in the infantry unit because I knew what they
9 had to go through. I mean not to say that Vietnam's good, but being a crew chief in Vietnam,
10 being able to at least get back at night and sleep in your hooch and everything had some
11 advantages and I guess the most heroic thing to me is those guys just going back out day in and
12 day out. You know, after going through the things that they did with the 5 guys killed, I mean,
13 the infantry platoon received heavy casualties. Most heroic thing that I know of that I wasn't
14 there was the [?]. Now but that's after the fact, knowing what went on.

15 SM: Would you explain what happened there, from what you know as far as what you
16 were told?

17 DM: Right, well, here again our infantry unit had been inserted, and...

18 SM: This is in the [?] area?

19 DM: Right, this is when we were...June 2, 1969, the infantry unit had been inserted, they
20 got pinned down by an enemy bunker and when the enemy first opened fire they wounded two of
21 the guys that were up front and [?] once they were wounded even though the enemy were still
22 firing and everything, went out to try to give aid because that's what he was, he was a corps man,
23 and he was shot numerous times and then he ended up finally shielding one of the wounded from
24 gunfire and he was a conscientious objector, that's why he was semantic. You know, here was
25 someone that didn't believe in the war. Didn't go to Canada, you know, he went ahead and
26 served his country, and you know Doc was a very compassionate person, you know, he
27 always...the Vietnamese kids in [?] when we might be waiting early morning and everything
28 they'd come to him and he'd try to take care of any ailments and stuff that they might have and
29 anything. But that's the most heroic thing that I know of.

30 SM: He died as a result of his wounds?

31 DM: Yes.

1 SM: Any other incidents or actions that you were involved in stand out, that you want to
2 talk about?

3 DM: Not any specific ones that I can think of.

4 SM: You mentioned, you mentioned being shot down, you mentioned something about
5 your aircraft being shot down?

6 DM: No, my aircraft crashed.

7 SM: You're aircraft crashed.

8 DM: When we were in [?] they had just moved the transportation company down, I
9 guess in July and my aircraft went in for a 100 hour PMI. We were getting ready to go on a test
10 flight, Major [?] aircraft was going to be down the next day, so we'd finish the maintenance and
11 the test flight warrant officer who was in the aircraft cranking it up and the maintenance
12 sergeants would fly in the copilots seat and I was clearing the aircraft, I'd check the left side of
13 the aircraft and I'd check on the right side an I saw Major [?] crew chief coming up waving his
14 hands so I told the pilot not to take off and he wanted me to come and help move the radios so
15 that when my aircraft got back in we could go ahead and go to chow and not be too late eating
16 and so one of the maintenance guys had been bugging me for the 2 or 3 days that we'd been
17 doing the maintenance to be able to go on the test flight because they didn't get to fly much, and
18 I told him no. When time come up I just motioned for him and let him go ahead and take my
19 place and so they left on the test flight and apparently they hit a sail boat mast flying across the
20 South China Sea in [?] and we went out and recovered the bodies the next day because we had to
21 send aircraft out looking for them to see what had happened and then they brought a Navy ship
22 in to recover the aircraft and the bodies the next day.

23 SM: Everybody died in the crash?

24 DM: Yes, yes.

25 SM: Hit a mast?

26 DM: Yeah, like a sail boat mast?

27 SM: Yes, this is a daytime flight?

28 DM: It was dusk.

29 SM: Dusk?

30 DM: And there again nobody really knows what happened. The inquiry board talked
31 about pilot error. I blamed myself for many years saying that if I had been on the aircraft it

1 might not have happened. There again I'm an experienced crew chief, I would know to look for
2 things like that and warn the pilot, but who knows. You know, you just don't know what really
3 happened.

4 SM: Was it the main rotor that hit the mast or the tail rotor?

5 DM: Yeah.

6 SM: The main rotor?

7 DM: The main rotor.

8 SM: Wow. How tall was the mast, do you know?

9 DM: Apparently they were flying low level, so, you know. There was even talk about
10 maybe the skid hit the water or something, you know, because there again it was dusk and the,
11 you know, once it starts getting a little darker your perception towards water and flying is not
12 that great. But there's no...nobody will ever know exactly what happened.

13 SM: And when we were on a break you mentioned an incident, I guess it must have been
14 actually when you were working the A Shau early on where there was an accident where I guess
15 a copilot was killed.

16 DM: No that's...we were in [?].

17 SM: Oh, this is in [?] as well?

18 DM: Right. Yeah, a cobra had had it's tail rotor shot off and they were flying towards
19 the runway in [?] to try to land because in that situation they'd have tried to land the helicopter
20 while moving and then shut it down to keep it from spiraling. But apparently the pilot decided
21 that he was going to try to turn the aircraft for some reason and it crashed and hit a rice paddy
22 and the main rotor blade came down and chopped the copilots head off which when I think that's
23 another day that I was flying with [?] and we went in to check what had happened, you know, to
24 see if they needed any help or anything and I had to help pick up the copilots head and body.

25 SM: Were there a lot of...were there many incidents like that as far as accidents, being
26 killed in accidents? Or were most people's injuries caused by enemy fire attacks?

27 DM: There was a high right of accidents but the majority I'd say, I don't know, I'd
28 probably say 10% of Vietnam casualties might have been accidents where 90% due to fighting
29 the conflict. Not necessarily enemy casualties or the result of enemy fire but working something
30 directly to that.

1 SM: Now you said that there were a lot of accidents, were these accidents that
2 were...what were the primary causes? Was it maintenance failures, or equipment failures, or
3 pilot error? What were the primary causes of the accidents?

4 DM: Well I'm not saying 10% aircraft accidents but there was...when you're in an
5 operation like that and you're going daily, you're flying the aircraft daily, there's a lot of things
6 going on, you're pushed to keep your aircraft up, it's hard to get parts so you...you know, you
7 improvise at times if need be to keep your aircraft flying. Within reason, I mean, there again, the
8 report we had with our pilots and copilots of course they would, they should do a flight pre-
9 check. Some of them got lacked because they kept the [?]. And their feeling was, 'Well if
10 you're willing to go up in the aircraft, why shouldn't I be?' So, but anyhow, just because of I
11 think the demand on helicopter support was so great that you did everything you could to keep
12 an aircraft flying.

13 SM: Could you give us some examples of improvised repairs? How would you keep that
14 bird flying when you didn't have the right parts?

15 DM: Well, bullet holes, patch them with 100 mile an hour tape. Nicks on rotor blades,
16 tail rotor blades were hard to come by so you would be patching bullet holes up or anything else
17 with 100 mile an hour tape to keep from causing further damage to the area. You know, and
18 sometimes we just didn't have the time to fix it before we had to go out again. So, you know, the
19 100 mile and hour tape was essential part of our tool box. And that was the weight on the shafts
20 and stuff, could end up with bubble gum on them, if they lost a weight on one of the tail rotor
21 shafts or something. Enough bubble gum weighed the same and would work for a while.

22 SM: These were weights that acted as like a counter balance or a balance?

23 DM: Yeah, they were balanced because going back from the transmission of the
24 helicopter on the tail beam is about four length shafts or tubes that are connected but they all had
25 weights on them because they had to be perfectly balanced or it would create a vibration for the
26 helicopter. And the same with the tail rotor blades, they had weights on them, so you know,
27 people, you know, tape, use 100 mile an hour tape and a 45 slug to try to balance it out, you
28 know, things like that. Now if you were in an area where you get the right supplies, typically
29 those things would happen during the day when we're in operations which it was crucial to keep
30 the aircraft up and flying at that time.

1 SM: While serving in Vietnam, the leaders, the officers and the NCOs and warrant
2 officers that you interacted with, did you feel that their leadership was adequate?

3 DM: As an enlisted man my attitude then was probably...the warrant officers were pretty
4 cool because then again I interacted with them. Typically captains, lieutenants, and Major [?] at
5 times could be assholes. And you mind set was, 'He doesn't know what in the hell he's doing.'
6 In retrospect, you realize that they did, but it's something that you didn't know then. I think we
7 had excellent leaders in the people, in the officers that we had. We had our share of assholes,
8 and you're going to get them.

9 SM: Okay.

10 DM: For our unit, I think we had good officers.

11 SM: So you came back to the United States in January of 1970.

12 DM: Yes.

13 SM: You still had three years left on your term of service, correct? Or two and a half
14 years?

15 DM: Two years.

16 SM: Okay.

17 DM: Should have been two years.

18 SM: Two years left on your obligation, so you stayed in the Army for 2 more years.

19 When you came back to the United States, what was that like?

20 DM: Well I had to leave Vietnam on a compassionate reassignment and my wife had had
21 some problems and they went ahead and let me come back since I had 10 months and 5 days in
22 country I had completed my tour. I would say that Colonel Carol offered to make me an E6 if I
23 would come back after my leave, if I come back for 6 more months, but I told him I didn't want
24 to be an E6. So they flew me to Danang so I flew back out of Vietnam from Danang and a mail,
25 it was an Air Force plane, carrying mail. A lot of mail, too, thank goodness; that's what I slept
26 on coming home to Travis Air Force Base. Got to Travis Air Force Base, I was given a new
27 uniform and bussed to San Francisco, and then that's when I had the rude awakening of
28 demonstrators, people spitting in your face because you were military and I don't know at that
29 point in time I'm sure they had a lot of people coming back from Vietnam come through that
30 way but I don't think they distinguished you probably from some guy who hadn't even been to
31 Vietnam if he was in an Army uniform, would have been treated the same way. Once I got on

1 the aircraft, boarded the aircraft, no one wanted to sit by me. I mean it was like I had the plague.
2 That was the reception you got, or I got. And I come home to Lubbock on a 30 day leave and
3 then went to beautiful Ft. Hood again.

4 SM: Did Ginger go with you, your wife, did she go with you to Ft. Hood?

5 DM: Yes.

6 SM: Did you feel that there was a different treatment by the civilian population around
7 Ft. Hood, or did they feel the same way as the demonstrators and other people that you
8 encountered on your way home?

9 DM: No, in Ft. Hood and especially at that time, everything from Temple, TX to say
10 Copperas Cove was military related. That area depended on the military so you didn't see a lot
11 of demonstrating and stuff from them.

12 SM: At Hood, were there a lot of Vietnam Veterans in your unit?

13 DM: No, not a lot, there were a few. The majority of the Vietnam Vets that come back,
14 that I know, were able to get out of the Army when they come back. You know, a lot of them
15 had two year enlistments so by the time they trained and went to Vietnam they might come back
16 with three months and the military would go ahead and release them, so you didn't find a high
17 population of Vietnam Vets back at Ft. Hood. I know I was put in an armored unit and I was
18 told when I first got there because I was on flight status that I couldn't be a crew chief for an air
19 craft because they were having to train people for Vietnam. So I was given the option to either
20 become a cook or go into armored. Well I took an early out and re enlisted to get out of
21 armored, out of tanks, so I wasn't going to do that so I became a cook. Because I left a few
22 months early before the unit I guess I'd been doing that for a couple of months. Then one
23 morning in walked Charles...warrant officer McKay and he was in the chow line, and he says,
24 'Martin, what the hell are you doing over there?' So I explained the situation to him, Mr.
25 McKay had been the test pilot after Mr. Holdige got killed in my helicopter. Mr. McKay would
26 become the test pilot in our unit. So he asked me, you know, what was going on. I explained to
27 him. The next day I was on the flight line with my own aircraft so it helps to know someone.
28 But that was the only way I would have gotten an aircraft when I got back to the States because it
29 was pretty much reserved for people that were training for Vietnam. There were, you know, I'm
30 saying a unit of 200 people there were probably 20 Vietnam Vets, probably 10% of the people

1 might have been Vietnam Vets in different capacities, and you had a lot of them that did want to
2 go back to Vietnam, they were volunteering to go back.

3 SM: Why were they volunteering to go back?

4 DM: Oh the money was great. Oh yeah, in '69 I think I made \$3,000 dollars while I was
5 in Vietnam tax free.

6 SM: Compared to what you were making back at Ft. Hood which was how much?

7 DM: Probably would have been a lot less than that, but the main thing was that it was tax
8 free. They didn't tax you on it. But you got, well, like me, I got flight pay. Proficiency pay,
9 which I got that even state side because I was flight status. But in Vietnam you got an extra \$55
10 dollars a month hazardous duty pay. There was something else, something...it wasn't as much
11 as the \$55, but, you know. But and then some guys just liked the experience.

12 SM: Did you talk with other Vietnam veterans in your unit about your experiences and
13 some of the things you had to cope with, some of the difficulties, did you ever talk together?

14 DM: Oh yeah, yeah. I mean, you would communicate with them and more or less you
15 became buddies because you guys had something in common compared to the rest of the guys
16 that didn't know nothing and it was fun to scare the other guys, too, with stories. You might do
17 that occasionally. Just being guys, you know.

18 SM: And was it difficult to deal with, being in the garrison army back at Ft. Hood after
19 having served in Vietnam, and the difference between being in combat and being a garrison, you
20 see a lot of the silliness of being a garrison vs. being a combat?

21 DM: Typically I know, and from the people I've talked to, once you've been in Vietnam
22 and come back, I guess you lose some of that Army discipline or respect for officers because you
23 get a lieutenant that wants you to salute him because you're walking down the street and he's not
24 wearing a Vietnam campaign ribbon and it was easy to say, 'Go screw yourself!' The guy had
25 no combat experience, who in the hell is he? I made it through Vietnam, you can't tell me
26 nothing. Yeah, there was a big difference. I'm lucky I didn't get a couple of Article 15s when I
27 came back because I had changed so much and my outlook on officers...because when I looked
28 at an officer, especially if he's in a dress uniform I could tell whether he's been to Vietnam.
29 That gave me respect for him if he had it, and I had no respect for him if he hadn't it. And that
30 was just a personal opinion.

1 SM: Were you aware of any soldiers that did get punished for lack of respect or
2 disrespect?

3 DM: Oh yeah, it happened all the time.

4 SM: For the same reason that you felt?

5 DM: Yeah. But maybe theirs was...their attitude was a little worse than mine at the
6 time. Yeah, because, I mean, you'd learnt the realities of what you needed to cope with in war,
7 and there was nothing that would lead to...especially the lower ranking officers. You know,
8 major, colonel, you kind of probably had the same respect for them but, you know, first/second
9 lieutenants were nothing, captains were questionable, and there again it was just, you know, if
10 they'd been to Vietnam. You know, because you just, you know, they don't have anything to tell
11 you that you haven't learned to stay alive and that's what's important.

12 SM: Speaking of Article 15s, any non judicial punishment or court marshals in your unit
13 while you were in Vietnam that you were aware of?

14 DM: Oh yeah.

15 SM: What for?

16 DM: Fragging the commanding officer or the XO or attempting to.

17 SM: What was the story behind that?

18 DM: It happened when we were in [?] and we had a rear detachment of people, a couple
19 of those were...how do I want to put this, pot heads that took the detail of shit burning in
20 Vietnam. They had to burn [?] in barrels with diesel fuel. These guys liked to do their pot and
21 whatever else they did and be left alone and not too many people stood around them too much
22 with the smell. But apparently they got high and they were going to take out the XO and
23 chunked a hand grenade in his hooch. Luckily he wasn't there but we had our first sergeant,
24 when we were in [?] he used to go to the shower carrying his 45, he was afraid those guys were
25 going to do something to him. But you know, typically Article 15 type situations were for
26 people like, in my experience, they were the guys that were in the rear detachment not going out
27 in the field daily. Number one, infantry guys could get away with a lot of shit. It would be hard
28 for them to be brought up on an Article 15 because they needed them so much in the field. I
29 think a lot of times when it came to discipline it depended on what your MOS was, whether you
30 got a verbal reprimand or an Article 15. But there again in combat things were a little different
31 because officers didn't want to bring charges against guys unless they thought they could get

1 them out of a unit because, you know, once whatever happened was done with the guys going to
2 have a rifle or access to a lot of weapons. I would say there was probably intimidation to keep
3 officers from doing things like that at times.

4 SM: Any blatant acts of, I guess coercion or intimidation on the part of enlisted men
5 towards officers that you were aware of?

6 DM: Not that I was aware of, but there again, like I say, it's just the knowledge of it was
7 probably enough.

8 SM: Now you mentioned pot heads. Are they frequent in your unit? Pot smoking, was
9 that very...

10 DM: Well you could buy a pack of pre rolled Js, looked just like a cigarette here, packed
11 just as tight, 10 of them for a dollar and it was good stuff. So I would say a majority or the
12 personnel smoked it one time or another. The people that got hooked on drugs, I think it kind of
13 depended on their jobs, you know. Some guys, you know, just because it was easily accessed, it
14 was inexpensive, and they didn't like the thought of getting killed. Did it as a way to get away
15 from reality, I don't know. But I think, like I say, I would say a majority of the people in our
16 unit tried it. I'm not going to say they did it on a regular basis. But when you go operations all
17 day long, you come back in and you don't know if you're going to be there tomorrow or not,
18 you're going to do whatever you want to do. It becomes a way of life. Plus it helps you forget
19 where you are and what you're doing.

20 SM: With the smoking of pot, were there any unwritten rules? Obviously it's against the
21 rules and the laws of the UCMJ, but since it was happening and I'm sure the officers and NCOs
22 in your unit knew it was going on, was there like an unwritten understanding or that, okay, as
23 long as you weren't going out the next day, you weren't flying, you weren't crew chiefing, you
24 weren't door gunning, you know? You could get away with certain things as long as it wasn't
25 going to put your life or the lives of your fellow soldiers at risk?

26 DM: Well, I mean, it was an unwritten rule, you know, amongst everybody, I mean, you
27 know, I'm not going to trust...number one, you didn't trust the real pot heads. Those kind of
28 guys you just stayed away from. You wouldn't, you just don't do it when you're getting into a
29 combat situation, you know. It's okay if you smoke at night but don't smoke during the day
30 when we're running operations. Now as long as you get your ass up, get out to the aircraft and

1 everything's okay, it's fine. When it gets beyond that you jeopardize my life because of your
2 bullshit, watch out.

3 SM: Were there ever any incidents where that did happen?

4 DM: Not that I can recall in any of the Hueys, you know, it could have occurred in other
5 areas, just, I heard infantry guys talking about various guys, you know, and it's one of those
6 things that they just try to avoid the person, but you know, you just don't want to trust yourself,
7 you know, in a combat situation to be left to someone that's not functioning fully.

8 SM: Just speaking of general problems that occurred in units in Vietnam, were there
9 racial tensions or racial problems in your unit?

10 DM: We really didn't have that many blacks in our unit which was kind of unusual, you
11 know, we had the blacks in the infantry, we had some black cooks and stuff. Typically from
12 what I saw was that the brothers stuck together. They were just like us, I mean, you found a
13 couple of good friends that you could trust and that was it. And with especially blacks would
14 stay together and they didn't trust anybody else. You would find that same thing with if there
15 were a couple of Hispanics. They would bond together and I think it just goes back to, you
16 know, you want to be comfortable with who you're around in that situation. There were race
17 issues throughout Vietnam, and it was obvious to someone that was there, you know. I mean,
18 there was segregation was what it was and I don't know if that was self imposed, you know,
19 because I know some of the black guys in the infantry did get along with some of the white guys
20 and stuff, it's, you know, and I think a lot of it also had to do with [?], you know, a lot of times
21 from where the people came from, you know. But there was definitely a racial bias in Vietnam
22 to what extent I'm not completely sure but it was obvious. But it was no more racial than the pot
23 heads, that segregation type things. Some of it was probably self imposed.

24 SM: One other thing that came up when we interviewed a couple of other members of B
25 Troop during the Las Vegas reunion last year, they talked about one incident in particular. They
26 mentioned that there were some techniques employed to interrogate Vietnamese to find out
27 information, in particular the technique of...

28 DM: High level flying?

29 SM: ...high level flying, yeah.

30 DM: Yeah, it works every time.

1 SM: Taking a couple of them up and making one of them fly, and then the rest will talk.

2 Did that happen while you were in Vietnam that you were aware of?

3 DM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You sacrificed the lower ranking to get what you need from the
4 others. It worked. When you find out something works good you use those techniques. You
5 know, it's just like I was saying earlier about when you took ARVN troops into a hot LZ, it
6 seemed like you'd always end up with one or two still on the aircraft. Well, you got to get rid of
7 them. It'd be nice if you could get rid of them when you're 10 feet off the ground but if you end
8 up being 100 or 1000 it really don't matter. You got to get rid of them, you don't need them no
9 more because you've got to go do another operation.

10 SM: Did that happen often?

11 DM: Yes. Like I said, just about every time we'd take ARVN troops in we'd have that
12 situation.

13 SM: But the 10 feet or the 1000 feet?

14 DM: I don't look at the altimeter, my job's to clear the aircraft.

15 SM: What did your pilots think about this? Did they ever say anything to you about it,
16 or did you guys ever talk about it?

17 DM: ...get the son of a bitch off. They weren't going to land and let the guy step off.
18 He missed his stop.

19 SM: What about the interrogation techniques, did your pilots ever talk to you guys about
20 that?

21 DM: That was known and accepted in the unit. Like I say, it was information we needed
22 that could be helpful that might save one of our guys lives, so use whatever technique works.
23 Because if you took them back into base camp the intelligence people are going to get a hold of
24 them and you're never going to get any information back and if you do it's going to be three
25 months later. The more rapid we can get information, the better off we were, and that was the
26 method that worked.

27 SM: Did your unit ever lose anybody to being captured, do you know?

28 DM: I don't think we had any MIAs. Not to my knowledge.

29 SM: No POWs, no MIAs?

30 DM: No, not to my knowledge.

1 SM: Get back to the United States and what you had to deal with when you got back
2 here. What was the most important thing that you took away from the Vietnam War?

3 DM: Me. I grew up in Vietnam. When I hit Vietnam I'd just turned 19 years old. I
4 come home, I was still 19 years old but I'd become a man when I was in Vietnam. Not
5 necessarily all the skills that I learnt there were good skills that I would use in the future, but if
6 anything I learnt survival skills there.

7 SM: What was the most important lesson you learned from Vietnam?

8 DM: CYA, cover your ass. It got me through Vietnam and it worked. I don't have a
9 Purple Heart, didn't want one, so you learned to cover your ass. But you had, in civilian life, the
10 techniques that you used in Vietnam are not always good, and it's hard to break those habits
11 when your perception is that's what saved my life, you know.

12 SM: Anything else you want to talk about?

13 DM: Girls? Just kidding.

14 SM: Did they become more important after being in Vietnam?

15 DM: They were always important to me!

16 SM: To most 19 year old guys they are.

17 DM: Well, whatever you want.

18 SM: I didn't know if there was anything else you wanted to discuss today.

19 DM: No, [?].

20 SM: We'll let you go. Alright, this ends the first interview with Mr. David Martin.

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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with David Martin
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
April 21, 2000
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

1 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner, conducting interview number two with Mr.
2 David Martin on the 21st of April, year 2000, 9:08 a.m. in the Special Collections library
3 interview room. Mr. Martin, why don't you go ahead and begin by telling us about one of the
4 problems with tail rotors.

5 David Martin: Yes. You had previously asked about training experiences and possible
6 accidents that might occur from them and during training at Ft. Eustice, after we'd done our
7 classroom training we got on the flight line. We were warned repeatedly about the hazards of
8 walking into a tail rotor and especially there's been a problem being unique to aviation in
9 helicopters and so we had, we were made very aware of that problem.

10 SM: Were there specific accidents that occurred in training or in Vietnam or were these
11 mostly just second hand stories?

12 DM: They were primarily second hand. I never witnessed anyone walking into a tail
13 rotor, but I know at Ft. Hood at Grey Army Air Field it did occur on the flight line there when
14 we were training prior to Vietnam and I know of incidences in Vietnam that occurred but there
15 again, I did not see those myself. It was reported.

16 SM: And did you ever witness the after math of an accident, a soldier that had been
17 injured by a tail rotor?

18 DM: No, no. But it was a known fact that was one of the hazards and something as a
19 crew chief and in our duties we should be aware to do our best to keep people away from the tail
20 rotor because of this possibility of danger.

21 SM: And who were the people most at risk of walking into a tail rotor?

1 DM: I would say the people most at risk would be like an infantryman, troops getting
2 on and off the aircraft, not being familiar with the aircraft. I would say there was probably more
3 dangerous in training in the United States for them than it was in Vietnam because in the United
4 States they had a tendency to where they would want to try to walk around a helicopter whether
5 they got off on the left side or the right side whereas in Vietnam, whichever side they got off,
6 they were to stay off on that side, especially in a hot LZ situation.

7 SM: Now today I know that part of the training when using helicopters in air mobile
8 operations, the units that are on the ground, the infantry units, are trained to approach the
9 helicopter at 45 degree angles and preferably from the front of the aircraft. Did that kind of
10 policy exist in Vietnam where they had instituted like a standard operating procedure for those
11 types of operations?

12 DM: I think it was obvious that the training would, ideal situations would be you would
13 approach the aircraft from the side. Here again in Vietnam this was something that was
14 especially an extraction would be probably where I would think that they would do that been the
15 most danger because you didn't have ideal situations and the infantry wasn't lined up, 'Well let's
16 get 4 on this helicopter and 4 on this one,' you know. It might end up to where you had too
17 many men on a helicopter and have to tell one to get off, especially in a hot LZ, then he's going
18 to be running to try and get on another aircraft somewhere and that could oppose a real danger at
19 that point in time.

20 SM: Now did you ever have problems with the aircraft that you flew on with the power
21 train, in particular, were there ever problems with the engine not being strong enough to support
22 the operations that you were trying to conduct?

23 DM: Oh yeah. We, one specific incident, we were in the A Shau Valley which is very
24 mountainous, triple canopy jungle. We were doing a LOH insertion and the pilot, when we had
25 flown into the area to drop the LOH off, had pointed the aircraft towards the mountain and I'm
26 not for sure how they were supposed to do it, etcetera, but we began to lose power which I think
27 was the result of lift, the air lift that we needed to maintain the altitude. As soon as we began
28 losing power, I was instructed to cut the ropes for the LOH we were still repelling into the area
29 of operation. We cut the rope that they were repelling on, and then the pilot was able to turn the
30 helicopter around and start going down the side of the mountain and we finally regained pitch so
31 we were able to get out. We almost crashed.

1 SM: How far down were these soldiers on the ropes? Were they closer to the ground
2 where they weren't injured when they fell?

3 DM: We had some that had just went out the aircraft, so they were, they could have
4 been probably I'd say 150 feet out.

5 SM: And they jumped out?

6 DM: I cut the rope.

7 SM: You cut the rope when they were about 150 feet up?

8 DM: Naturally when I cut the rope they went down.

9 SM: Right. And did a Medevac have to come in and rescue any of them?

10 DM: Not to my knowledge, I mean, you know, there again we regained control and I
11 didn't hear any of the conversations in the area of operation on my radio so I really don't know
12 what happened to the rangers but it was one of those situations where it's them or all of us and of
13 course they were in triple canopy jungle so that probably [?] the fall some.

14 SM: So the trees broke their fall?

15 DM: Yeah.

16 SM: From 150 feet?

17 DM: Yeah.

18 SM: Okay. Were there any other incidents that stand out where you didn't have the
19 power?

20 DM: Especially because of the weather in Vietnam sometimes you would get into an
21 extraction and have too many troops and you would have to put people on, and that seemed to
22 be, it wasn't frequent but it wasn't infrequent, either. It did occur on an occasional basis.

23 SM: Did it engender hostility between the helicopter crew and the soldiers that you're
24 trying to support, or were they understanding that you just couldn't quite take them at this
25 moment?

26 DM: Well, here again, if you're in a hot LZ it would be different than a cold LZ where,
27 you know, but I think with our own troops they knew the problems because there again, it was
28 either the gunner or the crew chief would be telling them, 'Hey, we need one or two of you off so
29 we can take off,' because there again, you know, if you don't get rid of one or two, nobody's
30 getting out of there so pretty much our troops were understanding. I don't think we ever had any
31 real major problems.

1 SM: Who would make that decision? Who stays, who goes, especially in a hot LZ
2 situation? Would the platoon leader make it, squad leader?

3 DM: Probably the squad leader or whatever. I don't remember having to physically
4 remove anybody so I think typically when they come in the squad or platoon leader or whatever
5 would just tell someone, 'Hey, you need to get on another aircraft,' or something. There again,
6 when you're telling them like that you're looking around trying to find the highest ranking and
7 let them know.

8 SM: Another question about the helicopter and maintenance. As a crew chief, and you
9 also worked in maintenance, did you ever have cause to work with one of the field
10 representatives from Bell?

11 DM: I never worked with field representatives, typically because a field representative
12 would have probably worked with someone from the 333rd Transportation Detachment which did
13 our higher level maintenance because as a crew chief we were pretty much daily maintenance,
14 the 2500 hour preventive maintenance inspection. If we had a engine replaced or a transmission,
15 one time I had a transmission replaced that was due to hitting a revetment, it was just we
16 removed and replaced the transmission with the help of the 333rd Transportation Detachment
17 which didn't require any special knowledge from Bell helicopter to bring in a civilian layout.

18 SM: Now you also mentioned that there was an incident where an officer was killed?

19 DM: Right. In the second unit that I was in, in Company B, 158th Aviation Battalion
20 because I was not a crew chief with them, I did night maintenance, so I would occasionally hack
21 full guard duty and one night that I was on guard duty we had an incident where the officer of the
22 day was coming along the bunker line checking bunkers, etcetera, and he was a couple of
23 bunkers down from where we were at and the men in the bunker asked him for his password and
24 apparently he had forgotten and he wouldn't stop or anything. He just kept on like, from what I
25 hear, it's like, 'Well, you know, I'm the officer of the day,' da da da da, and kept coming at the
26 people and the guy shot him. It was a spooky night as it was, I think always guard duty was
27 spooky over there not knowing what was out there and it wasn't' too much later that evening
28 where we had an incident in front of our bunker area where we believed we had saw or heard VC
29 and we requested the officer of the day to come out and advise us, check the situation out and
30 advise if we could fire or set off gas or something like that and the new officer of the day refused
31 to come out to the bunkers after the first had been shot.

1 SM: Now was this incident viewed as an accidental shooting or as a fragging?

2 DM: I would say it was accidental. I mean, it definitely wasn't, you know, the guys in
3 the bunker were protecting the bunker. They were doing what they were supposed to do. The
4 officer of the day had forgotten the password. Shame on him. So as far as, to my knowledge, it
5 was just viable actions and I don't think there was any action taken against the men that shot
6 him.

7 SM: Were there any other incidents like this?

8 DM: That's the only one that I can remember being on guard duty. It was an unusual
9 event, I mean, something like that would just not normally happen over there. I can't say it
10 normally wouldn't happen like that because the guy was a second lieutenant and he was new in
11 country and it seemed like second lieutenants had a way of getting in harm's way for some
12 reason.

13 SM: Do you remember what branch this guy was?

14 DM: He was Army.

15 SM: No, I mean was he maintenance, infantry, what was he? Pilot?

16 DM: No, he wasn't a pilot. Pilot's wouldn't do guard duty. He was a second lieutenant
17 and I would imagine infantry, but not for sure.

18 SM: Was the base attacked frequently or had you recently been attacked by Viet Cong
19 units?

20 DM: Just about every night you would have someone in the wire, so that was a frequent
21 occurrence to have, Viet Cong attempting to come in and set off charges and blow things up.

22 SM: Why do you think the officer continued on to that bunker even though he didn't'
23 know the password? Did the soldier not warn him, 'Halt or I am going to kill you?'

24 DM: No, the soldier, from what I understand, gave plenty of warning and everything
25 and the lieutenant, I guess, just, I guess he took it as a game because he was probably, there
26 again, the officers that got stuck with the night duty like that were typically new in country and
27 the only thing I can think of is that he was so new in country that he thought it was a game like in
28 the United States.

29 SM: Have there ever been any incidents where Vietnamese have successfully
30 impersonated an American officer, infiltrated a base and then gone in and taken out a bunker?

1 DM: Not to my knowledge, but you know, not to my knowledge, but being dark at
2 night, I mean, guard duty was spooky duty. I guess one of the things that used to scare me more
3 than anything is Viet Cong get in, you always heard these stories, you know. Viet Cong got in,
4 some guy was on guard duty, three guys sleeping in the bunk, the Viet Cong kills the three in the
5 bunks and leaves the one that's on guard duty and it was always...it was probably a ridiculous
6 story because I think the guy killed all four of them, but you always had these thoughts in the
7 back of your mind. 'Man, is someone down in the bunker?' I mean, you're trying to watch the
8 front of the bunker, now you're trying to look inside it. It was a spooky experience. Guard duty
9 was terrible. Probably the worst duty you could have in Vietnam as far as I'm concerned.

10 SM: You said there was some other events or incidents that you wanted to discuss today?

11 DM: Oh, just the camaraderie between the men that served over there. It's a bond that
12 you really, like the guys that I served with in B Troop, we were apart for 28 years and then all of
13 a sudden some of us get back together and it's like you haven't been apart since it seems like
14 yesterday. There's a bonding camaraderie between the guys that I served with and I know and
15 I've seen it in other veteran's organizations now or units where there is a strong bond that was
16 made when we were in Vietnam. It's profound, which I thought was very important and
17 interesting. It just seems like that bond is, in those hostile conditions, it's a bond that can never
18 be broken I don't think.

19 SM: Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about today?

20 DM: No, thank you.

21 SM: Well then this will end interview number two with Mr. David Martin.