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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Richard Detra
Conducted by Steve Maxner
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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 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with
2 Mr. Richard Detra on the first of July, the year 2000 at 9:30 AM in Washington, D.C. at
3 the Marriott. All right, Mr. Detra, please begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of
4 yourself.

5 Richard Detra: I was born in Minneapolis at a Swedish hospital on January 29,
6 1947. My ancestry is Scandinavian, Norwegian, Swedish, and French on my father's
7 side, very conservative. I went to school in south Minneapolis. After graduating in 1965
8 the U.S. Army was drafting at that time and a good percentage of all the guys in my
9 graduating class were drafted. At that time we thought it was the right thing to do to go
10 into the military. Our father's fought in World War II, our grandfather's, World War I.
11 There was no anti-war movement in Minneapolis at that time. So we signed up for the
12 draft, took a train from Minneapolis to Fort Lewis, Washington, is where we had basic
13 training, did six weeks there I believe. Then we didn't get a leave. They flew us directly
14 to Fort Polk, Louisiana, which was commonly referred to as "Tiger Land." It was "The
15 Birth Place of Combat Infantrymen for Vietnam." There was a huge sign right over the
16 main gate. My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was 11 Bravo, light weapons
17 infantry. We were trained with weapons and infantry [tactics] there at Fort Polk. After
18 that training—that was six weeks—I got a 30-day leave. I went back to Minneapolis and
19 then I flew out to Oakland and left from Oakland on a Pan Am. Eighteen hours later
20 landed in Bien Hoa. I went with two other fellows that were close friends from my home

1 town and another fellow was from Washington. We had gone through training together
2 and we all—they pretty much usually split you up, but three of us stuck together. I ended
3 up at the 90th Replacement Center in Long Binh. We stayed there probably for ten days.
4 We were pretty scared. I remember shaving my head. I was afraid of getting bugs in my
5 hair at that time. At the time there was an influx of aviation units coming into theater, in-
6 country, and they were building up aviation assets. So, at the time, they needed 11 Bravo
7 MOSs to pull security guard for these aviation units. So, I was lucky. They called my
8 name and my buddy's names and we got sent to an aviation unit and pulled security
9 guard at night at a place called Dau Tieng which is in III Corps. We were assigned to the
10 188th Assault Helicopter Company, the Black Widows, and the gun platoon was the
11 Spiders. Those were the call signs, also.

12 SM: Why don't we go back real quick? When you received your draft notice,
13 you said that part of your mentality was, well, this was something that was just expected
14 and understood?

15 RD: Yeah.

16 SM: What did your family think about it, though, your mom, your dad, the fact
17 that you had been drafted and you were going to be going to Vietnam?

18 RD: They really didn't say much about it. See, at that time parents didn't talk
19 much about war stuff. My dad never talked about World War II which I thought was
20 strange, kind of closed lipped about the war. They were behind me. They thought at that
21 time that we were—I guess they were brain washed to the point where it was okay to go
22 in the military. I'm sure that once my dad spent his four years in the Army, or I mean the
23 Navy, he probably had a better feel for our government, how it works. But they were
24 behind what I was doing. They were fearful for me going and the possibility of getting
25 killed over there.

26 SM: Right. What about your brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and
27 sisters?

28 RD: I had a sister, but she had moved. She was five years older than I was and
29 she moved out of Minneapolis when she graduated from high school in 1960. So, she
30 was out of the picture. She had her own things going on. She moved to California. So I

1 didn't see too much of my sister—from that point on, our roads were completely
2 different.

3 SM: Did you have any friends that voiced opinions that were questioning why
4 we were going to Vietnam and why we were involved in Vietnam?

5 RD: Not that I recall.

6 SM: Pretty uniform support throughout the whole community?

7 RD: Yeah.

8 SM: Family and community?

9 RD: Yeah.

10 SM: Now the training that you received when you went to basic training, what
11 were the major plusses and what were the major problems with that training?

12 RD: Well, training was probably the toughest training you're going to get
13 because that was the best physical shape I was ever in-in my life. They teach you all the
14 skills of killing, tactics, infantry tactics, weapons.

15 SM: Any problems while you were there, though, in terms of discipline or
16 anything like that?

17 RD: No. I just went with the program. You could see the guys that were making
18 waves.

19 SM: Yeah, that's what I mean. There were some people making waves?

20 RD: Yeah, there was certain—well, what they wanted to do at that—if you're
21 going to break, they want to break you during training. They didn't want you to break
22 when you were in combat. That's why the training was so hard. They were riding you
23 all the time. Any time you fucked up or even if you didn't fuck up, there'd be someone
24 in your face. You'd have your heels locked. You'd be doing push-ups, running, trying to
25 break you. So I knew what they were trying to do and I was perceptive enough to just go
26 with the program. I mean, you're still going to end up doing all this shit even if you
27 don't make waves, but the guys that did make waves, there was a few guys that got
28 shipped out. I don't know what happened or how they got out, they just—or what rating
29 they gave them.

30 SM: Were there any physical encounters between trainees and trainers if
31 someone got too far out of line?

1 RD: Yeah, I vaguely remember a couple of times guys got in fights with the
2 sergeants, but they tried to keep that hush-hush. They would just go out behind the
3 barracks and there was—it's like anything. You know that these guys, that's their job is
4 to hound you, but there's a way of doing it without really dumping on you. Then, there
5 are some jerks and they got called out a few times. I never got into any altercations with
6 a—well, I did it at basic. We had a—our drill sergeant was an alcoholic. So we had to
7 deal with his hangovers every morning. In formation he was a jerk. We had words a few
8 times and I was basically on his shit list. I used to get extra duty. It just made it rough
9 for me, but it was more of a personal thing. Well, all that stuff ends up personal if you
10 get in someone's face. So those were the types of encounters that would turn ugly is
11 when it got personal like that.

12 SM: Did you think your weapons training and the other training you received was
13 appropriate and effective in preparing you for what you went onto later and especially
14 going to Vietnam?

15 RD: No. No, because I was trained for the infantry and I got put in as an aviation
16 guy with no training as a door gunner. All my training was on the job. So I had six
17 months of military training that they paid for that I could have thrown out the window as
18 soon as I got off the jet. The only reason I got into that unit was because I had an infantry
19 MOS. That's security guards that were 11 Bravo's. So, that's how we got basically into
20 the unit and then after thirty days of doing security guard—the good thing, when we were
21 at Dau Tieng when you pull guard duty all night you're off during the day. So we'd go
22 over to the swimming pool in the middle of a combat zone. We're in the Michelin rubber
23 plantation. So there's rubber trees as partially part of our company area. So we had
24 shade. I mean, talk about decadent. You get off guard duty and right across the road
25 from us is the VC (Viet Cong) controlled village of Dau Tieng. Its off limits. We know
26 its VC controlled, the whole area was—the government had written off that area of III
27 Corps in the '20s as VC controlled. So here we arrive in 1967 like we're going to change
28 what's going on in this area? I mean, what's wrong with this picture? We don't speak
29 their language. We don't know the culture. We weren't given any kind of—they might
30 have given us a few briefings on do's and don'ts, but they really didn't tell us much about
31 the Vietnamese culture. So, you could be out—you might insult somebody without even

1 knowing it because their culture is so different, the American and Vietnamese. I lost my
2 train of thought now. Where were we?

3 SM: Well, just the training that you had received—

4 RD: Oh, the training.

5 SM: Prior to going to Vietnam was not appropriate to your experience.

6 RD: It was not. Not at all. I mean, basic knowledge of tactics, weapons, was
7 something I needed. I mean, the tactics wouldn't unless I got shot down and was on the
8 ground, but I'm in the air. So, I had to be retrained on the job under combat conditions to
9 learn my job, which is the thrill of a lifetime flying. It was probably the greatest year of
10 my life besides—everyone thought they were bullet proof over there, like, "I ain't going
11 to get hit." I mean, I did take a round up—it came up through the floor and lodged in my
12 boot in the sole. I've got a picture of it here somewhere. That's the closest I got to
13 actually getting hit in my body. I mean, rounds went through the aircraft close by. You
14 could hear them penetrating the ship, coming up through the floor. I always sat on a
15 bullet proof vest. We had bullet proof vests. That's what these deals were. That was last
16 time I came to the Wall. That was in '92, but anyway, this is what we wore. They're
17 called chicken plates. There are sleeves that fit down into a harness. You have one on
18 the back and one on the front. Well, what we did, we took the back plate out and sat on it
19 because we didn't want to get shot in the balls because all your fire smokes are coming
20 from underneath. Then you figure, "All right, the gunner's on the right." The gunner
21 always flew on the right side in the back, the crew chief was on the left. You had your
22 aircraft commander up in the front left seat and then the peter pilot flew in front of the
23 door gunner. So we're back to back and the transmissions between us. So, we figured
24 we didn't need our back plates because this guy's got his on. That was how we were
25 thinking.

26 SM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, logical.

27 RD: Yeah. So that's how we got around to where we could cover the old family
28 jewels. But, as far as back to the training, just the weapons. See, I qualified expert in the
29 M-60 in training. That was my best weapon. So I know that had something to do with
30 my getting on as a door gunner because that was my primary weapon for the whole year
31 was the M-60, the best weapon the Army ever made. The fire power is unbelievable. It's

1 a beautiful thing when that M-60s working. We used to have every fifth round was a
2 tracer. We could get, at the ammo points, we could get solid tracers. They had these
3 other ones, they had green tips. They were piggy back. It was a double round on the
4 same round, 7.62, like a 308 round. We used those, too. It was devastating. I'm getting
5 off here on some other stuff I guess.

6 SM: The training environment, were there any accidents or casualties or
7 problems?

8 RD: Training environment? Well, down at Polk there's a few guys—because this
9 was on the Louisiana-Texas border, hot. That part of it was good. It kind of got us ready
10 for Vietnam. When we got off the plane in Vietnam it was like walking into an oven. It
11 was that hot. A few guys got cottonmouth snake bites during training, a little heat
12 exposure.

13 SM: Nobody shot, nobody injured by grenades or anything like that?

14 RD: No. No. We didn't use live ammo out on exercises.

15 SM: Unless it was at the—

16 RD: Unless you were at the firing range.

17 SM: Firing range.

18 RD: There wouldn't be any live ammo out on these exercises just because of that,
19 accidents happening like that. You're not watching what you're doing, you're going to
20 shoot your buddy.

21 SM: Anything else stand out about training? Anything you wished they had
22 taught you before you went to Vietnam that they didn't besides being a door gunner?

23 RD: Well, I was so naïve at that time. I'm a young man at twenty years old. I
24 didn't know much about anything, really. We used to joke about going to Vietnam. I
25 mean, we tried to make a joke out of it so that we wouldn't feel so scared. It's like you
26 do all this training, but you don't—it means nothing until that first time that you come
27 under fire in combat, how you're going to react. They try to train you to react. That was
28 part of the infantry training. But, it's like being in class. Until you actually do it, it
29 doesn't have much of a meaning. I don't know how I can describe that. It's just—

30 SM: There's no substitute for combat?

1 RD: There's no substitute for combat. You never know—see, that was one of the
2 things when we first got over there, everyone was considered a cherry until you got fired
3 at. That's the mentality of being in combat in a war. We call it a conflict, but anybody
4 that you talk to, I mean, it was a war. It was no conflict. They can say whatever they
5 want. Someone's shooting at you and you're shooting back, it's a war. Politicians can
6 call it whatever they want, but when you're over there in the trenches, I mean, look how
7 long that thing lasted. That was a conflict? I mean, that was their civil war. We
8 shouldn't even have been there in my opinion.

9 SM: Well, you raise an interesting question. What did you understand was your
10 purpose behind being in Vietnam?

11 RD: My perspective was that—

12 SM: Yeah, where did you fit into the picture? What was the big picture?

13 RD: We were trying to keep democracy alive for the South Vietnamese. See,
14 during—when the French were there they went through the same thing and that's when
15 they split it into North and South Vietnam. A lot of the ones that weren't into
16 communism migrated to the south. They had the thing with Buddhists and Catholics
17 because the ruling regime was Catholic which was a minority in that Buddhist country.
18 So a small minority was actually in control of the majority. So, there's problems with
19 that, and they were corrupt as hell. Their government was corrupt. The Vietnamese
20 were—I don't know how to put it—it was take, take, take you know, just take, take, take
21 and you couldn't count on them. We worked with them quite a bit and they were
22 cowards. They weren't in to going out and fighting. I couldn't understand it. Here we
23 are trying to help these people and they don't even want to help themselves. So I had a
24 problem with that. I'm getting off the track with this. Where were we?

25 SM: Just the whole issue of what we were trying to accomplish in Vietnam as
26 you understood it.

27 RD: We were trying—damn, that's what's hard sometimes. You think about this
28 stuff and you know the answer and then all of a sudden there ain't nothing there.
29 Basically we were there trying to help them have a democracy, free elections, just like we
30 do in America, to be a democracy. We were fighting the communists who were trying to
31 overthrow their government. So basically, that's what I figured we were doing was

1 trying to help these people help themselves. Then in the end all they cared about was
2 money, and greed, people, and power. The people themselves didn't want to—I mean, if
3 they didn't want to fight then what the hell were we doing there? I'm thinking.

4 SM: Yeah. Well, let's talk about your first experiences in Vietnam. You arrived
5 June of 1967, first place of entry was Bien Hoa air base.

6 RD: Yeah, we landed in Bien Hoa.

7 SM: You stayed there for about [knock at the door]. I'll go ahead and pause this.

8 RD: Help them help themselves was basically what my feelings were. The
9 political part of it—once you're over there, it didn't matter what the politics were.
10 You're just trying to stay alive, and make it through your—I never thought in my life that
11 I would count the days off in a year. You had a calendar and you would start from 365
12 until you got to thirty, and then you were a short timer. The only time in my life I ever
13 watched the calendar that closely.

14 SM: Did everybody else do it, too?

15 RD: Everybody. Everyone had a short timer calendar. The ones we had was a
16 naked woman that was squared off into 365 squares. It had the nipples and the pussy in
17 there. To be honest with you, what we were over there fighting for was the women, to
18 get back to the U.S. and some round-eyed women. The longer you were over there, the
19 rounder the eyes got on the Vietnamese. You know, at that age you walked around and
20 you had a fucking hard on all the time. Twenty years old? You walk around with a
21 woody all the time. You're at the age that you're just sexually active. I had a friend of
22 mine that was a medic. So I had him—I was either getting rubbers or whatever but he
23 turned me onto tetracycline. He gave me a big jar of tetracycline and said, "Eat one of
24 these a day and you won't have to worry about getting gonorrhea or anything from the
25 prostitutes." So I was lucky that way. Some guys did get that—I think one guy in our
26 unit got that incurable VD (Venereal Disease). There were rumors that these people
27 never got sent back to the States that picked up this incurable shit they had over there.
28 They were shipped off to some other place and they were listed as missing. This is just a
29 rumor, but this was going on while we were in-country because it was happening. Every
30 time, especially with aviation guys, whenever we shut down anywhere on stand-by or
31 something mama-san would be out there selling their daughter or some little kid would be

1 selling their sister. You called it boom-boom. That's what pussy was called over there.
2 They said, "You want number one boom-boom? Cherry girl!" You know, like a virgin.
3 They called them cherry girls. They were small, no hair down here. We did a lot of
4 fucking over there, too. Besides the war, they were pretty lenient about that, the
5 commanders because they knew that you had to take care of that. I mean, if you're out
6 there fighting everyday they've got to give you some time to vent.

7 SM: I just never heard it referred to that, or that way before, the way you
8 described the—described it just now.

9 RD: Yeah.

10 SM: "The longer you were in country, the rounder the eyes got."

11 RD: That's right.

12 SM: Okay. I want to get into some of the policies that your units had with
13 regarding your interaction with Vietnamese, but before we get to that point, when you
14 first got assigned to the 188th you spent about ten days at the 90th replacement at Long
15 Binh and then got assigned to the 188th, the Black Widows.

16 RD: At Dau Tieng. It was called, actually Dau Tieng was—

17 SM: Oh, yeah. This was at Dau Tieng.

18 RD: Dau Tieng. The name of Dau Tieng was Camp Rainier like Rainier
19 Mountain because the 4th Infantry Division—it was the 3rd Brigade base camp, 3rd
20 Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division. They came from Fort Lewis, Washington. So that's
21 how the name came about. Of course, I took basic up there in Washington. So Mt.
22 Rainier was right there, beautiful.

23 SM: Black Widows and Spiders were the call signs, Black Widows being the
24 troop carriers and Spiders being the gunships?

25 RD: Yep.

26 SM: Your primary duty at first was base security, perimeter defense?

27 RD: Perimeter guard.

28 SM: Yeah, perimeter guard. How long did you do that?

29 RD: Thirty days.

30 SM: Then you moved up from that to a door gunner?

1 RD: Right, but the reason why is, see, during that time in May of '67—see the
2 original unit came from Fort Campbell. All the door gunners were airborne volunteers to
3 fly. They were airborne rated. So once the unit got to Vietnam the 173rd was getting
4 their ass kicked up at Dak To and there [were] other airborne units that were taking heavy
5 casualties in May of '67. So, what they did, military command in Vietnam came down
6 with a directive saying anybody that was airborne rated was going to be transferred into
7 these units to bring them back to strength. So, the door gunners in our unit were
8 confronted. They either had to drop their airborne status, or they're going to get shipped
9 out. So I think about twelve guys from our unit were shipped out. They didn't want to
10 drop their—they were macho. If you were airborne, you were something. I didn't want
11 to jump out of a plane. I don't need that kind of excitement. But anyway these guys
12 thought it was the cool thing to do. When they shipped these guys out then they had nine
13 slots open on the helicopters. We had an infantry MOS. So we were given flight
14 physicals. We passed the flight physical and they changed our MOS to 11B2F which was
15 aerial gunner. I got put in 2nd Platoon, that's when I met John, the guy next door here,
16 and then all the guys in 2nd Platoon. I guess like any company everybody had a little
17 clique that they hung with. That's the way life is, basically. So, if you were in 2nd
18 Platoon that was your life. Those were the guys you hung out with was—see there was
19 ten helicopters for each platoon, slicks, H models. We were the first unit to arrive in
20 Vietnam with the Bell UH-1H helicopter. That was the new model out on the market.
21 We arrived in-country. It had more power than the other previous models. So we ended
22 up getting all these special operations because we had the strongest bird and power.
23 That's how we got involved with a lot of Special Forces stuff and same with our
24 gunships. We had the new Charlie model. This was just before the cobra. It's like the
25 transition of aircraft.

26 SM: What were your first impressions of the Black Widows, the 188th? You
27 mentioned the FNG (fucking new guy) mentality and—

28 RD: Well, no one would talk to you.

29 SM: You went as the cherry?

30 RD: Yeah. Okay. So we arrive at the unit, and these fucking guys, all trained at
31 Fort Campbell, they came over in tact as a unit. People wouldn't talk to you much. You

1 usually stuck with the guys that you come into the unit with. It was a feeling like you
2 didn't really want to get to know anybody real close because they might be killed.
3 'Cause aviation, you're right out there with them. We were their ride to the battle and
4 back. We'd go in and get—we'd bring ammo in when they're running out of ammo,
5 right there in the fire fight. So we were under heavy enemy fire a lot of the time. We all
6 thought we were bullet proof. That was our mentality. At twenty, twenty-one years old,
7 we had no fear. I mean, we did have fear, don't get me wrong, but you had to put that
8 fear back in the closet when you're out there on these missions or you couldn't maintain.
9 You had to maintain under fire, otherwise you had three other guys that were counting on
10 you on that helicopter. Until you proved yourself under fire, you wouldn't get any
11 respect from anybody. Once you were in a fire fight, you noticed more people would be
12 talking to you because they know that you'd proved yourself under fire and they could
13 count on you. Strange, but that's the way it looked to me.

14 SM: Now what units did you primarily support when you were in the troop
15 carriers? You mentioned special ops guys, so the Special Forces and SOG (Special
16 Operations Group).

17 RD: Okay. Well, down south our primary—see our battalion, the 269th, was
18 stationed at Cu Chi. We had three assault helicopter companies. We supported the 25th
19 Division which had three brigades. So it worked out to where the 188th supported the 3rd
20 Brigade down at Dau Tieng, the 187th assault helicopter company supported the 2nd
21 Brigade at Tay Ninh, and the 1st Brigade was at Cu Chi supported by the 116th which was
22 an assault helicopter company. They were our sister companies in the battalion. So our
23 primary support was the 25th Infantry Division. But we did support the 9th Infantry
24 Division. We worked several operations with them. The 199th Light Infantry Brigade,
25 we worked with them. We worked with the 1st Infantry Division. Those units worked
26 in—their AO, area of operation, was western III Corps. So you worked with all the units
27 that were in the area. It wasn't—like I said, our basic focus was the 3rd Brigade of the
28 25th Division which was 2nd of the 12th Infantry, 3rd of the 22nd Infantry, the 2nd of the
29 22nd—“Triple Deuce” was a mech outfit. Those were the three companies within the 3rd
30 Brigade. We did a lot of work with those guys.

1 SM: Okay. Now the—what about ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)
2 units?

3 RD: Oh, we worked with the 25th ARVN Division. You'll like this one. The 25th
4 ARVN Division was a joke. Their commanding officer, come to find out a couple of
5 years after we left, was a communist spy. He was a mole, but he was the 25th Infantry
6 ARVN Division commander. We always wondered why whenever we went out on
7 operations we never made contact. I know now because I found out, but they were a
8 joke. We used to have to push them out of the helicopter. They wouldn't get out of the
9 chopper. See, the ARVNs were so small, like a regular payload on a slick you'd put six
10 infantry guys in there plus four would be ten guys in that chopper. You'd have a full
11 load. Now, with the Vietnamese we could get ten of those guys in there. We'd come in,
12 we'd be on a combat assault. We'd fly in, prep the area, do all of the above, air strikes,
13 artillery. They knew we were coming, but they weren't there. They'd been warned and
14 they were out of the area. So, we never got into any shit working with them. They were
15 a pathetic division. Come to find out, the ranking officer that took over for this guy—
16 they took him to jail, this mole. He turned the division around to be one of the best in-
17 country after we left, but during that time frame that's where the ARVNs were at. We
18 hated working with them.

19 SM: Now you said you had to kick them off the aircraft?

20 RD: Oh, yeah. We'd be—like say when we first got over there it was the
21 monsoon season so water everywhere. So you didn't want to land in it because your
22 skids would stick down into the mud and you might not get back up. So you'd hover
23 above the rice and they're supposed to jump out. Well, some of them didn't want to get
24 off the ship. So I had to physically throw these ARVNs off the ship, me or the crew
25 chief. If they're on his side, he'd have to do it. You always had to watch them because
26 there was VC in their ranks. We were told that these guys would turn around or leave a
27 grenade—pull the pin, leave the grenade—in the ship up under the seats in the cargo bay.
28 If you didn't look for it, shame on you. But if someone didn't tell you that ahead of time,
29 you wouldn't know that this might happen. So, usually the guys that had the experience
30 would give you little pointers, I mean should give you the pointers, say, "Watch when

1 these guys get off.” We had to watch them to make sure they didn’t turn around and fire
2 on us because there was VC in their ranks.

3 SM: Were there incidents in your unit where that happened?

4 RD: No, not that I recall. But, it was kind of a weird feeling to think, “We’re
5 fighting with these guys and we’ve got to worry about them pulling a grenade in the ship
6 or turning around and firing on us?” No. We didn’t like working with the ARVNs, but
7 we did work with them quite a bit.

8 SM: Were there ever any incidents where you had to rapidly get out of an area
9 where you were working with ARVNs because it became a hot LZ (landing zone), or did
10 you always go into cold LZs with them?

11 RD: With the 25th division, yeah.

12 SM: It was always cold?

13 RD: Yeah. See, this guy, this mole would contact—when he found out what the
14 operation was about, he’d get in touch with his counterpart [Editor’s note: Audio
15 missing] and let them know and they would leave the area.

16 SM: What about the American units you took in from the 25th ID (Infantry
17 Division) or the 9th ID?

18 RD: Oh, we got into shit. We got into shit.

19 SM: Whenever you were taking ARVN around, you’d go into a cold LZ?

20 RD: Cold LZs. They probably wouldn’t even—oh, shit. They would stay in the
21 LZ. These guys wouldn’t even go out on sweeps and that. That’s how aggressive they
22 were. They weren’t aggressive at all. That’s the word I was trying to find earlier. They
23 didn’t really care about fighting and this was their war. So I didn’t see the point of why
24 we should be over there getting killed and these guys don’t even really care. I mean,
25 basically it was just most of the Vietnamese, all they want to do is farm their land. It
26 wasn’t about politics. Feed the kids, just life, but then you had the communists wanting
27 to take over and the politics comes into it. From what I saw, that’s basically my
28 interpretation was that they just wanted to be left alone to fish, to do what they do.

29 SM: Did you and your other soldiers, did you talk to other people about this kind
30 of stuff, like for instance with the ARVN? Here you had to kick them off the

1 helicopters. They don't seem to be very willing to fight. What the hell are we here for?
2 Did you guys talk about that kind of stuff?

3 RD: All the time. We'd get—I'll tell you, when we got in after flying we'd end
4 up over at the EM (Enlisted Men) club or we might go out by the berm and smoke a joint,
5 unwind. Some guys didn't like alcohol so we'd smoke weed. Plus you didn't have to
6 deal with the hangover in the morning when you got up from just smoking weed. But
7 we'd talk about—it would be like a group session. Once the flights came in—and you
8 might come in at different times and stuff, but you'd end up over at the EM club drinking
9 beer and talking about the day's mission. What happened, who got shot at. I mean you
10 had to vent and that's how we did it. We got together, even if it was just in the 2nd
11 Platoon hooch. Our whole time in-country we lived in tents. We didn't have any sea
12 huts or permanent structures. We lived pretty basic. Like I said, we were in isolated
13 areas our whole time. We made do. We didn't have the stuff that a lot of the other
14 aviation units had. There were more secure areas. But, thank God we were aviation. We
15 could fly and get whatever we needed. See, we were lucky that way. Just send a bird
16 down to Saigon, pick up a case of beer, go and get liquor, make sure there was plenty of
17 liquor in the company. They had two clubs. EM and—we had the EM club, an NCO
18 (Non-Commissioned Officer) club, and an Officer's club. We had a theater that showed
19 movies. Like I said, we had a swimming pool there at Dau Tieng. They had a snack
20 bar—the only snack bar in War Zone C. It sold hotdogs and hamburgers and shakes. It
21 was unbelievable. We were lucky 'cause our company area was real close to the pool.
22 Its hard to—you trip on it and you think, "God, the middle of the war zone here these
23 guys are out hanging at the swimming pool." It was neat. Actually, there was three pools
24 there. There was two others that the French care taker that took care of the plantation
25 trees. Well, he had two pools, but those were for the officers. The enlisted guys could
26 only go over to this other pool. This guy used to come in once a week to collect money
27 from the military. See, if we put any gouges in those rubber trees, they would leach
28 [latex] or the rubber. So we had to pay him so much money for holes or damage to the
29 trees. They had something going with the VC too because they were in production
30 during the war, the French. So, it was kind of funny. Here we are in the middle of a war
31 zone and they're worried about us putting a fucking hole in their tree, with bullets flying

1 in. We took a lot of sniper fire there. Usually you'd have formations in the morning, but
2 we wouldn't have them there at Dau Tieng because the snipers could hit us in our
3 company area from the village. The village was just across the road from us. I mean,
4 you could throw a stone from our perimeter into the village, it was that close. The roads
5 actually came within a few feet of the—see, here's our perimeter just to give you an idea.
6 This is the cleared area. We had fifty-five gallon drums of foo gas. This was all
7 concertina wire, but right around here you'd come around. That's how close the village
8 was to our perimeter. There'd be a bunker right here. At that time this is all VC
9 controlled village, this whole area was. They were digging tunnels into the base camp
10 while we were there. As a matter of fact, we had gotten mortared. During one of the
11 mortar attacks one of the tunnels collapsed. That's how we found out that they were
12 digging tunnels into the base camp. Now they never got into the base camp during our
13 tenure there, but later on in '68 or early '69 they came in. They had dug the tunnel into
14 one of the—into the plantation manager's home and they got up into the mansion. That's
15 how they attacked from inside. They killed all the people in the building. I learned this
16 because I contacted some guys from—I made contact with all the infantry units we
17 supported. So I got their feedback, kind of like what you're doing. They did get into the
18 base camp, but like I said—they didn't use them while we were there. We left in March
19 of '68 and about a year later they used those tunnels to attack the base camp. This was
20 the gate. This was the main street going into Dau Tieng just to give you a little
21 perspective on what we're talking about.

22 SM: Thanks. Now the villagers themselves, would they come up and try to sell
23 things to you?

24 RD: Oh, yeah.

25 SM: What were the rules about interacting with them?

26 RD: Oh, the rules? Well, see, basically they had MPs (Military Police) and that
27 was their job was to maintain traffic around the base camp, control the workers. We had
28 indigenous workers working in the company area. I think we had seventeen. One of
29 them was the mayor of Dau Tieng. He was in charge of these seventeen. We had two
30 laundries in our company area that were Vietnamese. The barber that used to cut my hair
31 and shave me with a straight edge, they killed him one night trying to get through the

1 wire. He was a VC, but he was our company barber. He was killed in the wire trying to
2 get in with some satchel charges or whatever, he was going to do something. The mayor
3 of Dau Tieng, they caught him stepping off the distance between our helicopter
4 revetments at the airfield. They arrested him and took him away. Now, these are people
5 that we're bringing onto the base and they're VC. We didn't have the problems at LZ
6 Sally that we did at Dau Tieng because up there the 101st had a directive that there would
7 be no Vietnamese workers in any of the base camps. So what I'm trying to say is we
8 didn't get mortared as much at Sally as we did at Dau Tieng because they had all the—
9 they had plotted everything down there.

10 SM: They had plotted everything in Dau Tieng?

11 RD: They had the distances down so they'd give this information to the mortar
12 crew that was out in the Razorback Mountains. There's a small rise of mountains just
13 north of the base camp. They'd have spotters up there and they would just start punching
14 mortars. They wanted to go after the helicopters. That was their main thing. Fuck the
15 infantry, they wanted to get the helicopters. So they'd mortar the airfield and they would
16 adjust their fire. One guy would be a spotter, they'd either have a spotter in the village
17 here up in a high building or a tree seeing where the rounds were hitting and they would
18 adjust. They'd have radios, too. We got mortared a lot there, rocketed and mortared.
19 They used to call it mortar city, rocket city. I talked to guys that were there after we left
20 and they told me that they called it rocket city, but we got mortared a lot there, especially
21 during—right before Tet. Saigon River ran right along here. This is the Saigon River
22 right here. That was their major infiltration route coming in from Cambodia. This area
23 was a staging area for the VC units. So they popped us down right in the middle of all
24 this shit. We were completely isolated out there, a lot of rubber plantations in III Corps.
25 Michelin—I never bought Michelin tires in my life. This was the Michelin plantation. I
26 wrote to Michelin in France and tried to get some background on their operations during
27 the '20s there. They didn't even respond to it. Those people really didn't have a choice
28 when the communists came in and tried to get their support because the French were
29 brutally treating them—they were actually killing these people. They were slaves. I
30 mean, if I was one of these Vietnamese that was working on these plantations for the
31 French, I would have turned into being a communist. That was their only—I can

1 understand why they embraced communism. I mean, when you're being brutally beaten
2 and they didn't pay them much. I researched it through some books that were written,
3 that were translated from Vietnamese about those times from the '20s. I know I got off
4 the beaten track.

5 SM: No. No. No.

6 RD: With that understanding, I didn't realize this until later in my life, but at the
7 time I had no idea that—we're always leery being around the Vietnamese because we
8 didn't know how to speak the language. You'd hear them talking and you didn't—if you
9 didn't understand what they're saying, you don't—what are they saying?

10 SM: Yeah. For the barber, he might be talking about how he is going to kill you.

11 RD: Yeah. So like I said—

12 SM: He's gonna take the straight razor to your throat.

13 RD: The barber that used to shave us with a straight—use a straight razor was a
14 Viet Cong. Like I said he was killed one night trying to get into the base camp.

15 SM: Now how frequently was the base camp rocketed or mortared while you
16 were there? Are you talking about on a weekly basis, a daily basis?

17 RD: Daily.

18 SM: Wow.

19 RD: At night time. They used to fire off during the day, too.

20 SM: Many casualties as a result of that stuff?

21 RD: Well, on June 24th of '67 the flight that had been working 9th Infantry
22 Division down by Nha Be, Tan An area, they got back. I was pulling security guard that
23 time. I was out on the perimeter that night. I came in. Standing orders from battalion
24 was that our aircraft were supposed to be dispersed throughout the area, not all kept in
25 one spot at the airfield. So the CO (commanding officer) said, "Fuck it." He was tired or
26 whatever. He wasn't going to disperse the aircraft. They needed maintenance pulled on
27 them and some other stuff. So, he disregarded this order and about 11:02 that evening we
28 got hit with a hundred round mortar barrage. It took out twenty-nine of our thirty-one
29 helicopters in a matter of minutes. We were non-operational by 11:30 that night. Like I
30 said, two of our gunships got up. They did get out and take out the mortar tubes that

1 were firing on us, but the next morning there was twenty-nine helicopters that were
2 damaged.

3 SM: How severely damaged?

4 RD: I think they fixed eleven of them, shrapnel damage. Three of the gunships
5 were completely destroyed. One of the gunships that was on counter mortar was actually
6 cranking when a mortar round hit the tail boom, landed on the chopper, and destroyed it.
7 These guys, you think they're excited, they jump off this chopper and go to another
8 gunship. They're trying to get up while all these fucking mortars are raining in, 82
9 millimeter mortars. Now in the meantime, when this mortar attack hit, you've got to
10 understand, all the ships—there was maintenance guys out there working on all these
11 ships for whatever reason. So there was between twenty-five and thirty guys were
12 wounded during that mortar attack. No one got killed. We lucked out that way. I'm on
13 the perimeter. I'm fucking—I'm waiting for a human wave attack to come now. After
14 the mortar attack usually there's a ground attack. That didn't come, thank God. So I
15 remember going up to the airfield in the morning and there was dud rounds laying in the
16 PCP, that steel planking they put over the ground so you wouldn't sink in the mud. There
17 was expended rounds or rounds that didn't go off that were stuck, that penetrated the
18 steel, but it was just there with the fin on it from the mortar round. The ships were just—
19 they were just devastated with shrapnel all over. I've got pictures of them. I don't know
20 that I have them with me here. This was our mascot, 2nd Platoon mascot. We called him
21 Fucker 6. It was a little take on the CO. We had a French twist to it, it was Fucker
22 (French accent), but it was actually Fucker 6. Oh, here's some of the shrapnel right here.
23 See the glass in that?

24 SM: Oh, yeah, peppered.

25 RD: This was one of my hooch mates here. So that's just—some of them were
26 minor damage, but it still all had to be fixed. I mean, you couldn't fly them until you
27 fixed those holes. That was one of the first nose arts we had when the unit got in-
28 country. I think we had three different nose arts. This is up at Kontum. Look at the area.
29 This is the area we worked, desolate. It's over by the Cambodian border. So, if you went
30 down out in that jungle, you wouldn't—see, they really didn't tell us all the time where to
31 go if we went down, which way to go. The communication wasn't all that good.

1 SM: You mean if you were shot down?

2 RD: If we were shot down, they'd say, "If we get shot down today, head this
3 way," or give you some head up on—

4 SM: Yeah. Some kind of a rally point.

5 RD: Where's the good guys at instead of being wandering around. What was
6 good about aviation, if you went down, your wing man was coming down and get you.
7 So we were lucky that way. So we didn't get—actually, we didn't have any missing in
8 action in our unit per say. When we moved north, our sister company had I think two
9 guys missing in action during one of the operations that they never did find them. We did
10 have a missing in action with the Black Widows later on during C-101. They presumed
11 that he got killed. The medic checked him. He got shot in the neck and he was dead, but
12 they didn't retrieve the body. Then when they finally went back in to get him the body
13 was gone. So they had to carry him as MIA. His name's on the [188th] flag. We'll be
14 doing that down at the Wall on Monday.

15 SM: Now were there any other incidents similar to the one where you lost the
16 twenty-nine out of thirty-one helicopters?

17 RD: Nothing came close to that mortar attack as far as damaging our helicopters.
18 We lost plenty of birds on missions from ground fire.

19 SM: Why don't we talk about some of them, then?

20 RD: Okay.

21 SM: What was your first experience under fire?

22 RD: My first experience under fire was August 30th, 1967. It was actually my
23 baptism of fire in the unit when I finally got on as a door gunner. We were Chalk Nine.
24 VC tactics were that they would let the main body of the flight land in the LZ and would
25 open up on the last two aircraft in the flight hoping that they would crash into the planes
26 or the Hueys on the ground. So we're Chalk Nine. We're working with 4th of the 9th
27 Manchus. They were 2nd brigade—I think it was 2nd brigade, whatever—25th Division.
28 What it was, it was supposed to be a bomb damage assessment mission. They didn't
29 wear any of their gear, just weapons and ammo pack and canteens. It was just supposed
30 to be a walk in the park. This is what we're told. It was in the Iron Triangle at a place
31 called the horseshoe. They call it the horseshoe because from the air it looked like a

1 horseshoe, the bend in the Saigon River. For two days they had—the Go Minh battalion
2 was a local force VC battalion, one of the best units that we fought against in that area,
3 was supposedly in this horseshoe area. They hit it with B-52 strikes for two days,
4 artillery, air strikes, and we were going to bring the Manchus in for a bomb damage
5 assessment. When we flew in, we weren't on the first flight. We were on the second
6 flight. They had three lifts that went in, ten helicopters at a time flying into the LZ. The
7 first bunch that flew in, they opened up on them and they damaged nine out of ten
8 aircraft. The only Huey that didn't get fired on was the lead aircraft. For whatever
9 reason, they had set up a seven-point ambush for the force when we came in. So that
10 flight—they dropped those guys off. They took off. They got the shit shot out of them,
11 and we, for some reason, our ship was down. The PZ (pickup zone) was Cu Chi. We
12 had some kind of minor problem with the helicopter so we didn't—we weren't on the
13 first flight. We went in on the second flight. Same thing happened on the second flight
14 and plus they had all these grunts pinned on the ground. They're out in the middle of
15 these rice paddies and they were all around the circle. Like I said, it was a seven point
16 ambush. So they had seven positions and that was the ambush. So, when we flew in on
17 the second flight, we were Chalk Nine. We were about twenty feet off the ground and all
18 hell breaks loose. The first thing I know here's Trueblood gets blown out of his—where
19 he was behind his gun on the left side. We were receiving fire on the left side. So I
20 didn't see shit because I'm on the right side. All I know is I'm hearing the rounds going
21 through the helicopter, hit one of the infantry guys up in the front, there was six of them.
22 These guys dove out of the helicopter at about twenty feet up. They were out. They were
23 gone. [Jim] Trueblood got shot in the arm and got blown into the cargo bay. At this time
24 I'm freaking. You know, I'm telling my pilot, you know, it's fucking—"Trueblood's
25 hit." I left my sixty. [Interruption here at door]. Okay, I left my sixty to go and
26 administer first aid to Trueblood. I left my weapon, my sixty, grabbed the first aid kit
27 and started giving Jim—fixing his wound up. So right after this happened, just a few
28 seconds later, another burst of AK fire came through where he was sitting, through the
29 transmission housing, and would have killed me because I was right behind him, but
30 because I left my position to help Jim, his getting wounded saved my life. So we're on
31 the ground and fire is just coming from—we're getting all our fire from the left side. We

1 don't know nothing about the helicopters on the ground in front of us. They won't let
2 you take off because they want you to leave in a fucking formation. You're under fire,
3 now, you know, and I'm freaking on the radio. I'm telling the pilot, "Get the fuck—let's
4 get the fuck out of here." Like they don't know we're receiving fire. This one, like I
5 said, one of the infantry guys got wounded that was in the ship on Jim's side and plus Jim
6 got wounded. So we finally got out of there, took him back to Cu Chi. This guy was my
7 bunk mate. We'd been spending some time together. We hooked up at the reunion in
8 Fort Worth for the first time in thirty years. He lives up in Alaska now, but every August
9 30th we call each other. That's something that will be with us the rest of our life. That
10 was the heaviest encounter that we were in as a unit. It was actually—I'm not saying it
11 was the heaviest. I mean, we saw a lot of stuff along those lines because like I said we
12 had the new model, H model, and so we got more dangerous missions. Then we got
13 back. We took Jim back to Cu Chi, dropped him off at the hospital, and then went back.
14 I think the third flight they wouldn't even bring in there because our choppers were so
15 shot up.

16 SM: Did you lose any?

17 RD: We didn't lose any in the LZ. We all got out, but there was combat—there
18 was damage to our birds from the rounds that we took.

19 SM: What about the guys you dropped off? They went in, as you said, for the
20 cake walk, to do a BDA (battle damage assessment), but they went into a hot LZ with a
21 lot of enemy around there. Did they get pulled out by you guys or by somebody else?

22 RD: Somebody else. As a matter of fact later in the day when they were running
23 out of ammo, one of our guys—one of the crews volunteered. They asked for volunteers
24 to go in with an ammo resupply. It had to be voluntary because they were pinned down.
25 You'd been flying—what a target, you know? So two of the guys did. Who was it,
26 Spearman, Mark Hayes, Sondey, and—was it Williams [Smith]? I'm thinking the name
27 of the door gunner because he got killed on the fucking mission. Anyway, they
28 volunteered to do this. It was late in the day and these guys were running out of ammo.
29 Plus they had a bunch of wounded. They had a bunch of guys killed in the LZ. So they
30 had a bunch of bodies down there, too. So they volunteered for this mission. So they
31 flew in. They picked up—they unloaded the ammo. It was probably high tide, too. So

1 water table III Corps is high tide and the water was always high in those areas. So
2 they're hovering up above the paddy. They unloaded the ammo. They're taking all kinds
3 of fire. During this time, the guy [Smith] got hit, the door gunner got hit, took a round.
4 He had his chicken plate on, but he got the round in through here. He thought he was
5 okay, told Mark that he was okay, but he didn't realize—he was probably so scared he
6 didn't realize the severity of the wound. So anyway, he got killed. During this time the
7 ground commander's on the radio trying to get our guys to get their wounded out of
8 there. So these guys are hovering above the rice paddy taking fire from all around. They
9 hovered over to the other side to pick up the wounded. They were actually floating them
10 out on the water on air mattresses to keep these guys from drowning. I mean, they're
11 wounded. As Bill was loading up one of the guys he got shot in the ass. Two of the guys
12 got silver stars for this, Spearman and Bill Sondey got silver stars for volunteering for
13 this mission. Mark Hayes had problems for years because he wasn't put in for any kind
14 of medal and he should have been. He volunteered. It was a voluntary mission. Of
15 course, the other guy got killed. I'm sure he didn't get a fucking medal or anything. All
16 he got was a purple heart. So that's how this particular mission ended for our unit. As
17 far as picking them up, I don't know who picked them up. But, it was—that story's
18 going into history. It's a big chapter in the history. Other missions, we worked with B-
19 36, [Cpt.] Bo Gritz, the legendary Special Forces guy. At this time he was a captain. He
20 was a ball buster, you know, he was, "Let's go kill them." We worked with those guys
21 on Operation Rapid Fire V staged out of Tay Ninh East.

22 SM: What was the purpose of this Operation Rapid Fire?

23 RD: Reconnaissance, POW (prisoner of war) snatches for intelligence purposes,
24 for Special Forces intelligence branch for II Field Force which was the main—on the
25 chain of command, they were at the top for III Corps and for intelligence purposes,
26 information. They did snatch a few POWs and there was a red Chinese nurse that they
27 did snatch on that operation. She was shot up though and died on the way back from one
28 of the missions. We had trouble getting them in and out. It was over by the Cambodian
29 border. I think at that time, this was like the end of December. So I think the intelligence
30 had to do with Operation Yellowstone. That was a big operation at the time. They were
31 trying to get some information to get some POWs. They wanted to snatch some to get

1 information for interrogation. It was—we were doing one ship insertions, false
2 insertions, so the enemy wouldn't know for sure if we dropped the troops off or not.
3 These were tactics that were just beginning to be used that were used later. That was one
4 thing, like when you were fighting in the war, whatever you learn today you know if you
5 fucked up, you ain't going to use it tomorrow. That's how you learned as you went.
6 Lessons learned, that's what they called these things, operational reports lessons learned
7 so it wouldn't happen again. It was all trial and error the whole way through. You
8 learned as you went. I mean, if you did something wrong, you knew the next day that
9 you wouldn't do that again, especially under fire. I mean, that was the deal. You'd be
10 under fire. Frank wants to do this too, so—

11 SM: Okay. You mentioned Bo Gritz's unit. What about other SOG units or
12 Special Forces units?

13 RD: Well, we worked with B-36. That was teams A-361 and 362. Those were
14 two A teams. We also worked with the Koreans up in—after our helicopters got fucking
15 blown up, we were given a direct order by Lt. Col. Jim Merryman was the 269th battalion
16 commanding officer. He gave—well, needless to say, the next day our commanding
17 officer was relieved of duty after the mortar attack. They came down from 1st Aviation
18 Brigade. These are half a million dollar items that we're flying around. So I think it was
19 the 1st Aviation Brigade, 269th commanding officer Merryman came down and our CO
20 and XO (executive officer) and I think the gun platoon leader were relieved of duty on
21 the spot and taken out of the unit, right off. So, we got a new CO after that. Our unit
22 had—the 188th had four different commanding officers during our time frame. Jack
23 Johnson was the third. Then when he gave over command to Hank Dreher and then he
24 became the last 188th CO and the first C Company, 101st Aviation Battalion Black
25 Widow's CO. Hank and Jack were the only two of the four commanding officers that
26 would help me with the history. The other two didn't want anything to do with it. Well,
27 Wofford, I could understand he was relieved of duty, but from a historic standpoint, I
28 don't give a shit about what happened. I'm just trying to write our story. But, he just
29 recently died, our first CO. In January he died. McWhorter was a dick head. He was a
30 West Pointer, a real dick head. Him and Top, they went back and forth. Our first
31 sergeant lives in Williamsburg. We're going down there tomorrow for a barbecue. So he

1 won't see us over there tomorrow. He stuck up for his guys. Now, this is a black man in
2 a white man's army in 1967. There [were] death threats on his life. There [were] a lot of
3 southerners, southern boys in our unit. The southerner's still fighting the Civil War.
4 They don't like niggers, as they would put it. Top had death threats on his life in the unit.
5 So he was real jumpy. He didn't like people walking up on him from behind. He was
6 always packing. He even had a formation out—even besides the sniper fire—he had a
7 formation, everybody out in front of the orderly room. Actually he carried pearl handled
8 .44 magnum pistols, western style, had 2 holsters set up. He got everybody out in
9 formation, took out one of the 44s and put a couple of rounds in one of the rubber trees.
10 He told everybody that, "If you think you're going to—if you're out to get me, you better
11 watch your fucking back because I'm going to blow your brains out." This guy was a—
12 he retired out of 'Nam. He'd spent two years in Korea. This guy was combat savvy and
13 he was a good man, but because he was black there was a lot of guys in the unit that
14 would not accept him as their 1st Sergeant. Then the death threats, the rumors started
15 going around and it took—even years later when I first found Top, he couldn't believe
16 that, "You want to write about our fucking history in 'Nam?" So this is the way it started.
17 Finally now he's with me, but at the beginning he had those memories of someone trying
18 to kill him in the unit and that's where he was coming from. So there was some stuff
19 going on besides the war that made life a little uneasy at times within the company.

20 SM: Were there any incidents of fragging in your unit?

21 RD: Yes. As a matter of fact, there was. When we moved up north to LZ Sally,
22 we had a problem child who was a black guy from—I think he was from Chicago.
23 Anyway, he was having problems with his wife at home. He had problems. When he
24 was drinking, this other guy would appear as real angry individual. You know, we
25 always refer to it as the other guy. When you wake up in the morning you'd be back to
26 yourself, but if you drank too much you turned into the other guy. So, he had confronted
27 a few people at Dau Tieng with a loaded M-16 and threatened to kill them. He thought
28 the one guy—Richard Kaplan was the mail room—that was his job. That would have
29 been a good job for anybody if you're in the unit would be the mail room guy because
30 that's all you dealt with was the mail. So anyway, this guy wasn't getting any letters
31 from home and he thought that Kaplan—this is how fucked up he was when he got

1 drunk—he was thinking that this guy was holding his mail out and not giving it to him.
2 So, they had a big confrontation in the mess hall, he pulled a weapon. He was
3 threatening these guys with a loaded M-16. Well, this happened on two or three
4 occasions. The MPs showed up, took him away for a few days. He came back to the
5 unit. He'd been busted down a couple of times. He had some head problems. All this
6 was behind his drinking. I think if they'd have kept him off the booze, none of this stuff
7 would have transpired, but anyway, nothing was changed. So these problems, when you
8 got four different commanding officers coming and going during your tour, they don't
9 know the history behind maybe one individual in the unit. So they come in blind. They
10 don't know that this guy's a walking time bomb ready to go off. So, we moved up north.
11 They took him off flight status after these incidents down south. They put him in the
12 603rd which was our maintenance detachment. I think after these two altercations—yeah,
13 two altercations down at Dau Tieng, then they took him out of the 603rd and they ended
14 up putting him in the motor pool, busted him down to private. He was a Spec 5 or
15 something. So his cash flow was really deleted now. I mean, we ain't making much to
16 begin with, but now you got him way down here. We get up to Sally. We're out flying.
17 All the flights were out. All the crews were out on a mission. It was during the day.
18 This guy had been drinking in the morning. The 1st Sergeant after DePalm was a guy
19 called Pearl Ackley. Now isn't that a handle, Pearl? I tried to locate him and couldn't
20 find him, but anyway he was a 1st Sergeant. They had a duty formation and then he
21 would delegate details to whoever. So they were doing a police call through the area and
22 here's McKeever sitting in one of the tents. During a duty day, you're not in your tent.
23 You're out doing something. You can't be in your bunk. So, they had a confrontation in
24 the room, now. The 603rd—at the time I think he was still in the 603rd. They had their
25 own 1st Sergeant. 188th had their own 1st Sergeant. So this Pearl Ackley is getting on this
26 guy's shit. He's half in the bag drunk. So he said, "Well, fuck you. I don't want to talk
27 to you. I want to talk to my 1st Sergeant. I ain't got nothing to say to you." So he told
28 him, "Okay. Okay. I'll take you over to the orderly room." Took him over to the
29 orderly room and told him to stay there while he went to find the other 1st Sergeant. So,
30 he takes off. So, McKeever decides to say, "Fuck"—the 1st Sergeant tells us—Mike
31 Vickroy, he's the company clerk—to watch this guy, "If he goes to the bathroom, go with

1 him. Make sure you know where he is.” So as soon as he’s gone McKeever gets up and
2 he heads down for the bunker line. So Vickroy, he don’t want no part of this. So I mean
3 he was happy to see the guy take off. So anyway, he goes down to the bunker line and
4 my good friend Dan Wooley’s down. He’s sergeant of the guard. He’s a duty sergeant
5 that day for the perimeter guard. So he’s down there. McKeever goes down there and
6 gets the M-16 and grabs a couple of grenades out of one of the bunkers. He threatened I
7 think—he threatened everybody on the perimeter that he was going to kill them if they
8 came close to him. So what he ends up doing is he had put two grenades—no, he put a
9 grenade in his pocket, in his fatigue pocket. He faked like he was going to go turn
10 himself in to the 1st Sergeant. He gave the M-16 to Danny. Danny cleared the weapon, it
11 was loaded. He threw a couple of grenades up on the bunker. We had boxes full of
12 grenades for the perimeter, right. So these guys thought it was over with, that he’d given
13 all this stuff back, but they didn’t know that he still had [two grenades] in his fatigue
14 jacket. So he’s going around. He’s really pissed off now. He’s uptight with—anybody
15 with authority is not the person that—you wouldn’t want to be a captain or something
16 and run into this McKeever, this Leroy McKeever, in his state of mind. Anybody with
17 authority—because Jack Johnson had refused his request for personal leave to go home.
18 He was having problems with his wife or there was something going on there. Jack went
19 on R&R (rest and recuperation) so McKeever was intentionally going up to the orderly
20 room to kill Jack Johnson with this grenade. In route there’s a couple of guys seeing that
21 he had a grenade, he took it out of his pocket and was walking with it. God only knows
22 what he’s thinking. All he wants to do is kill somebody. He’s drunk now. I’m sure he’s
23 not aware of the repercussions of what he’s doing. So on the way up two of the guys
24 tackled him trying to get the grenade away from him. At that time he pulled the pin on
25 the grenade and said, “You better get the fuck away from me or I’m going to blow you
26 both”—these were friends of his. One was a black dude and another guy was a door
27 gunner that knew him. No one could reason with him. Danny tried to reason with him
28 on the perimeter, “Don’t do this.” So he got up. He pulled the grenade and now he’s
29 walking up to the orderly room and he runs into the 1st Sergeant of the 603rd. It’s Joe
30 Helvey. So, they’re having a heated conversation. Now, you’ve got to understand, this
31 is—I wrote in to the CID (criminal investigation division) to get the—I have the whole

1 transcript from what happened. This isn't—I'm not making any of this up. This is
2 written down. So they get in a heated, heated conversation and McKeever's swearing at
3 him, "You mother fucker, I'm going to blow you up." There's a crowd of people starting
4 to gather 'cause the word goes through the company like the wind. So they start
5 gathering around him. They had talked him down. They had called to get the MPs over
6 there from the 101st. This is in the works while all this shit's happening. They'd already
7 called to say that, "We've got a problem over here, big time." They're standing around
8 and all of a sudden McKeever—they were talking through it and McKeever put his hand
9 out to like to shake hands with Helvey after this heated exchange. He had forgotten that
10 he had pulled the pin out of the grenade and he just let up a little bit on the handle and
11 you could hear the detonator pop. Now everybody knows what that sound is. Everyone
12 scattered. Joe Helvey and McKeever's standing like this like we are. They both froze.
13 They didn't run. The grenade went off between them and just blew them to pieces.
14 Three guys got wounded that were in the area from the grenade. One of McKeever's
15 arms was completely blown off and was laying on the ground. Our company mascot,
16 which was—we had two dogs. One was called Spider and one was called—no, that was
17 the monkey, Spider and Web, Spider's Web. So one was Web and the other one was
18 Spider. Web got killed, got run over down by—when we were at Dau Tieng someone
19 backed up and ran over him and killed him. All our mascots got killed just like that war.
20 The monkey—one of our pilots killed the monkey. It was like the monkey from hell. It
21 used to bite everybody. So no one really liked it. We had it around, but it used to shit in
22 its hand and throw shit at you. He'd go into our tents—we had to have a long leash so it
23 could move around in the trees and that. He'd always go in and shit all over the hooches
24 and all that. Okay, but back to the other mascot. Now Web, he picked up this guy's
25 fucking arm and takes it up to the mess hall and is eating this guy's arm at the mess hall.
26 So, one of the captains took a 45 out and killed the dog. Let's see, the next—that's what
27 happened. That was the only grenade incident that happened during our time in Vietnam.
28 These two guys that got killed. I personally don't think it should have happened. It
29 should have been dealt with long before this. The guy should have been sent out of the
30 unit. Jack, today, has problems with that. He read the—he wrote the forward for the
31 history. You'll see it at the reunion. He's had problems until this day about that incident

1 because this guy was coming to kill Jack. The only reason he didn't was because Jack
2 was on R&R or Jack might have got blown up or something. He'll never forget—none of
3 us will ever forget it. It was such an unbelievable thing to happen, but we did have a
4 fragging during our time over there.

5 SM: Earlier you had mentioned that some guys would go back and smoke a joint
6 and unwind and other guys would drink to unwind. Was drug use prevalent in your unit
7 at all?

8 RD: Not really, just weed. See, during that time frame, there was no heroin or
9 any of that stuff going around. I'm sure it was available. Our unit wasn't into it. We
10 were really in an isolated area so most of these—the bigger base camps and that would
11 start having those problems, but that was later. During our time, we smoked weed.
12 There was a number of guys in the unit that smoked weed. We never smoked when we
13 were in combat. We knew better than that. It was moderate use. We weren't abusing it.
14 I mean, you couldn't abuse it because you had to watch out for the officers that was trying
15 to bust you. What we'd do, we'd go out by the perimeter where they burn the shit and
16 we'd smoke by these—we called them honey pots. They were fifty-five gallon drums cut
17 down to about here and you'd pour kerosene in. Because of the water table you had to
18 burn your shit. You couldn't bury it because it could end up coming back up. So we'd go
19 out there and smoke the weed out by the honey pots. Fuck, I mean, this weed was so
20 strong, Steve, that one or two hits and you were just blitzed. You'd be sitting there
21 holding a joint in your hand and it would be out. We'd just sit out on the perimeter at
22 night and watch the fire fights and artillery strikes and trip like that for a couple of hours.
23 Then we'd hit the sack. At the time we used to get rationed two beers and two sodas a
24 day. So what the heads would do—well, we were the heads and the juicers. That's what
25 we called each other. Everybody knew who was who in the unit. So we used to trade our
26 beer rations to the juicers for their soda rations because when we were smoking the weed
27 we wanted a soda, we didn't want alcohol. So, it worked. It worked for us. But there's
28 no heavy drug use in the unit, not during our time.

29 SM: Where would you get marijuana?

30 RD: Oh, we'd buy it from any of the kids around the base camp. It cost twenty
31 dollars a kilo, or Vietnamese are into the barter system. We used to trade them soap or

1 C-rations. One of the ways they'd throw it over the fence from the road. I showed you
2 how close the company area was. But anyway, yeah, they used to throw it—this is the
3 perimeter road that went around, but anyway, it was available everywhere. Little kids
4 would come up and sell it. Them people were poor. It didn't cost anything to grow
5 marijuana over there. So anyway, one way we'd get it is they would throw it over the
6 fence to us in some kind of a container. We'd throw money or whatever we were going
7 to do, throw it over the fence, made sure that the MPs had gone by. We were hip. We
8 knew what we had to do to get what we wanted. In other ways when we're out on
9 missions or standby somewhere, they'd come up. They'd approach you and ask you if
10 you wanted to buy weed or get some boom-boom. So it was either getting pussy or
11 weed. So we'd get both. We were just youngsters. Yeah, like I said, there were a
12 number of people—some of the officers smoked. It was discreet. It was a coping
13 mechanism just like drinking after being in combat all day. You either want to come
14 back and get shit faced drunk or smoke a joint. That's what we chose. I mean, we did
15 our fair share of drinking, but when we didn't feel like drinking we'd just puff a little
16 weed and unwind that way.

17 SM: Now you said some officers did. Was that something that the officers
18 usually didn't do or was it kind of balanced?

19 RD: Well, you got to understand, most of the—a great majority of the officers
20 who were warrant officers and regular line officers that went to West Point or something,
21 they didn't respect warrant officers. They didn't think they were shit. So you had that
22 little struggle going on within the company. I got to—you know, these warrant officers,
23 we had our share of shitty pilots but I'd say ninety percent of the pilots were good, very
24 good. They were young nineteen, twenty. They were as old as we were and they're
25 flying the choppers. We had a very good rapport with our—at least in 2nd Platoon—with
26 the pilots. I remember every once in a while they would come to me and ask me if I
27 could get them some weed, which I would do. So everything was kept real discreet. Like
28 I said, it wasn't abused because there was no time or place to abuse anything. We were
29 always flying or—

30 SM: So was that kind of the rule that you could kind of do what you wanted as
31 far as either smoking pot or drinking, but as long as the next day—

1 RD: Even Jack will tell you, he knew that there was marijuana use in the
2 company, but all he wanted to know was, “Well, where are they getting it?” I mean,
3 fuck, the supply is unlimited. Wherever you are is where you’re going to get it. But they
4 had inspections, spot inspections. As a matter of fact, referring back to the weed thing,
5 we had to hide it wherever. We had our hiding places in the sandbags or wherever, but a
6 funny incident since we’re talking about the weed, there was one guy that came in the
7 unit with me this Mike. I can’t think of his last name off hand, but this guy was out there
8 on guard duty one night, guard duty. We didn’t smoke weed on guard duty. This guy
9 was smoking weed on guard duty and 1st Sergeant came by, DePalm. He had the balls to
10 ask DePalm if he wanted to smoke some weed with him in the bunker. So right away he
11 called the MPs, got this guy arrested. So they took him in, and plus he was growing
12 weed underneath the hooch. He had plants going, a California guy. At the time I was
13 from Minnesota. He’d probably been in weed before he went in the service. I never was
14 into drugs until I got in ‘Nam. That’s when I first smoked weed. Someone else turned
15 me on to it, one of my hooch mates. So anyway, he gets busted and they court-martial
16 him and they take him to Cu Chi. They’re going to court-martial him. At that time the
17 military code of justice didn’t have marijuana as a restricted substance. It wasn’t on the
18 list. So he walked. He beat it, but he had to go back and DePalm had him on every shitty
19 detail. Then he finally transferred him out during one of our infusions. They allowed
20 infusions over there. You understand how that worked?

21 SM: Well, the infusion as far as after you had suffered so many losses they’d
22 bring in new guys?

23 RD: No, infusions—to keep the continuity of a company, if everybody was going
24 to leave on the same day you wouldn’t have a company. So what these infusions did
25 would bring, say, fifteen percent of your guys would be transferred to another unit and
26 fifteen guys from their unit would be transferred into your unit with different DEROSes,
27 the time you left country. So what it does to a cohesive unit is fuck it all up. These guys
28 all trained together and once they got to ‘Nam they started to transfer them out to all
29 these different units. It was crazy. I mean that part of how they ran that war was bullshit.
30 We ended up—we didn’t fight fourteen years over there. We fought one-year wars
31 because you had a 365-day tour. Then you got another guy coming in that don’t know

1 shit, its going to take him eight months to get his shit together. So once we knew how to
2 fight that war, tactics and everything, we left the country. So, all your experience left. It
3 was crazy that whole concept.

4 SM: Did you ever talk about that while you were in Vietnam?

5 RD: No. This all came later. We were just too focused on staying alive and day-
6 to-day shit. We didn't really focus on anything, a bigger picture. Our big picture was
7 just staying alive.

8 SM: Any multiple tour guys in your unit?

9 RD: Yeah, there was. Jack Johnson, he was on his second tour. He got wounded
10 on his first tour and he asked to get the command of the 188th. He was at battalion at the
11 time so he got that job. A lot of the guys that came over with the unit were second tour
12 guys so that helped. Anybody that was a career soldier was going to see two or three
13 tours in Vietnam during their time. Me being a draftee, I knew I wasn't going to be
14 seeing any more time in Vietnam. They tried to get me to extend thirty days for an early
15 out and I wouldn't even do that. When we were up at LZ Sally that was such a scary
16 place up there flying in them mountains. There's no place to go down. I got shot down
17 with ten days left in-country. It was the last day I flew. We were working up doing an
18 insertion up in the mountains. We took a bunch of fire and knocked out our hydraulic
19 lines. We'd just made it out of the mountains, late afternoon, went down in a rice paddy
20 next to a small village. We had two cherry pilots that was just new to the unit. They got
21 into the guns. Me and Greg, we'd been there a long fucking time. Like I said, I've got
22 ten days left. I'm at the top of my game at this point in the unit. This fucking guy comes
23 in—and it's almost dark—with all his landing lights and shit on right next to—you figure
24 at night everything's controlled by the enemy. Wherever you're—if you're not in your
25 base camp you can figure everyone around you is the enemy. So, we go down. The
26 guy's got all the fucking landing lights on like you're fucking in a drive in or something.
27 He's telling me to take the mini-guns off the ship. I said, "Hey, sir, if you want the mini-
28 guns taken off the ship you're going to have to do it yourself," because Greg and I
29 grabbed our 60s and as much ammo as we could carry and set up a defensive perimeter
30 around the aircraft. Because we thought we were going to receive fire from this village
31 while this idiot's out there with all the fucking lights on. So I told him—I told him. I

1 figured I'd get article fifteen or court-martialed, it didn't matter. I was freaking. I had
2 ten days left and this fucking guy's telling me to take the guns off? I said, "No, sir." I
3 said, "If you want the guns off, you take them off yourself. I'm going over here on this
4 berm and I'm going to get under cover. I'm going to watch that village to make sure we
5 don't receive any fire from it." So about ten minutes later a slick came in and got us.
6 Nothing was said. I think he got the point. I think he learned something that day because
7 of me going off on him. Then he opened his mouth. He talked before he thought it
8 through. So nothing happened. Like I said, that was the last day I flew. I left ['Nam]. I
9 left the day of the change of command when Jack Johnson had his change of command
10 with this Hank Dreher.

11 SM: Now you said that you were shot down?

12 RD: Yeah.

13 SM: What were the circumstances behind that? How did that happen?

14 RD: Well, we were doing an—we were working on an insertion up in the
15 mountains. We were a light fire team. We were—the gunships were going to draw fire
16 off the slicks. That was our job. So we go in and try to draw fire to see where these
17 guys, the bad guys, were so we could open up with rockets and mini-guns and our door
18 guns. So during the exchange we took a bunch of fire and it knocked out our hydraulics.

19 SM: What kind of fire was it?

20 RD: AK-47.

21 SM: AK-47s? I didn't know if it was heavier anti-aircraft guns, 51s.

22 RD: No. No. They had .51 calibers up there. We experienced .51-caliber fire up
23 in that area and down south we did, too. We took .51-caliber fire. That's like a golf ball
24 coming up at you, a tennis ball. That's what it looks like in the air and it's lit up. So
25 basically at that time I believe it was AK-47 fire. That was their basic weapon so that's
26 what I'm assuming it was because we were a little shook up at the time. I really wasn't
27 tripping on what kind of weapon it was. I knew I could hear a lot of shit going through
28 the helicopter I know. So anyway, but we did make it out far enough to go down before
29 we lost hydraulics completely, but the whole control panel was all lit up with warning
30 lights. So we did take a lot of hits. Like I said, they came in and picked us up. Then
31 they came in and sling loaded the gunship out of there.

1 SM: Was it standard operating procedure for a pilot to turn on his landing lights
2 and everything else—?

3 RD: I don't think so.

4 SM: If they were shot down in enemy territory?

5 RD: When we flew at night, standard operating procedure was to fly with no
6 lights. As a matter of fact, we had a mid air collision at Tuy Hoa and Phu Hiep and lost
7 two gunships. We lost eight guys when we worked with the Koreans up in Phu Hiep.
8 We worked for them for two months. They were on a night recon mission and they lost
9 contact, visual contact, because they didn't have no lights. That was SOP (standard
10 operating procedure). One of the gunships banked into the other one and killed all eight
11 guys on board. There wasn't much left of the choppers. I think I got a picture of it. So
12 this is after the mortar attack at Dau Tieng. They sent us up there to build our morale
13 back up. Then we have this devastating mid air collision killing eight of the Spiders, the
14 gun platoon. We really had a tough time of it, as a unit, with these accidents and shit that
15 were happening. A helicopter just melts down to nothing. Here's a sign for Camp
16 Rainier. That's the main gate sign. The airfield is in the background. That's the other
17 main gate. I mean, this collection is unbelievable. Here's the airfield. This is where we
18 got mortared. All the ships were along here, the company area's right along here. So we
19 take—there's a road here and we'd either walk to the airfield or we'd all jump in a three-
20 quarter ton and get someone to drive us out to our aircraft. But anyway, this was our
21 layout. We called it the "Web". Every unit called theirs—like the Robin Hoods used to
22 call it the forest. They all had different names.

23 SM: Sherwood Forest?

24 RD: Yeah, Sherwood Forest, yeah. So ours was the "Web". We really—I mean,
25 the Black Widow's was really a neat nick—I guess it was a nickname, right?

26 SM: Uh-huh.

27 RD: For a unit. It was the Spiders. I mean, I'm really proud of our unit to say
28 the least. This is a Michelin rubber plantation factory where they processed the rubber.
29 This is Nui Ba Den in the background. It was called Black Virgin Mountain. It was the
30 highest point in III Corps. This is basically another shot of the company area. You can't
31 see the pool on this one, but it was really near it. There was a snack bar right next to it.

1 SM: Amidst the trees?

2 RD: Yeah. This is the rubber. These mansions were unbelievable that the
3 French had built in there.

4 SM: What were they used for?

5 RD: The mansions?

6 SM: Yeah.

7 RD: That's where they lived.

8 SM: Oh, they were still there?

9 RD: Yeah. This guy came in twice a—I think every Thursday he flew in from
10 Saigon, stayed in the mansion, and collected money from the military for damaged trees.

11 SM: Good God.

12 RD: Can you believe that shit?

13 SM: That's a scam.

14 RD: Okay. Here they are right here.

15 SM: I didn't know if maybe—I didn't know if the commander and the staff
16 commandeered the mansion to make it into like a TOC (tactical operations center) or
17 something.

18 RD: No. Some of the mansion buildings were used for headquarters. Yeah, like
19 you say, the commanders. The 3rd Brigade was in a villa. So all the high ranking guys
20 were in the villas. Air Force was in the villa, and we were in the tents.

21 SM: Yeah.

22 RD: Yeah. This is what's left of the two ships from the mid air collision.

23 SM: Oh, wow, not much.

24 RD: And I got—this is actual—I got this from a guy in California before I left.
25 He was a safety officer at that time and he had to do the investigation. These are actual
26 photos that were taken by the military. Eight of our guys got killed on that one. This is
27 another one we put together for the reunion ready to frame. This is a night gun run on the
28 village of Dau Tieng. It's a time—what do you call it, a time shot, like you left the
29 shutter open?

30 SM: Mm-hmm.

1 RD: Ones going straight down are door guns and these are mini-gun fire. That's
2 all the patches from—well, that's not all of them. I located some more since we did this
3 one.

4 SM: Oh, wow. That's great.

5 RD: That's the only pictures that I know of, of that incident.

6 SM: That was when you were supporting the ROKs (Republic of Korea)?

7 RD: Yeah. We supported the 9th ROK division, the White Horse, and the Capital
8 Division, the Tiger division.

9 SM: Now what were they like, the ROKs?

10 RD: They were the best, they were the best fighters that I've ever seen, in my
11 opinion. When we worked with them, you got to understand that these Orientals look at
12 life a whole lot different than we do in the way that they do their missions. I mean, if
13 they're working in an area and they receive fire and some of their people get shot, they go
14 into the closest village and they kill everybody. So what happens, the VC give the
15 Koreans a wide berth because they know they're not going to—they know how the
16 American military does their thing, what they can get away with, but see they couldn't get
17 away with this shit with the Koreans because they were brutal. The first time I ever got
18 turned on to kimchi, I don't know if you've ever eaten it, but it was something. We
19 worked with them for two, yeah, about two months up there. We did take some wounded
20 up there on the mission. Some of the guys got wounded, but as far as contact there
21 wasn't much contact because like I said, the VC and NVA (North Vietnamese Army)
22 gave these guys a wide birth. They stayed out of wherever their area of operations was
23 because they were brutal.

24 SM: You said they'd go into a village and kill everything. Could you define that
25 for me?

26 RD: Define everything? I can't because I don't have that knowledge.

27 SM: Like My Lai everything?

28 RD: Well, let's say whatever it took to get their point across. Let's put it that
29 way. I wasn't in the village personally when they were doing this so I mean this is
30 hearsay, but these are rumors that were—some of the guys that were on the missions
31 were aware of it. I didn't go out there in the villages where this happened, but they

1 weren't massacres. They didn't wipe out everybody in the village. I think what they did
2 was to get the point across they would kill a few people in that village. Say they lost
3 three people on their patrol they'd probably kill three people in that village just to let
4 them know that we know that these guys got to be coming from somewhere and basically
5 that's the way I see it.

6 SM: Okay. Anything else about the ROK's strike you as unique? How was their
7 leadership?

8 RD: Leadership was brutal. We were used to seeing—they were into some kind
9 of martial arts.

10 SM: Taekwondo?

11 RD: Taekwondo. Okay. Well, they'd form a circle. They formed circles and
12 they would do the Taekwondo. That was part of their program for self defense and that.
13 But I did see a couple of officers actually go up to guys that had fucked up and they
14 would knock them down and hit them, physically abuse these guys, not verbally. So their
15 discipline was different than the American soldiers were. You might get verbally abused,
16 but you wouldn't be struck. I'm sure that there was instances of that, but I didn't see any,
17 of officers striking enlisted men. But with the Koreans, I did see it.

18 SM: Did you ever hear verbal abuse or verbal—?

19 RD: Well yeah, I mean—with the Koreans?

20 SM: Yeah.

21 RD: Yeah. We heard it, but you didn't know what they were saying, but you
22 knew he was hot.

23 SM: Yeah. It was in Korean.

24 RD: One guy's doing all the talking, right?

25 SM: Yep.

26 RD: These guys, you know, you could see the fear in these guys' eyes from this
27 officer going off on them. They wouldn't take a step to fight back, either. They had that
28 much respect for this officer no matter what the situation was. This is what I saw, but I
29 saw on one instance where an officer—they had this guy's heels locked and he hit him a
30 few times, slapped him, hit him, knocked him down. You've got to understand you're in
31 a war. You're in a combat situation and things are different. The Americans weren't

1 going to go in and tell these Koreans how to fight their war. They're going to fight it the
2 way they know it will work. I mean, look, they had just come from their war, but they
3 were brutal. I enjoyed working with them because we didn't get in hardly any contact up
4 there.

5 SM: I was just going to ask you that.

6 RD: Yeah. So that's why I liked it.

7 SM: There weren't many hot LZs?

8 RD: Huh?

9 SM: There weren't many hot LZs?

10 RD: No, not with the Koreans. Well, the word was out, "Don't fuck with these
11 guys." So we really enjoyed it, plus we stayed at Phu Hiep which was right on the South
12 China Sea, sandy beach. So we got to go down and go swimming and the fucking water
13 is crystal clear. The thing about South China Sea, whenever we wanted to bore in our
14 weapons systems or anything we'd fly out and find sharks because it was so crystal clear
15 they'd be swimming around up by the top of the water. We'd come in on them and make
16 gun runs on them and shoot up the sharks to sight in our weapons and mini-guns and
17 stuff.

18 SM: Yeah.

19 RD: So it was kind of neat. That's how we used to go fishing.

20 SM: What about killing other wildlife?

21 RD: I have to admit, we did kill a number of water buffalo. If they were in the
22 area when we came in, we'd usually shoot and we'd usually kill them. That was the
23 farmer's tractor so he'd be pissed off. We'd end up having to—someone would have to
24 pay for that water buffalo. That's what it all came down to was cash. No matter what
25 you did, if you blew something up you had to pay for it. So I don't know how they
26 worked that. It was the major infantry division that handled that with the killing of the
27 water buffalo and that, but we had that mind set that we were going to kill any fucking
28 thing out there, I'll tell you. 'Cause when we're going in there they give you an idea,
29 "This is supposed to be a hot LZ," or we have free fire zones over there. We used to go
30 out on these things called vulture flights. It was in a free fire zone. When we were down
31 south it was around the Iron Triangle. What they did, they dropped leaflets, told

1 everybody that they were to move out of the area even though they had spent their whole
2 lives living in these farms. They told them they had to leave. So if they didn't leave the
3 area by a certain date there was a chance that they were going to get killed 'cause it's
4 going to be a free fire zone. I don't know how they put that—how they exactly put all
5 that together. All we knew was that we were told that it was a free fire zone. We called
6 our light fire team to go out there, we called them vulture fights. So anything we seen out
7 there, we could kill. That's what we did. So anything moving, we'd go in and we'd kill
8 it. What a name for that kind of operation, vulture flights, but there was a lot of free fire
9 zones down in that area because it was out in the jungle and there really wasn't that much
10 of a population out that far. There were a few people, but that's why they turned them
11 into free fire zones. The few people that were there they tried to get out of the area and
12 relocate them and that didn't work. Them people were poor, they didn't have any money
13 or anything. You're going to take them and put them over here, and they don't have any
14 place to go. It was wrong. In my feeling it was wrong to relocate those people, but the
15 politics of war took over and that's what happened. They relocated a lot of the villages in
16 the areas that we worked because basically they were VC controlled. The VC would
17 come in and use the locals who would take their food because who knows? Like the
18 NVA was from North Vietnam. They didn't know the terrain around down south so the
19 VC, the local communists, would be their guides. They'd come into the villages at night
20 and get food and stuff from the villagers. So that our military, to relieve that problem,
21 would just move the whole village, problem gone. They didn't give a fuck about what it
22 did to the people, just as long as they knew that they weren't going to be able to use that
23 village for supplies or bunkers or ammo hiding places.

24 SM: Did your unit support the relocation of villagers as far as using your air
25 assets to actually transporting them?

26 RD: No. I think that was the "Mule Skinners". They were CH-47s, the big twin
27 choppers. They used them. They'd put the cattle and everything. They'd lock them in
28 because they'd hold jeeps and trucks and everything. So yeah, they'd just round them up.
29 They'd have a pickup zone. They'd bring all their belongings with them, pets, chickens,
30 whatever, pigs, and they'd relocate them to another town. I don't know. I couldn't tell

1 you off the top of my head where these relocation places were, but there was quite a few
2 of them around. They turned them into just refugee camps, basically.

3 SM: Now did you guys talk about this kind of stuff as far as—?

4 RD: No. No. We didn't think much of the Vietnamese, at least the people that I
5 hung with. We couldn't speak the language. Right there you've got a big problem. You
6 don't know what they're saying when you're talking to them. I mean, what are they
7 planning? You have it always in the back of your mind that these guys are trying to kill
8 you. I mean, who can you trust when you can't even speak the language? You can't. So
9 we were just leery. We always had a loaded weapon with us, too. You made sure you
10 had a loaded weapon with you wherever you went just in case. I couldn't imagine
11 walking around without a loaded weapon. You just never knew who the enemy was.
12 They could be—like I told you, the barber. One day he's cutting—giving you a shave,
13 and the next day he's trying to blow you up. So I'm sure—like we had seventeen
14 indigenous workers there and I would imagine twenty-five percent were probably VC.
15 You've got to understand that the village itself, they were VC. So I mean any people we
16 had working in town had to be VC. It just didn't make any sense why they even brought
17 the Vietnamese in to do that work. It made it a little easier on us. They cleaned the
18 hooches. They filled sandbags. They worked in the kitchen doing KP (kitchen police),
19 but just the idea that you got the enemy in your company area—they knew everything
20 about us from the inside. That's kind of scary when you think about it. At the time I
21 didn't really trip on it.

22 SM: But yeah, especially when you couple that with what you said was
23 understood at the time, and that was an enemy village. That was explained to you at the
24 time. This was a VC village.

25 RD: Yeah, it was off limits.

26 SM: Off limits because it was a VC—

27 RD: There'd been GI's killed in the village. There were stories of guys being
28 killed in the village. They were in there getting pussy. While they were getting fucked
29 they came in and they killed everybody. They killed the women that were with them,
30 killed these GI's. There was a number of instances. A number of the guys that I've
31 contacted from the infantry units that were based there had stories about Dau Tieng that

1 these guys just wanted to get laid and they end up getting killed. It was strictly off limits.
2 You did not go in the village. Then they put an aviation unit right across the street from a
3 VC controlled village. You would think the aviation unit would be on the other side of
4 the base in a more secure area. It didn't make any sense at all. To this day I can't believe
5 that we were put at that location. I imagine—well, most of the guys haven't tripped out
6 as in depth as I have, but at the time it didn't even seem like it was a good idea. When I
7 did—Jim Merryman, he was the battalion CO, he's been helping me with the text for the
8 269th story I'm putting together. He said originally he tried to get the Black Widows to
9 be stationed up at Tay Ninh with the [187th AHC (Assault Helicopter Company)]
10 Blackhawks because it was a bigger base camp and more secure. See, Dau Tieng was the
11 smallest of the base camps for our battalion where we were stationed. Both places that
12 we were stationed, at LZ Sally and Dau Tieng, were very small base camps in
13 comparison to what was out there. We made the best of it. We had a good time. We got
14 away with a lot of shit. We did a lot of crazy stuff, but I guess you had to do that to keep
15 focused, to keep your sanity. If you didn't get into trouble then you weren't doing
16 something right. That's the way we looked at it. I mean, what were they going to do,
17 send us to Vietnam? That was our mentality. Fuck them lifers. You got all these career
18 soldiers and after—even after basic and AIT (advanced infantry training) I didn't
19 understand how anybody could spend their whole life in the military. I couldn't put up
20 with the bullshit structure. I mean, common sense has nothing to do in the military. I
21 couldn't live in that environment. I knew that shortly after I was in the military. Some of
22 these guys—it wasn't for me. Even some of the officers that I flew with, my 2nd Platoon
23 leader, he was a commissioned officer. When I did finally find him he didn't want
24 anything to do with the unit history. I flew with this guy all the time. If you can't even
25 talk to the guys that you flew with there's something going on. He's got to have some
26 problems.

27 SM: Did he say why?

28 RD: No. He didn't elaborate. But he was a commissioned officer and he did his
29 minimum time in the military and got out. He's doing good, married, family, lives in
30 Pennsylvania. I do [talk with him] from time to time. I got his email so I fuck with him
31 every once in a while. I tell him, I say, "Charlie, I'm going to keep it easy, but I'm going

1 to keep you posted on what's going on," because I know he wants to know because he
2 was there. I flew with him. So anyway, I've been bugging him because he took eight
3 millimeter film over there. So I been bugging him for about two years. We put one
4 video together and I said we got three to show at the reunion. You might enjoy those.
5 One of them, Charlie Maurer, two years later, I get this package in the mail. Charlie
6 finally put it on a VHS (video home system) for me. I ain't heard from him in a long
7 time and finally I got three emails from the guy within a day or something I think, but
8 God, this is the most I ever heard from this guy. He wanted to find out if I'd received the
9 video. So I emailed back and told him, "I got your video. I'm going to show it at the
10 reunion." I got in touch with him before I came out and told him what we planned on
11 doing, plus we put out a newsletter once a year to try to keep everybody in touch with
12 what we're doing and trying to do. But a lot of—I mean, the warrant officers, some of
13 them stayed in. It was on an individual basis as how you accepted the military or can you
14 hang with this, but no, I got most of the guys—there's a number of the guys in the unit
15 were draftees because the draft was going at that time. We were two-year guys. We
16 referred to everybody that wasn't a draftee as a lifer. We used to always have turmoil
17 with the RA's, regular Army. Like your service number was either US blah-blah-blah or
18 RA, regular Army. US was draftee. We used to get on those fucking guys and say,
19 "Yeah. We're out of here and you got another year to go," because if you enlisted you
20 had to do three years, and drafted was two. We knew that these guys, they weren't
21 enjoying the military. They definitely were not going to make it a career choice, but we
22 used to dump on them every chance we got that they had to do one more year of stateside
23 duty which was all spit and shine. There was nothing for you to do. So they got to keep
24 you busy, right?

25 SM: Yep.

26 RD: They got to make sure your shoes are shined. It's ridiculous. When I got
27 back to Fort Hood, you got to understand I used the M-60, I qualified expert with it. I
28 used it for a year in Vietnam. When we got back to Fort Hood the first class they gave us
29 was on the nomenclature of the M-60 machine gun. I'm taking this class and I could be
30 giving the class, but this other guy's giving the class on it. It was kind of funny. Why
31 would they keep me in the military just to—see, they should have just, the draftees, they

1 should have cut them loose after 'Nam. That's the only reason we were drafted, but that
2 wasn't the case. So most of us that were drafted still had five or six months left to do
3 when you got back. You had six months of training, a month vacation, and a year in
4 'Nam. So you usually had five or six months to do and they didn't have anything for us
5 to do. The only thing that was going on was Vietnam and they knew they couldn't send
6 us back. That's why they tried to get us to extend for thirty days to at least keep you, as
7 an experienced soldier, in theater, that would be thirty days that you might be able to help
8 someone, some of the new guys, give them some of your—share your experience with
9 them and keep them alive for their tour. Really there was no point keeping us at all.
10 They should have cut us loose, but that wasn't the way it was. They sent us back to hang
11 out and have these meaningless classes until our time was up. In our instance we got sent
12 up to the riots on Chicago. I was bitter as hell when I got out of the military after that
13 fiasco up there. Fuck, we got spit on. They were throwing garbage at the bus we were
14 in. It was really, really sad.

15 SM: Before we talk about that, let me ask you a couple more questions about Dau
16 Tieng. I want to ask you about the Tet Offensive, too. You mention the hostility in the
17 village, the fact that it was off limits because it was a VC village. Did they ever attempt
18 to pacify that village, you know, bring in supplies and medical stuff?

19 RD: Yeah. They had the 25th—

20 SM: Try to win it over?

21 RD: Yeah. [Interruption with outside voices].

22 SM: So, you were going to explain about the pacification that went on in Dau
23 Tieng.

24 RD: Okay. 25th Infantry Division, they had pacification programs trying to win
25 over the hearts and minds of the local Vietnamese. They put together soccer games and
26 stuff like this. Food was donated, all this. Funny part was, they didn't want to be won
27 over. They were VC. They were—plus the South Vietnamese government, they had
28 been so oppressed by the South Vietnamese government for so many years, I mean, there
29 wasn't even any government posts out that far. Like I said earlier, they'd already—what
30 do you call it when you'd given up?

31 SM: Surrendered?

1 RD: They'd already surrendered the area to the VC and it was controlled by
2 them. So they pulled back their forces. So these people that they're trying to win over
3 aren't—they're Viet Cong. That's where the politics comes in. I mean, all they were was
4 villagers and farmers was basically what it was. Then we're going to come out there and
5 tell them that there's going to be a democracy now. There are going to be free elections.
6 So that's why we were out there to push democracy. It was a joke.

7 SM: Now what happened at Tet, Tet '68?

8 RD: Tet '68, we got involved with that big time.

9 SM: You were—at this point you were at LZ Sally or were you still at Dau
10 Tieng?

11 RD: No. We were at Dau Tieng. We were there for Tet '68, believe me. I was
12 flying guns then. As a matter of fact, we started getting hit with heavy mortar attacks the
13 end of January, probably all of January. From November ninth on, we had major mortar
14 attacks at Dau Tieng. Like I said, I got scrambled. I had to fly counter mortar. See, we
15 had to keep a light fire team on strip alert at night for if we got mortared, you'd send
16 them up. We'd locate the mortar tubes, either take them out or call it in to artillery and
17 they'd take them out. So, I had to fly that night. It was my birthday. That's why I'll
18 never forget it. I had to go out and fly. We didn't—nothing happened. We just didn't
19 get shot down or anything. So then the thirty-first comes. We didn't get hit like—we got
20 mortared, but we didn't get hit like Bien Hoa and everything that's ever been written
21 about all of the other places. The 101st NVA Regiment was in the area. They were the
22 closest enemy unit to us. I have the whole—this is Tet '68. That's the whole thing.
23 That's everything about it. It's got maps. It shows where the enemy units were and
24 everything. So that's like a—that's priceless. So, at the time, when Bien Hoa got hit, the
25 25th Division was spread out—actually before Tet '68, the 25th Division was on
26 Operation Yellowstone up by the Cambodian border. Well, their commanding officer,
27 through intelligence, knew something was going on. So he pulled these guys back in,
28 okay, the 25th. The 25th was the—we were the defense—we were the outside circle of
29 the defense of Saigon. So we're getting these guys at the border and when they first
30 came in-country, but they were trying to infiltrate into Saigon. Basically, that's how it
31 was working. Dau Tieng area is one of the staging areas. The Iron Triangle was one of

1 them. So when the shit hit the fan, we got called up. We were on call. All the gunships
2 in the 269th battalion were on standby for close fire support for the 3/4 Cav that was sent
3 from Cu Chi to open the road and relieve the siege on Bien Hoa. We were part of that
4 reaction force that—God, I wish I could get my wording down here better—to come to
5 the aid of these guys that were getting overrun at Bien Hoa. So when they made their
6 mad dash down one, the NVA had set up ambushes all along Highway 1. That was the
7 main highway. For the whole country it was the main highway, actually. You know, it's
8 like Highway 1 in California. It's the main artery. So when they left Cu Chi, they ran
9 into—they got ambushed at a place called Ap Cho and Cu Chi City. The NVA had built
10 reinforced concrete bunkers along the roads. So they knocked out a bunch of their APCs.
11 Now, this is a mech unit, tanks and APCs (armored personnel carrier). So we get
12 scrambled in the morning and we're over at Cu Chi City. I remember being in Cu Chi
13 City. We used to go over there and get pussy and hang out. It wasn't off limits. Now,
14 when Tet started, the NVA moved into Cu Chi City and took it over. Ap Cho, this was
15 another small village close by there. I remember making gun runs down the main street
16 of Cu Chi during Tet. We burned down most of the buildings on the street. That was
17 another thing we did while we were—as far as the gunners or crew chiefs were concerned
18 on the gunships is we'd see who could start the most buildings on fire. I mean, we were
19 into it. I mean, fuck, I was in a war. Every fifth round is a tracer. So it had sulfur on it.
20 So it would be easy to ignite anything that was dry. So anyway, we ended up burning
21 down most of the buildings in Cu Chi. You know, took fire, gave fire, and we
22 supported—our battalion ships were the basic air support as far as gunships for the 3/4
23 Cav when they made their dash to Bien Hoa to relieve the siege down there. We were
24 part of that little battle of Tet '68 which was a major one even though it doesn't get the
25 publicity like Khe Sanh or Hue. That's why I'm trying to tell our story because we've
26 seen as much as anybody that was over in that country. We didn't get any kind of press
27 release or coverage or anything like that. That bothers me. I think our unit should—I'm
28 proud of our unit. I think that we should have been recognized. We should have got
29 some recognition that we didn't get besides the bullshit with the anti-war movement.
30 That's a whole other issue. I've always been a historic—I've always liked history, let's
31 put it that way. I thought, hey, what could be better than to write the history of my time

1 in Vietnam and my unit? So that was one of the reasons why I'm doing this. The other
2 would have to do with the guys that are on that Wall down there. Yeah.

3 SM: Well, why don't you talk a little bit about that operation during Tet, where
4 you went down and helped the—

5 RD: Well, there's not really much to say. We were in the air, and we're on the
6 radio, ground contact with the ground commander. He's telling us where the fire's
7 coming from like we can't see it because they're firing at us, too. So we're trying to take
8 these guys out but a gunship, unless you get a direct hit with a rocket inside the bunker or
9 aperture you're not going to do nothing to that bunker, right? These are concrete,
10 reinforced bunkers they got. So they had to bring in like 106 recoilless, tanks. They had
11 the tanks there. These guys were set up. Their job was to make sure that no one got to
12 Bien Hoa. Any reaction force, that was their job was to ambush everybody that came to
13 the rescue. So they were in place and they were ready for them. They knocked out all
14 kinds—I got some pictures from the air of a bunch of APCs that were knocked out on fire
15 and tanks. They took out a lot of them. I mean, we got the job done, but a lot of guys got
16 killed during that operation. None of our guys, but the guys on the ground got their ass
17 fucking whooped. I mean, they put a whooping on them boys, too, but during this whole
18 thing both sides were taking a lot of casualties.

19 SM: Did you guys ever actually fly missions into Bien Hoa to support them, or is
20 this mostly—?

21 RD: I think some in the battalion did, but I don't think—I don't know. See, how
22 it worked they might only need one or two ships or something out of your company and
23 you wouldn't even know about another crews mission for the day because if we didn't
24 have a combat assault or something you were always sent out on missions. It might be
25 one or two ships would go over to Cu Chi or down to Saigon, Bien Hoa, because the
26 ground units would be always asking for air support. So we'd get a mission to go work
27 with the 199th or the 1st Infantry Division or the 9th. Yeah, we flew all over the area.
28 Vung Tau, I mean, that was what was nice about flying. It was beautiful over there. I've
29 never seen a country so beautiful in my life, as lush, green, and then all of a sudden you
30 fly and you fly up on these B-52 craters. It looks like a bunch of these big, round holes in

1 this lush vegetation. You could just get a little feel that there was something going on
2 here, like today's Wednesday.

3 SM: What about river traffic and operations against riverine supply missions and
4 stuff like that, the VC or the PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) would engage?
5 Because you pointed out that your base area around Dau Tieng was right there on the
6 Saigon River. Did you guys have a lot of missions where you went in and shot up barges
7 and stuff like that?

8 RD: Yeah. We used to shoot up the sampans.

9 SM: Sampans?

10 RD: Yeah. Those convoys you're talking about, they ran convoys from Phu
11 Cuong which is just south—that was the province capital for Binh Duong Province.
12 That's the province we were in. That was right on the river. They used to run river
13 patrol boats up there every day; convoys that were like ten to maybe fifteen or twenty. I
14 got them in the—our daily reports mention it, also. What they would do, they would
15 paint a Vietnamese flag on the top of them. So from the air we knew that they were
16 friendlies. We used to fly the rivers. As a matter of fact, we worked with the Navy
17 SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) down in Nha Be flying close in air support for SEAL team one
18 down there. The best food I ever had in Vietnam was with the Navy. They'd get the best
19 food, let me tell you. Anyway, we used to fly over. We used to try to—we were crazy.
20 We'd try to—we used to fly over the sampans and try to hit the gooks with the skids for
21 fun. That's what we were doing for fun, you know, trying to unwind; low level, right on
22 the river. We used to do a lot of low leveling. People would be running to get out of the
23 way. We wouldn't be firing at them. We were just trying to hit them with the skids.
24 You've got to remember, we were young kids and we were a little mischievous. You get
25 away with as much as you can. So that's why we ended up doing half that crazy stuff.
26 But yeah, we did fly cover for patrol boats. If we got clearance on sampans, once we got
27 clearance we'd take them out, rockets, mini-guns. But we had to get clearance first. You
28 had to get clearance to wipe your ass, you know? They had—the rules of engagement
29 were a joke over there, where you couldn't fire on anybody. You couldn't fire on
30 anything unless you were receiving fire already even though you could be looking at this
31 guy that's going to shoot at you with his NVA uniform on. So we disregarded that most

1 of the time. If we'd seen the guy, we'd open up. But there were shitty rules of
2 engagement that came down from higher up that were used for—we'd use them for toilet
3 paper. But there was a lot of stuff that didn't make sense over there under a combat
4 situation. I'm sure it was that way in Korea and World War II, too, you know, rules of
5 engagement. You had to wait until you received fire to return fire. Like I just said, we
6 didn't do it that way. I would rather be in prison alive than in a box going back to the
7 States. That's the way most of us looked at it, pilots, too.

8 SM: Well, when you left Vietnam and came back to the United States, shortly
9 thereafter you found yourself in Chicago at the Chicago riots?

10 RD: Yep.

11 SM: You want to elaborate on that a little bit more?

12 RD: Okay. Yeah. We get back from 'Nam, get a thirty-day leave. We go home.
13 It's the 4th of July. So I'm in the kitchen having—bullshitting with Ma and some of the
14 kids in the neighborhood are firing off M-80s out in the ally. Next thing I know I'm
15 laying underneath the kitchen table, just reacting after a year in 'Nam. My mom's just—
16 she don't know what to think. So I just told her, "Sorry, Ma. I'm just having a little
17 flashback here." So anyway, I did thirty days back there. We bought, Dave and I
18 bought—see, we'd saved, we'd sent all our money home from 'Nam. We played cards
19 over there. We used to win a lot of money playing cards. We'd do a little black market
20 stuff over there, too. So I got to send my whole check home. So when I got home, we
21 had enough money to buy our first new vehicle. Dave and I bought the new Super Bee,
22 Dodge Super Bee. It's a 383 four speed high performance muscle cars of that period. So
23 anyway, we took my Super Bee down to Fort Hood. My other buddy Point, he bought a
24 new 396 Super Sport in Washington. He was stationed there and we met down at Hood.
25 So, we used to always drive into Austin, Texas—when we got off work like at five or
26 whatever, we'd drive into Austin and party down there. We got caught speeding on post
27 a couple of times. I stopped and pulled over. Point kept going and the MP just said, "I'm
28 going to let you go, but you tell your fucking buddy in that Super Sport I know who—I
29 know his car, and I'm going to find him." So that was the only thing that ever happened
30 with dragging on post. So we're down there. We're not doing anything. We're just
31 putting in our last five months in the military. They have no use for us. We lived

1 through Vietnam. They can't send us back, but we have to fulfill our military obligation.
2 So we're down there and in August, I don't know, August eighth or whenever the
3 democratic convention was in Chicago. They had problems with the rioters, the anti-war
4 movement. Hoffman and his group were out there. The local police couldn't handle the
5 situation. They called the National Guard. They were the next level. We got put on alert
6 down at Fort Hood. They took our whole battalion, put them on C-141 Starlifter, the big
7 ones, flew us up to right outside Chicago and bussed us to Great Lakes Naval Station.
8 That's where they put us up. I don't know how it came about, but Dave Huggins, my best
9 friend from Minneapolis, we went to high school and grew up together. We spent our
10 whole time in the service together in the same bunk bed. It was one of those weird times
11 when it did work except for in 'Nam when we were in different units. So, full battle
12 dress, M-16s, field packs, helmets. They fly us up there, they bus us over to Great Lakes.
13 Then on the way into Great Lakes they're waiting for us. The anti-war movement is
14 waiting for us. They're spitting on—they had screens on the windows like they did in
15 'Nam so that you couldn't throw grenades in the busses. They were spitting through the
16 mesh on us. They were throwing garbage against the [bus]. It was just an ugly scene. So
17 we get in there and we're talking. None of us wanted to be there, believe me. These are
18 all draftees in the unit. No one wanted to be there. We just wanted to get out of the
19 military. So I don't know who it was, whoever was in charge I don't know if they'd seen
20 on our DD214 that we were door gunners or whatever, but Dave and I got put on as a two
21 man sniper squad with a jeep, with a M-60 mounted on the back of a jeep. They told us
22 that if we get called in, "If there's any sniper fire in Chicago, you're going in there.
23 You're going to take out the person that—the perpetrator. You're going to take him out."
24 We're looking at each other thinking, I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I was
25 ready to kill somebody in the streets of Chicago. Luckily they didn't use us. National
26 Guard took care of the problem. We stayed up there a few days. They flew us back to
27 Fort Hood. On that note when I left the military that was my last—those are my closing
28 thoughts on the military is how they used us and abused us. I was real bitter. Dave's still
29 real bitter, too, about it. I'm sure everybody that got sent up there—anybody that had to
30 deal with any of that anti-war movement shit that was a veteran I think has to be, he has
31 to be carrying some kind of ghosts about it because it was hard enough to come back to

1 the States. I mean, when I landed in Washington State, when I got off the plane I kissed
2 the ground. I was so happy, so proud to be back. Then they told us—we got debriefed
3 when we came in. They says, “We think for your own safety you’d be smart not to wear
4 your military uniform home.” We were proud of the medals and shit, you know, I mean
5 we were proud to be alive and back. We didn’t realize the depth of the anti-war
6 movement, I mean—just happy to be home. So that’s what we did. We took off our
7 uniforms, put on civilian clothes, got back to Minneapolis, ended up getting in many
8 heated arguments with people I grew up with over Vietnam to the point where for twenty
9 years I never told anybody I was in ‘Nam. Fifteen-twenty years because I didn’t want to
10 argue. Then I decided that fuck, this war ain’t never going away. Fuck it, I’m going to
11 write it. That was another one of the reasons that I’m doing this. It’s got to be told. Our
12 story’s got to be told. Those are probably some of the most talked about times in this
13 century, the ‘60s, I mean unbelievable. I mean, even when I got out of the service I
14 dropped out. I became the people that were at those riots. I grew my hair long. I
15 dropped out. I got into drugs. I was selling drugs in Minneapolis. I didn’t follow the
16 war. I did not demonstrate, believe me. I would not demonstrate against those guys over
17 there, but I basically dropped out into that sub-culture for years. Even Karma’s [my
18 wife] an old hippie from the ‘60s. We’re from that generation. I’m proud to have gone
19 through it. To think that we’re alive today is saying something after what we’ve been
20 through in our lives after Vietnam, getting into the drug culture, that whole game. It’s
21 been quite a trip, quite a trip. So we did good?

22 SM: Yeah. So this will end the first interview with Dick Detra.