

**ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. 'Fair use' criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.**

The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Scott Dawson  
Conducted by Stephen Maxner  
September 14, 2001  
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon

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

1           Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Scott  
2 Dawson on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, year 2001 at approximately 6:20 Lubbock time. I am  
3 in Lubbock, Texas at the Vietnam Archive and Mr. Dawson is in Hikone, Japan. Sir, if  
4 you would, why don't we begin with a brief biographical sketch of you life and just go  
5 ahead and state where and when you were born and where you grew up.

6           Scott Dawson: I was born in Orlando, Florida and shortly after that...well, I don't  
7 know where I moved. I was raised by my mother and stepfather and my stepfather was in  
8 the Army. He was a career Army officer and we moved around from place to place for  
9 the next four or five years. After that there was some sort of...well, I call it a custody  
10 problem in the family, and I went to live with my grandmother in Wilmington, North  
11 Carolina. I was there until the end of junior high school. A combination of events  
12 caused me to go back to the family but from Wilmington, I went to Redlands, California  
13 and I went to high school in Redlands and graduated in 1967. I felt I had a rather normal  
14 childhood but it was not very...well, it wasn't very affluent. Most of my memories are  
15 with my grandmother, and we lived on 35 dollars a week. She ran an apartment house,  
16 and I think I'd describe our condition as aristocratically poor, because my grandmother

1 had grown up in western North Carolina from a rather affluent family and then moved  
2 over the years further east until finally locating in Wilmington, North Carolina.

3 SM: Where in Wilmington did you live?

4 MH: I lived in the Merritt Apartment House on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Dock Street. It was on  
5 the same block as the Cornwallis house, and between us and the Cornwallis house were  
6 the original owners of our apartment building, and when it was built somewhat time  
7 before the Civil War, it had been their main residence, and they were I think living what  
8 used to be the Carriage House.

9 SM: What year did you graduate high school?

10 SD: 1967.

11 SM: Now in high school how much did you hear about the Vietnam War? Did  
12 you know anybody that graduated just maybe the year before you that did go off to war?

13 SD: Well the year before my father was in Vietnam. He went in 1967. He was a  
14 colonel in the Army, and the irony there was that he was planning to retire at that time  
15 and then his retirement was refused because of the need for field grade engineering  
16 officers, which then they sent him and they put him in a staff position. But, when I came  
17 from Wilmington to California, it's like pulling anybody where they're somebody and  
18 putting them into a place where they're nobody and on top of that having a southern  
19 accent in Southern California is not a benefit. I had problems, so I really didn't know  
20 that many people at all and those years before graduation there was a small number of  
21 people that I was closely familiar with but not that many. In the school at that time there  
22 was no monument or anything to people who had fallen in Vietnam but I remember when  
23 I went back later there was a monument to something like 11 kids who died in Vietnam  
24 who had graduated from there. The most famous graduate that I know of from our group,  
25 and I only knew him slightly, was a fellow by the name of Jim Fallows who went on to  
26 the Atlantic Monthly to become an editor and writer.

27 SM: When did your father come back from Vietnam?

28 SD: He came back about a month and a half before I went to boot camp.

29 SM: Did you get a chance to talk with him about his experience at all?

30 SD: We talked a bit. He was a bit closed about it because he was in MACV in  
31 Saigon and I was going to a very different place. He gave me advice from his wisdom of

1 the years in the service, but basically it was, 'Keep your ears open, your head down, and  
2 do what you're told to do.' He had a side arm but he never used it in anger while he was  
3 there. He came back, it would have been about June of '67, so that's about six or seven  
4 months before the TET Offensive.

5 SM: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

6 SD: I have two sisters and three brothers, all of them younger, and one brother  
7 later served in the Army but never went to Vietnam.

8 SM: So none of your siblings served in Vietnam?

9 SD: No.

10 SM: How about other relatives? For instance, uncles maybe who served in  
11 World War II or Korea?

12 SD: Well again, my father was in Korea as engineering officer and then I have an  
13 uncle who served in World War II on the battleship New Mexico, and he has his pictures  
14 and ribbons and whatnot and I've talked with him about his experiences. That was a long  
15 time ago.

16 SM: Did you talk with him before or after you went to Vietnam?

17 SD: I remember talking to him before I went, long, long ago, asking him  
18 questions. I was curious. I had a thing about Japan even back then. I was very interested  
19 in the Orient and his experiences from World War II tied into that. We talked then and  
20 later we talked when I came back from Vietnam. But, his questions were usually framed  
21 in terms of, 'You got even with those gooks, didn't you?' sort of reaction. I had gotten  
22 beyond that kind of thought. This is getting ahead of the story. I came out of Vietnam  
23 with very strong feelings in general, not very favorable to Asians, and I came out of  
24 Vietnam on my third wound and then was sent to Japan and my experience there just  
25 changed a lot of the way I reacted to people and the way I thought of the people.

26 SM: What were the formative things that affected you in terms of your decision  
27 to go into the Marine Corps?

28 SD: Well one, to go into the service in general was the GI Bill because as I said  
29 before, my stepfather, there are five brothers and sisters. I, in a sense, didn't feel he  
30 really had the responsibility to put me through school and I wanted some government  
31 help. Again, in the back of my mind, I had this idea of becoming the teacher and I was

1 most interested in history, and for all it's pejorative meanings, war is a big thing in  
2 history books and this was, quote, my opportunity to find out what it was really like.  
3 That was another reason. A third reason was very personal, maybe rather psychological.  
4 But, when I was a kid in junior high school I got beat. Another kid who is about 16 got  
5 held back a couple of times gave me a real thrashing. I remembered that experience and I  
6 never wanted to have to experience that again. I never wanted to have that kind of  
7 feeling that I had because I still had to go back to school with the same kid. He was in  
8 the same school, not the same class. I wanted to be able to face him at some time in the  
9 future, and when it came to that, give as good as I got. So, there was a mixed bag of  
10 reasons, ranging from a sort of a kind of revenge wish to a feeling of responsibility of  
11 taking care of myself.

12 SM: Did you feel that the Marine Corps would better train you?

13 SD: Yes, the Marines are very good at putting out the image and proving it to the  
14 individual that they are the best and I still feel that way. The training they gave  
15 me...well, I'm still here so I can't complain.

16 SM: Just out of curiosity, did you ever run into that guy again?

17 SD: The irony is that he ultimately married a young lady that I knew in junior  
18 high school and the only thing that made me feel a little bit better was the fact that he was  
19 later arrested on second-degree murder charges and I had heard that he died under  
20 unsavory conditions, which didn't bother me in the least.

21 SM: Sounds like a mean person who met a mean end.

22 SD: Yes.

23 SM: Was there any concern when you graduated from high school or did you  
24 know definitely that you were going to Vietnam?

25 SD: I actually enlisted in the service three months before I graduated. I had made  
26 up my mind and I didn't want my dad coming back and changing things, and I'd already  
27 turned 18, and so I just went in, took care of the paperwork, and my mother, with  
28 hesitation, signed as well, had to sign some documentation. I had to sign a waiver  
29 because of my eyesight. Basically I am 20/400 in each eye and there was some issue as  
30 to whether I could get in without a waiver and so I signed a waiver. It was actually, at  
31 that moment, a choice. I had tried to get a job with the forestry service and go out and

1 fight fires in the hills of Southern California and they said, 'No,' and so I enlisted in the  
2 Marine Corps and then two weeks before school ended they called me and said they had a  
3 job for me, but I told them I already had a job. So, it was a bit of poor timing there.

4 SM: Did you purposely enlist for the infantry?

5 SD: I would have been happy to be a clerk. I enlisted but I also knew from the  
6 recruiter that if you joined the Marines, the Marines go where the action is. I expected to  
7 go but I don't think I'd have been disappointed if they'd have pointed me in another  
8 direction.

9 SM: What was your dad's reaction when he got back and learned that you'd  
10 already enlisted?

11 SD: He was not disappointed. I think there was a bit of pride in him. I'm not  
12 sure about how he felt about me joining the Marine Corps but he never said anything  
13 derogative about the Corps itself. He said that his experience with mid-grade Marine  
14 officers in Saigon, the only thing he could say for them was that they had a professional  
15 ability in cursing. He had an extreme respect for Marine senior NCOs. The gunnery  
16 sergeants, master sergeants, top sergeants, he was impressed. He had no qualms. One of  
17 the things that my father was proud of, he was a colonel in the Army but he also had his  
18 Good Conduct Medal because he had spent close to three years in the Army before  
19 getting an appointment to the military academy. So the fact that I had chosen this route  
20 to go into the service didn't seem to disappoint him or surprise him.

21 SM: If you would, why don't you go ahead and describe your introduction to  
22 Marine Corps life?

23 SD: My family left California on I think it was around July 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>, whatever.  
24 I then went down to Los Angeles where I was supposed to check into an induction center  
25 and they gave me a pass to get into a two dollar hotel to spend the night and then go  
26 check in for my physical the next day. It was one of these places where they give you  
27 rubber bands when you come in to shoot the roaches off the wall. The next morning I  
28 went in and immediately they were trying to put the fear of God into you. Some staff  
29 sergeant was running around sort of shepherding us like a wolf from place to place, trying  
30 to get us to think, 'You have made the biggest mistake of your life.' I just remember  
31 going through sort of machinery like process for physical and whatnot. They kept us

1 seated, standing, moving, walking, whatever, and then finally it was over and there was  
2 nothing substantially wrong with anybody except possibly a little bit of overweight.

3 That night they put us on a bus, I can't remember if it was a greyhound or  
4 whatever, but I remember getting on I think it was a civilian bus and then later they  
5 changed to a military bus and they had us sitting ramrod straight, two people to each seat  
6 all the way back and then we got to San Diego and hell began. We didn't get any sleep at  
7 all that night, from haircuts to packing our clothes and mailing our clothes back to our  
8 families, it was just, 'Move, move, move, move, move! Don't talk, don't speak, don't  
9 think, just do!' Finally we got to our quarters and while we were quite surprised, I guess  
10 we should have been happy because we were going to live in tents for our first, what, six  
11 weeks...no, it was about five weeks of training.

12 There were so many people coming through the boot camp at that time that they  
13 didn't have barracks for them and so they had put up tents near the handball courts, and I  
14 remember the handball courts because that's where we'd go when we'd clean rifles or do  
15 any sort of maintenance thing with our clothes or whatnot because at least there was  
16 some shade there in the later afternoon.

17 The tents were a Godsend. You couldn't wax the floors, and so we lived there.  
18 I've still got my platoon book, the graduation book, and we lived...I remember one  
19 incident. There were two guys that joined on the buddy system and they brought that up  
20 to the drill instructor. This is one of those things that sticks in your mind but you don't  
21 remember if it's apocryphal or just something that you've created in your memory. But, I  
22 remember saying something, 'Oh, you're buddies, so you want to fuck your buddy,' and  
23 then this idea of putting them in the same bed. You join the buddy system, 'Okay,  
24 buddies, here you are.' It was both trying to destroy your civilian character and create a  
25 new being from the word go. You separate your identity from your past identity to make  
26 you a new person who will follow orders. It just went on and on like that.

27 I guess the first three weeks were actually the worst. I think it was third or fourth  
28 week there was...no, the first week there was a physical exam and that scared me because  
29 at that time I was overweight and I was just really worried about being shipped off to  
30 what they called the Fat Farm and spending two or three weeks of just physical exercise  
31 and then being sent back to another platoon. Then, that going on until a physical exam

1 around the fourth week and that was really I felt touch and go. I stayed with the platoon  
2 and well, I ultimately graduated. There's still some pride. We were the honor platoon of  
3 the series that time. Those sort of memories stick with you.

4 The drill instructors, I have always felt that those guys ultimately saved my life  
5 because again, the one thing they wanted to do was separate us from our past and the  
6 most important thing you could learn was to obey orders. They taught us well. I  
7 remember then with good feelings. They were harsh, they were rough on us, but they  
8 were good.

9 There were two incidents, one incident near the end of the camp and the chief drill  
10 instructor suddenly came out and said, 'Who has not been thumped,' and at one time or  
11 another most people came in for either verbal or physical...I won't call it physical abuse  
12 because it was not extreme, but they were there to make you tough and to realize that you  
13 had to pay the consequences when you screwed up. We were so indoctrinated that there  
14 were seven of us that immediately shot up our arms and then they marched us into the  
15 tent and the drill instructor came before each and every one of us and gave us a little bit  
16 of a dressing down. 'How is it that you never came before me before this time? You  
17 puke, you...' whatever he said, and then he popped each one of us one good in the solar  
18 plexus. It sort of doubled us up and we felt, 'Oh, this is the real thing. We've achieved  
19 some sort of equality with the others.' Now maybe the others hadn't been hit either and  
20 they were just smart enough to keep their hands down, I don't know. But, I remember  
21 that incident very clearly.

22 The other time was that one of my mother's friends, that last week, and sent a box  
23 of cookies and the cookies seemed to be rather soggy with brandy and they were just  
24 saturated, and I think the only reason I didn't get in trouble that time was that the drill  
25 instructors said they tasted quite good.

26 One more, and that was graduation day. One of the instructors sort of thought of  
27 him as like an iceman. He had no feeling. The chief instructor was always there, always  
28 right. There was another instructor that was sort of like our friend. He'd say, 'The  
29 smoking lamp is lit for one cigarette and I'll smoke it,' and then a few minutes later he'd  
30 let the smokers who had a cigarette smoke as well. But, there was one guy who always  
31 seemed kind of cold and distant but did his job well. It was sort of like a psychological

1 ping-pong game between those three guys, bouncing us up between the different  
2 personalities. A friend of mine, we were walking around the base. We had a half day  
3 base liberty before we would get on buses to go to Camp Pendleton and we met Staff  
4 Sergeant Fisher at the EM Club, and he was the one guy we wanted to meet the least, and  
5 then he invited us over to where he was sitting and bought us a beer and we just talked,  
6 and in hindsight I sort of have the feeling of a man who loved his job, he did his job  
7 well, but there was a little sense of hesitation in terms of knowing a certain number of  
8 these young men that he was sending out weren't going to come back. The ribbons that  
9 he wore bore the fact that he'd already been there and whether it had been in Lebanon  
10 years before or if he even dated back to the Korean War, I don't know. But, there was a  
11 certain sensitivity in hindsight that I felt and he was a good man.

12 Incidents regarding violence in camp, there was one incident in which a Marine in  
13 another platoon got kicked in the neck and he was put in the hospital. I remember it  
14 being a corporal on the drill field, not a sergeant, not a staff sergeant or anything like that,  
15 but evidently a rather new man on the field and it just disappeared after that as an  
16 incident. I remember it because the drill instructors brought us together and talked to us  
17 about it and basically said to us, 'If we see anything to report to them,' that this was  
18 unacceptable behavior. Another incident was a reported suicide. Again, we learned about  
19 this basically because they brought us together and told us, 'This is a terrible thing, this is  
20 a very troublesome thing. If you're going to kill yourself, don't cut across the wrist, cut  
21 along the wrist. Do it right because it's much, much worse paperwork if you survive.' I  
22 hope tongue in cheek, but it was to get across the point that, 'You are ours and you are  
23 our responsibility and we are going to take care of you one way or another.' So, they did.

24 Race relations in boot camp, I remember one young black man, whether you call  
25 it an attitude experience before he came into the service, why he came in, there's always  
26 stories about the bad guy who the judge said, 'Go to jail, or go to the Marines.' I don't  
27 know, but I remember that he was always in trouble and at the end when we had our  
28 graduation picture you could see him. He was at the end of the line and you could see  
29 him flipping the bird by his trouser seam, and that caused quite a bit of trouble for him. I  
30 never saw any retribution but I know he spent some time in the tent and one of those rare  
31 occasions when I saw the company commander - the staff sergeants, drill instructors,

1 every day - but the company commander, I think I only remember seeing three or four  
2 times during, what, it was an eight week cycle at that time. It had recently been cut  
3 down, or at least that's what I heard, recently been cut down from 12 weeks because of  
4 the demand for manpower.

5 SM: What was the racial makeup of your platoon?

6 SD: I would say about 50% Caucasian, white. I got the pages of the book before  
7 me right now. It would look about 70% white, about 10 to 15% black, and about the  
8 remainder Hispanic. I talked about my physical problems, weight, and sort of a lack of  
9 exercise over the years in keeping up. Toward the last physical examination they put  
10 several of the young black recruits in charge of me and said, 'It's your responsibility to  
11 make sure this puke doesn't fail,' and then they give me a salt pill and call me Mr.  
12 Terrific which was after a TV program that was on at that time. Some guy would take  
13 something that looked like an aspirin and suddenly grow a cape and fly around buildings  
14 or through buildings or whatever and it was their job to make sure I got a little bit of extra  
15 training to get into shape. They had I would say a quiet contempt for me but there was  
16 sort of a rough kindness as well.

17 There was no real friction there that I felt, but at that time in my life, okay, I'd  
18 come out of the south. I was not a segregationist, I wasn't a racist. I could remember  
19 seeing the local black community on the steps of the city hall singing, 'We shall  
20 overcome.' I can remember seeing people taken away from the lunch counters down on  
21 the five and tens on Front Street or people sitting there and not being served, and the  
22 thing was where our apartment house was, just across the street was the black Catholic  
23 Church and there was a black parochial school. So, I would wind up going around the  
24 corner and often playing in their playground. It was like I grew up without so much of a  
25 color bias as opposed to those who grow up in isolation and only hear words of contempt.  
26 I'm not saying I was perfect, but being around blacks was not new to me.

27 Now when I went back to my family, with my mother and stepfather and whatnot,  
28 I was the colonel's son and there were not that many middle rank black officers that I saw  
29 around in the mid-60s. so, it was a very white existence. When I got into boot camp I  
30 was very naïve. I had no idea of what racial relations were like. Malcolm X, I didn't  
31 know what a Malcolm X was. It had no meaning to me. I knew of the movement of

1 Martin Luther King, those sorts of things, but I was not up on the situation of race  
2 relations or anything like that. We were just all Americans and I couldn't understand the  
3 bitterness in some people. Okay, these guys didn't show me any bitterness but just a  
4 sense of, 'You're the weak guy and I'm stuck with you.' Anyway, I got through in part  
5 because I thought we had our ground proofing just before the physical test and spending  
6 close to three days, several hours in a swimming pool everyday really sort of builds up  
7 your endurance. So, when we took the final test, I passed and continued on.

8 SM: What kind of weapons training did you receive?

9 SD: In boot camp we were issued an M-14 and we also fired the 45 at boot camp  
10 also, but no other weapons at that time. After boot camp we went to basic infantry  
11 training school and then to advanced infantry training, and then 20 days leave and then  
12 back for further training before we went to Vietnam. In basic infantry training, lots and  
13 lots of different weapons.

14 SM: That's after boot camp?

15 SD: That's after boot camp.

16 SM: Can you give me the start and finish months and years from boot camp?

17 SD: Entered end of July and then finished boot camp in mid-September.

18 SM: That's '67?

19 SD: Yeah.

20 SM: Then went on to your basic infantry school?

21 SD: Yes, and that was a month and then advanced infantry training, that was a  
22 month. Then, 20 day leave. I remember being home for Thanksgiving that year and then  
23 came back to Camp Pendleton and then arrived in Vietnam around December 20<sup>th</sup>. I  
24 remember that date because that's my father's birthday.

25 When I went home there was one interesting thing. My dad realized that an  
26 enlisted man, a PFC, doesn't get that much money and so I knew nothing about catching  
27 military hops, but my dad raised this issue and said, 'You don't have to pay to get out  
28 there.' So, he contacted some friends of his and being, what, Army engineer he'd always  
29 had a lot of ties with the Air Force. So, one of his friends found up there was a flight  
30 going to Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas. Here, I wound up close to 14 hours on an  
31 old Constellation. I think it was made by Lockheed, sort of forked tail prop plane, with

1 the ranking major general of the Air Force who was something like in charge of Air  
2 Force reserve, whatnot. So, I was back in the back of the plane with the flight crew. We  
3 were back in the back eating pheasant because my uncle who did a little hunting had been  
4 lucky so we had pheasant in the back while the major general was in the front eating  
5 peanut butter and chicken sandwiches or something. He came back. I was still rough on  
6 protocol and had just started to stand up, give a salute, no cover, anything, and he said,  
7 'Just relax, son, sit down, sit down.' We talked for about 20 minutes and he just, 'Good  
8 luck, keep your head down, come home safe,' and then off he went. I didn't have this  
9 reaction against officers. My father was an officer, I knew he was human. The people I  
10 dealt with were all concerned that people they knew or young men under their command  
11 came back so there wasn't any antagonism there from the very beginning as in some  
12 cases.

13 SM: The training that you received in both basic infantry and then advanced  
14 infantry, did any of that include the M-16?

15 SD: Yes, both included the M-16. I carried an M-16 from basic infantry training.

16 SM: Was that the weapon that you then used regularly in basic and advanced?

17 SD: Okay, basic infantry, yes, the M-16. Oh my God.

18 SM: It wasn't just familiarization training?

19 SD: I'll be honest; I remember advanced infantry training school, most definitely  
20 the M-16. Basic infantry training school, I honestly don't remember. I remember doing  
21 the dry nets with an M-14 I guess because I was scared. But, the M-14 for sure in basic  
22 and then M-16 after.

23 SM: What do you remember about the differences and did you have an  
24 immediate reaction after using the M-14 and going to the M-16?

25 SD: I don't think I really had a reaction. I was more scared of the M-16 because  
26 of all the news stories during the high school years about soldiers complaining about  
27 jamming. The main thing that I wanted was as much experience shooting the thing to  
28 build up a little trust in it. We had an adequate number of opportunities to shoot it,  
29 different live firing ranges and the like. But, it also seemed basically the basic training  
30 was to get us to fire as many weapons as possible; the M-79, the M-60 machine gun, like  
31 I mentioned before in the questionnaire, the BAR which dated back to World War II,

1 again, firing the .45, wanting us to sort of intuit what to do with anything that came into  
2 our hands, and just lots of live firing practice was the main thing that sticks out in my  
3 mind with the basic infantry training.

4 SM: Now in training, did the M-16 ever lock up on you?

5 SD: No.

6 SM: How about after?

7 SD: No. I mentioned the one incident in Vietnam and if you want to talk about  
8 that now or later...

9 SM: I didn't know if that was the only time it ever happened?

10 SD: It was partly failure on my part because I didn't check the breech. We're  
11 getting ahead of ourselves. In basic infantry training, advanced infantry training, no  
12 problems.

13 SM: Okay. Now, after you finished those periods of training, did you feel  
14 confident in terms of getting...

15 SD: I was mean.

16 SM: You were what?

17 SD: I was mean!

18 SM: You were mean? Okay.

19 SD: I was tough. We were the best.

20 SM: Were you ready to go to Vietnam?

21 SD: I sure felt it. I wasn't sure I was that excited about it, but we felt we had  
22 been trained well and we were confident we could do our job.

23 SM: Now did they set up any kind of mock villages or anything like that for you?

24 SD: There was a combat town that we went through one afternoon, but other than  
25 that most of the things that we did as far as practicing actions were looking for booby  
26 traps, moving through trails at night, orienteering, map reading in the dark, location  
27 exercises, this sort of thing, and walk, walk, walk, getting lots and lots of exercise and  
28 getting us ready to move. Some things on tactics, but tactics were minimal and very,  
29 very simple. The idea is you shoot, keep your head down, and you move direct into or  
30 you flank left or flank right. The Marines are always proud of themselves for the idea of  
31 vertical envelopment, but we got a chance to jump off of some two by four helicopters

1 built on the ground to simulate getting out of a helicopter, but other than that there was no  
2 vertical envelopment training to speak of.

3 SM: And in terms of tactics that you were trained on, what was the standard, if  
4 you remember even if it was covered, standard response to ambush that you were trained  
5 to?

6 SD: Ambush, if you're in the killing zone, go down, start shooting at the enemy,  
7 either the head or the tail, swing left, swing right depending on the direction of the fire  
8 and start to move across the enemy flank.

9 SM: And in terms of movement, was it primarily Ranger file as they call it in the  
10 Army, single file, wedge formations? What were the tactics that you were taught in  
11 terms of moving through the jungle or through the forest?

12 SD: Basically single file. To be honest, Camp Pendleton, I remember once going  
13 out on boats and coming in, hitting the beach. Then, we had to get in trucks at the beach  
14 because we could not charge across the freeway. So then they took us by truck  
15 underneath the freeway through some culverts and then we, again, got online. But as far  
16 as actual movement tactics, it was basically single line or in most cases we went from  
17 place to place in regular platoon formation and then as far as our exercises, whether they  
18 be night or day when trying to move around, quote 'with stealth,' it was basically single  
19 file.

20 SM: Now what did you think was going on in Vietnam?

21 SD: At that time when I was in camp I had absolutely no idea. In that period of  
22 time we were not focusing on news whatsoever. I don't even ever remember seeing a  
23 newspaper at that time.

24 SM: But just as an American in terms of what you heard and what you read in  
25 newspapers, heard on the news, talked with your mom and dad before you went in the  
26 corps, what from your perspective as an 18-year-old young man going into the Marine  
27 Corps was going on in Vietnam?

28 SD: We were going to the aid of an ally. We were going to a friend's house to  
29 help put out a fire is the standard metaphor. I felt I had a responsibility to go. I gave my  
30 reasons before, but this idea of citizenship and obligation. To a certain extent, I feel  
31 you've got a duty to your nation and it sounds weak now but whether...love it, right or

1 wrong, I wasn't in a position to make judgments. At that time I trusted my leadership,  
2 trusted the president, trusted the country to make the right decisions. I wasn't in a  
3 position and I didn't have the information to make those decisions. So, okay, I'll go. I'll  
4 find out...like I said, I wanted to find out about war, partly finding out about war in  
5 hindsight is how screwed up your leaders were.

6 SM: What did you think the United States was trying to accomplish in Vietnam?

7 SD: I thought they were one, trying to give Vietnam time to establish a working  
8 democracy, and to do that you need stability, and we were trying to provide, to assist, the  
9 Vietnamese in achieving that stability.

10 SM: Were there any kind of discussions about these types of issues while you  
11 were going through your training in the Marine Corps?

12 SD: Other issues? Okay, other issues...

13 SM: Well, issues like as far as what the United States is doing in Vietnam, why  
14 you're going, things like that?

15 SD: No. We were in the Marine Corps. There was not a draft into the Marines.  
16 You joined. You made the choice. Now, what does the Marine Corps do? The Marines  
17 fight. Now, if by chance you go to the east coast or you go to a technical training camp  
18 or whatnot, okay, that's your luck. When boot camp finished, there were 67 people.  
19 There were six Marine reserves and they went to some sort of flight training, mechanics,  
20 whatnot. Of the other 60 men, there were maybe five that didn't go infantry. We all  
21 knew where we were going. There was no question about talking about Vietnam or  
22 thinking about Vietnam because we weren't going over there as political emissaries, we  
23 were going over to fight. There was no really discussion of the war or why of the war.  
24 We were going, so the best thing to do was to get ready.

25 SM: Now when did you know for sure that you were going to Vietnam?

26 SD: The first time I really had orders was at the end of advanced infantry  
27 training, but we knew it from the day we were going from boot camp. Like I said, it was  
28 not an issue. It was just a matter of getting orders. I think at the end of advanced infantry  
29 training I had orders to report to 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. That was that. It was just a matter  
30 of coming back to Pendleton, an indoctrination and some more training there, and then on  
31 your way. There was one thing that did come up in advanced infantry training school and

1 that was basically the issue of prisoners. There had been a couple of high profile court  
2 marshals about Marines shooting prisoners and the point raised at that time was you do  
3 not shoot prisoners. The only time that is quote, 'That action would be acceptable,' is if  
4 you are in a situation where that prisoner is an endangerment to the unit and an  
5 endangerment to the mission. Under that condition, that would be it. But, if you were  
6 given an order to kill somebody who is a prisoner, don't do it.

7 SM: Were the rules of engagement ever discussed in any other way?

8 SD: I never heard the phrase, 'Rules of engagement,' until I think there were  
9 discussions about Panama years after I got out of the service. But, I never heard the  
10 words 'Rules of engagement,' during any training. Like I said, that one instance that was  
11 brought up was even if you get a direct order, you don't kill the son of a gun.

12 SM: How about code of conduct training?

13 SD: Code of conduct? Yes, we had to memorize it. Can I still remember it? No.  
14 But, I remember being a part of basic and also a part of infantry training, being required  
15 at inspections to relay that we understood our general orders and the like.

16 SM: What was going home on leave like for you before you went to Vietnam?

17 SD: Well I went to a different home. Again, I was a stranger. My dad had been  
18 transferred to Virginia and so I had to fly across the country instead of just go back up to  
19 Redlands. It was disappointing, disappointing because there was no one to show my  
20 pride to. I was the big, fat guy who was stupid enough to become a jarhead and I wanted  
21 to impress the girls and show my friends and there was nobody there to show. It was low  
22 key; relatives and the like, but all of them were a little down because they watched the  
23 news every night. Maybe if I'd been watching the news every night as well maybe I'd be  
24 a little more hesitant at that time. But, during that whole time I don't remember seeing a  
25 TV, very rarely seeing a newspaper; not that we couldn't get them. There was just no  
26 need.

27 SM: What was your send off like, your farewell when that leave was over?

28 SD: It was a photo opportunity. Everybody lined up. My brother said, 'Be  
29 careful!' I remember my dad sitting down with me one time and just talking about,  
30 'Don't set out to be something that you're not, but at the same time, when you're given a  
31 responsibility, take the responsibility. When you have men, nobody messes with your

1 men except you. Do your best, and come home.’ My mother was rather emotional. But,  
2 she kept a straight face. Again, I was the colonel’s son. The people in our neighborhood,  
3 which was at that time Fort Lee, Virginia, were kind. No, no, this was outside of  
4 Washington, Annandale, Virginia, and most of the families around there were military,  
5 either Fort Belvoir or Pentagon.

6 SM: What did you have left to do when you went back to Camp Pendleton?

7 SD: Camp Pendleton? There were two more weeks of training and lots of  
8 paperwork and then one night they took us out to Los Angeles International Airport by  
9 bus, put us on a Continental Airlines at that time had the contract to take Marines across  
10 the Pacific, and I remember three or four of us trying to chat up some French stewardess  
11 who was working with Continental. I remember at the end of the flight, since I was  
12 sitting back toward the back of the plane, was one of the last to get off, some of the  
13 stewardesses were in tears. They understood what their job was and I guess they had this  
14 experience going both ways, because they’d done the route, some were coming back,  
15 some would recognize people coming back and they’d find out about other people who  
16 made an impression or they had a memory of. They understood what their job was, and  
17 they were emotional.

18 SM: Well, this will end the interview with Mr. Scott Dawson on the 14<sup>th</sup> of  
19 September.

20 SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Scott Dawson. I am  
21 in Lubbock, Texas at the Vietnam Archive and Mr. Dawson is in Japan. Sir, why don’t  
22 we go ahead and pick up with the discussion of your flight over to Vietnam and if you  
23 would, would you please describe it, what it was like on the aircraft, the atmosphere, and  
24 your first impressions on arriving in Vietnam.

25 SD: If I remember correctly we flew on a Continental Airlines out of Los  
26 Angeles. We’d taken the military equivalent of school buses to the airport and some sort  
27 of processing, some sort of little talk, and then we got on the plane. It was just a regular  
28 passenger plane. The one thing I remember among the stewardesses is there was one  
29 French stewardess who was on loan from Air France and was doing training or some sort  
30 of indoctrination with Continental and I was toward the back of the plane and like good  
31 Marines we were chatting up the stewardesses. The accent was just driving me up a wall.

1           The flight itself, the officers were up toward the front so we in the back, we  
2 weren't rowdy or anything but it was a pleasant flight. Tensions, nobody was tense,  
3 nobody knew where we were going. Anybody who knew anything was sitting up in the  
4 front of the plane. It was just long.

5           The one thing I remember next would be when we got off that plane some of the  
6 stewardesses were crying. They'd gone through this before and they'd been carrying  
7 people back so some faces stuck in their minds and they remembered people and they  
8 remembered people who didn't come back. They had a feeling of what their role and  
9 what their involvement was as far as the whole transportation process.

10           We got first to Okinawa and spent about three days in Okinawa taking care of  
11 paperwork, assigning people to their units, making sure that pay records were all  
12 together, and then flew to Da Nang.

13           At Da Nang I was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment, and I  
14 remember burning the shitters for the first time in the transit area, going to the latrines,  
15 pulling out the half cut 55 gallon drums, taking them out, pouring in some kerosene,  
16 burning them, and then taking them to be buried; not the last time unfortunately.

17           The next thing I knew I was on a C-130 to Quang Tri, and then a deuce and a half  
18 on up to the base where I was to be stationed at Quang Tri. The trip was uneventful. The  
19 only thing that was really hoping for at that time was that Bob Hope had just arrived in  
20 Da Nang and there was some hope that we might be able to get to where he was at to see  
21 his show but that was not to be.

22           It was a long trip but it seemed very, very quick. It was like flying from Los  
23 Angeles to New York except multiplied by three.

24           SM: What month and year did you leave?

25           SD: This was December.

26           SM: December of '67?

27           SD: December of '67, right.

28           SM: December of '67 is when you left?

29           SD: Right.

30           SM: When you arrived in country, did you receive any kind of briefings?

1 SD: No, I didn't get any what I would consider briefings until we got to our  
2 company.

3 SM: How long did it take you to get to your company?

4 SD: About two days.

5 SM: That was what company again?

6 SD: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, Alpha Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad. Alpha 3  
7 Bravo.

8 SM: What assignment were you given in the company, or in your platoon?

9 SD: I was a rifleman. I was the low man on the totem pole in 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad so that  
10 meant when the work details came up, I was the first to go.

11 SM: What area?

12 SD: Area meaning...

13 SM: I'm sorry, of Vietnam, yes, sir.

14 SD: Quang Tri.

15 SM: Quang Tri Province?

16 SD: Quang Tri Province. Our base was outside Quang Tri City. Did I ever see  
17 Quang Tri City, no.

18 SM: No?

19 SD: No, never got into the city itself. Our base was outside of the city, a little bit  
20 to the west. Other than seeing some villages and off to the right when I turned left, I  
21 never got into the city itself. There was no patrolling that I know of in that direction by  
22 our battalion, and that was the city's security and everything was maintained by the  
23 ARVNs.

24 SM: When you got to the company, what did they tell you about rules of  
25 engagement, dos and don'ts, things like that?

26 SD: The main thing they were telling us was to keep our eyes open. We had a  
27 one day indoctrination telling us about things to look out for when we were on patrol, and  
28 looking for signs at the side of the trail, looking for little piles of rocks, sticks aligned in a  
29 row or in parallel, signs of booby traps and that sort of thing, because the NVA, VC,  
30 whoever couldn't remember where they were all at so they'd leave little signs to tell their  
31 own people to be careful. Talking about our responsibilities, in the base, and when we'd

1 go on patrol, but basically we were coming right out of basic or advanced infantry  
2 training from the states. We hadn't had that much time to forget anything so they were  
3 saying, 'Okay, these are some basic things about Vietnam. But, you're going to learn on  
4 the job.' It's just sort of a pep talk. The company commander came in, our new platoon  
5 commander came in for a few minutes and then disappeared. Then, we had our series of  
6 classes and that was it. Then the next morning we went to our companies.

7 SM: How effective do you think that was in getting you prepared for your in  
8 country service?

9 SD: I think it was more to give the platoon time to decide where anybody was  
10 going because while decisions had been made in the states which division and in  
11 Okinawa which regiment, but the people at the platoon level really didn't know we were  
12 coming until we got there. It seemed to me like it was to give them time to make  
13 arrangements to decide who went where.

14 SM: How about after that when you got into your platoon and into your squad.  
15 Did they have any kind of specialized training set up for you.

16 SD: No. It was just, 'Go pick up the trash, go burn the shitters, go do this, do  
17 that, and listen; keep your eyes and ears open.' Probably the real training was those  
18 hours when the first times I was standing watch and sitting in a foxhole watching out  
19 before it's too early for anybody to go to sleep and you're just talking, and those hours on  
20 perimeter watch those first days were probably the best lessons.

21 SM: Anything in particular stand out in your mind?

22 SD: No. It was just talking and getting the feel for what being in country was  
23 like, trying to get to know your partners, your comrades, let them know you, and also  
24 finding out what was happening, who was doing what, what were the responsibilities. It  
25 was probably more effective in the class because it didn't put you to sleep.

26 SM: When were you issued a weapon?

27 SD: That was at company.

28 SM: What did they issue you?

29 SD: I got an M-16 and that was it for the moment.

30 SM: Did you feel comfortable and confident with that?

1 SD: Yeah. When I was going to my basic training, when we fired or had our M-  
2 16 at advanced infantry training, I had no problems with it. Compared to the M-14, it  
3 was like a toy. There wasn't as much kick but you could still hit a target with it so there  
4 was no problem there. I didn't have complaints about bore size.

5 SM: Were there any Vietnamese that worked on the base?

6 SD: No. When I say base, this was a barbed wire enclosure, sort of the top of a  
7 rather low hill, scraped bare, that reddish-orange clay that typified most of northern-south  
8 Vietnam and whenever there was a wind it just blew this reddish dust everywhere. It was  
9 flat to one side and to the other side then it started going into some draws and small  
10 valleys as you went further west. So part of where we were looked like it used to be a  
11 fruit orchard of some sort. The trees were lined up in regular order which made it a little  
12 disturbing at night when you were on watch because these trees sort of standing out in the  
13 distance, just one by one like people standing out there at night. Sort of made you a little  
14 edgy! But, if you think of a state side base, that's completely irrelevant.

15 The largest structure was the command tent, and that would be, what, about 16 by  
16 24 foot tent. That was battalion commander actually who was there, and then there were  
17 some of these little tents that look like something out of the Arabian Nights except olive  
18 drab where one or two officers or one or two staff NCOs would be in and beside each tent  
19 would be a slit trench for people to dive into in case we got mortared.

20 SM: So you didn't have bunkers?

21 SD: No. We had fighting holes and barbed wire outside, but it really seemed sort  
22 of a temporary arrangement. I don't know how long they had been there before I got  
23 there but everybody seemed to know that we were going to be going someplace else soon  
24 and there were always rumors that we were going to go afloat and that really scared  
25 people because the people that went afloat only came ashore when something bad was  
26 going down. People weren't excited about that. They'd rather be on the ground that  
27 playing fire fighter for someone else who got in trouble.

28 SM: What unit actually occupied this base? It wasn't just the company I take it,  
29 it was the battalion?

30 SD: It was the battalion, yes.

31 SM: Was the battalion full strength?

1           SD: To the best of my knowledge, yes, at that time it was. Our platoon was up to  
2 about 48, about 48 men at that time and a full platoon would be about 56. When I say 48  
3 I'm not talking about the machine gun squad. Guns were we considered separate when  
4 we thought of the platoon because they were actually part of headquarters and Supply  
5 Company and then they were attached to each platoon. But, they were integral to the  
6 platoon.

7           SM: I understand.

8           SD: We had, if I remember correctly, it was up to 44 by the time we...yeah, 44.

9           SM: Now was your squad full strength?

10          SD: Yes.

11          SM: Do you remember anybody from your squad?

12          SD: There was a fellow by the name of Asaycek and I remember him because we  
13 wound up in the same holes in the evening most often talking a lot. In platoon, oh Lord,  
14 there was Eagleburger or Igleberger who was a rather...well, he was a noisemaker. He  
15 wanted to be the life of the party and keep everybody happy. The platoon commander, a  
16 Lieutenant Courtney, was a mustanger. He had been to Vietnam before and then went to  
17 Officer Candidate School and he was back in Vietnam for a second term. So, there was a  
18 lot of trust in him because he'd already been there once as one of us. Sergeant Hernandez  
19 who was the platoon sergeant, thin, wiry guy, bony face. He was a real hero and he got  
20 recognized for it as well. Reyna, Corporal Reyna who wound up being my squad leader  
21 was average height, sort of a little overweight Mexican-American, really great guy.  
22 Everyone was looking out to try to take care of the people that were under them because  
23 the worst thing you could do is not bring somebody back. So, they wanted everybody  
24 listening, everyone being careful.

25          SM: Toward that end, were there ever any incidents of anybody falling asleep on  
26 guard duty or anything like that?

27          SD: In the days that I was there as far as falling asleep on guard duty, on guard  
28 duty perimeter, no because we were always running three man holes and usually two  
29 men at one time. So, one may be groggy but the other one was punching him to keep him  
30 awake and one person was sleeping behind.

1 I did have one experience with a situation on a listening post, and the guy who  
2 had come back from a NCO school down in Da Nang, had just come back, and he wanted  
3 to prove his oats or whatever and take us out on a listening post and so we went out and  
4 he was the first one to fall asleep that night. He was told in very straight terms that we  
5 didn't trust him and to get his act together; not by me! I was the new guy there. I was  
6 still wondering, 'Can I punch a sergeant in the ribs and wake him up?' sort of worries.  
7 That was my experience in terms of a sleep situation.

8 SM: How far out was the LP/OP placed?

9 SD: We were about 200 meters outside of the wire and I don't know if you want  
10 to call it an LP or an ambush, we were looking over what must have been a well-traveled  
11 path during the daytime and whether or not we would have turned into an ambush or not  
12 is mute because nobody came along.

13 SM: How many people were on the...

14 SD: It was a fire team, four people.

15 SM: Anything except personal weapons?

16 SD: Just personal weapons. There was a radio as well.

17 SM: You didn't have an M-60 or anything like that?

18 SD: No, no, no.

19 SM: What were your instructions if someone were to happen upon the trail in  
20 front of you?

21 SD: I at the time would just be waiting for instructions. If they said, 'Fire!' I'd  
22 fire. At that point in time I was low man on the totem pole.

23 SM: Do you remember how much ammunition you carried with you out there?

24 SD: I carried as much as I could carry. At times I would have as much as 700  
25 rounds, and the normal, probably 400 would be more normal. But, I liked bullets and I  
26 liked grenades. They gave me a sense of security.

27 SM: Yeah. How many grenades would you typically carry?

28 SD: Typically four. Later on we went into Hue City at one time I had nine.  
29 People just sort of amazed as I kept rolling them down the floor so they could throw them  
30 out the window.

1 SM: Well you said that there weren't Vietnamese civilians in your area. How  
2 about ARVN or Vietnamese Marines?

3 SD: Saw nobody. We were patrolling to the west of the city and that was just  
4 open plains; grass, tall grass, and not the very, very tall elephant grass but sort of waist  
5 high grass, a couple of places where there were former villages and some stone buildings  
6 left, but it was basically a free-fire zone. Nobody was there in I guess five patrols that we  
7 carried while we were still there. As platoon sized patrols, we found one person out there  
8 and that was some old grandmother who said she was gathering wood to feed her baby. I  
9 don't know what that was supposed to mean, but that was the only civilian that we saw  
10 out in that area.

11 One experience when we were patrolling, they attached a sniper team to the  
12 platoon and we went out and then I was with the fire team who was working with the  
13 sniper team and we just dropped off as the platoon went on this one little knoll. The  
14 platoon carried on and then after a while we set off a stick of C4 and the logic there was  
15 that because there was usually nobody out there, if an animal or something should booby  
16 trap, the local unfriendlies, whether they be NVA or VC would sometimes come out to  
17 see what they got. Maybe they'd have some fresh meat for dinner. And, we sat out there  
18 and they made contact. I never saw them but the sniper said there were four NVA  
19 moving through the grass across the path where our platoon had just gone and they took a  
20 few shots but they came up with one cooley hat with a little bit of blood on it and they  
21 called that a confirmed kill. So, I wasn't that impressed. There was activity out there.  
22 They weren't shooting at nothing, I'm sure of that. But, it was just empty grass; grass,  
23 plain, and rolling hills.

24 SM: Was this a free fire zone?

25 SD: Yes, there was to be no compunction about using your weapons. There were  
26 no civilians out here.

27 SM: How about friendly military forces? No chance they might be operating in  
28 the same area?

29 SD: The Army was starting to move units into I Corps and that's what made it  
30 touchy because the artillery was setting up first, and the coordination between the Marine  
31 artillery and Army artillery was not completely perfect. There was one instance where

1 we seemed to have gotten caught near one of their test fires as they were what we called  
2 thrust points, preset artillery targets or locations, whatever, and that scared the living  
3 daylights out of us. Platoon got on the horn to stop it and there was no more. But, there  
4 was the possibility of getting caught up in friendly artillery fire.

5         There was one other incident with an Army helicopter, and this was a classic, one  
6 of the old whirly birds, the old Plexiglas dome type helicopter from the 50s and this  
7 chopper buzzed us and we were scared because maybe he didn't know who we were,  
8 couldn't see who we were because it was starting to get dark, and the platoon commander  
9 was on the radio making sure people knew who we were and where we were, and then  
10 this guy circles around and comes back, and he lands. We're saying, 'What is this?  
11 What is this guy doing?' He was lost! His compass was broken and he didn't know  
12 where the hell he was, and if he kept going he would have wound up in North Vietnam  
13 probably.

14         Anyway, the platoon commander gave him directions and then here it is close to  
15 six o'clock and we had to change our position again. So then we started roaming the hills  
16 for about another hour until we found another place to set up. But, I always remember.  
17 We were teed off but he must have been really scared because he was both running out of  
18 fuel and going in the wrong direction. There were friendlies, but at that time partly  
19 because of the upcoming change over everybody was just sort of scaling back as they  
20 made preparations to either move on or move in.

21         SM: What was the nearest unit on your flanks?

22         SD: I have no idea. To the best of my idea and information, there were no units  
23 on our flanks.

24         SM: How about to your rear?

25         SD: We were that battalion base. At that time, I had no idea of what was going  
26 on around me. My world centered in that platoon. That was the world to me. My fire  
27 team and my squad, this was the world that I cared about. Company worried about where  
28 the battalion commander was, battalion worried about where the regiment was. At that  
29 time, I didn't have a need to know, and didn't know.

30         SM: How did they treat you as the new guy?

1 SD: Well, as I said, the work details, my first day in the platoon the first thing  
2 that happened was to pick up trash in the battalion area. So, roaming around picking up  
3 the trash. The next thing I knew, I was burning the shitters. The next thing I knew, there  
4 was some other detail going on. There was no hazing to speak of. You get a bunch of  
5 Marines together there's always going to be some roughhousing, but there was no hazing.  
6 Everybody knew that you didn't want to make someone angry at you because here you  
7 were living in a society where everybody had to work together and everybody had a gun,  
8 and so you wanted to maintain the peace. You didn't haze the new guy, you broke him  
9 in, and part of the break in process was, 'Okay, I did this when I first came, now it's your  
10 turn. Learn the ropes.'

11 I was treated fair as far as I knew because I hadn't been there before and I got to  
12 like most of the guys. Okay, it wasn't all peace and harmony and joy, but again, they  
13 were people that I came to know and trust.

14 SM: What was the ethnic makeup of your squad and platoon?

15 SD: Probably, oh Lord, 60% white, 20% black, and the rest Hispanic.

16 SM: Was there a lot of interaction between members of different groups?

17 SD: I was living with a black. We didn't get along that well. Especially with  
18 people first coming in, depending on your background, if you were a local tough guy,  
19 then you wanted to stay a tough guy and stay in charge of your life. I was big but I really  
20 wasn't what I would call a tough guy. I was there to learn and to survive, and there were  
21 other people who were there. It seemed they wanted to thrive and be in charge. He  
22 wanted to be in charge of himself and the fact that he was stuck in a two-man hooch with  
23 this dumbass honky didn't appeal to him. We talked civilly but there was a tension  
24 between us.

25 What I remember as far as the Hispanics were concerned that they tended to be a  
26 little bit more toward the career Marine. I don't know what their ambitions were on the  
27 outside but they seemed to be a little bit more ambitious with regard to the service. It  
28 was a chance for theme to do well and establish a starting point either in the service if  
29 they continued, or if they got out of the service. They were squared away and sharp, and  
30 they worked to maintain good relations with everybody. They were good people to work  
31 for and they took care of me and got me back.

1 SM: When you mentioned earlier that typically the relationships among the  
2 members of your unit were pretty good but there were also moments of tension and  
3 problems. When there were moments where there were problems, what did they  
4 typically stem on? What were the problem areas between members?

5 SD: There were personal things, just being...okay, my hooch mate; I think it was  
6 just a member of presence for so many hours of the day. There was a tension there about  
7 being around them. Maybe it was just something I felt. Did I ever see any real  
8 altercation? No. Was there a feeling of tension at times, a feeling of discomfort? Yes.  
9 There was a real effort to stay stable, to stay sane amidst this insanity, and everybody  
10 knew that you had to rely on the person next to you.

11 So, you didn't let it come to serious words but there was friction and there was  
12 just a tension around suddenly being thrown into call it a...okay, you had it in boot camp,  
13 you had it through the training, but there were larger numbers with regard to the mixing  
14 of races so that when you had your private time, you could separate out with your group,  
15 with your buddies, who often tended to be like you. In the field, there was no choice, and  
16 for those people who had never had this experience, again, that tension of being around,  
17 okay, in this guys' case, being around this big white guy was just disconcerting. So  
18 whether it was my habits, or maybe it was my snoring, there was sometimes a feeling of  
19 tension. I don't remember any incidents as far as something that just caused anybody to  
20 snap, but okay, I felt tension at times.

21 SM: What was the relationship like between the lower enlisted and the NCOs in  
22 your unit, in particular your squad and the platoon?

23 SD: Corporal Reyna was one of us. He had a hooch with one of the other  
24 Marines nearby us. He was there with us all the time. Sergeant Hernandez, he'd been to  
25 Vietnam before and he was always around and always there when you needed him or he  
26 was needed. He had a sense about what was happening in the platoon and he was a lifer.  
27 He was going to make it a career if he could, and he did his job well. NCOs, no problem  
28 whatsoever. Officers, we truly loved Courtney, Lieutenant Courtney. He was there for  
29 us and we truly trusted him. It was sort of, I don't know, did you ever see the movie  
30 'Beau Geste'?

31 SM: Yes, with Gary Cooper?

1           SD: Yeah. Who is it, the sergeant, was hated by every man in the unit but they  
2 knew if push came to shove, the one way to get out of there alive was to follow him.  
3 Well, we loved Courtney and we felt that same way. He would get us out of there,  
4 whatever happened. So, the relationship was good. We had a high level of trust and we  
5 had good people.

6           SM: How frequently was your base mortared or rocketed?

7           SD: While I was there we were never mortared or rocketed. There was one I  
8 guess you'd call it a fire fight but it was actually a big mistake because on that side of the  
9 base that faced the hills there was a draw and two figures of the draw which were both  
10 occupied by Marines got into a firefight with each other, and nobody was hurt but it  
11 figured out about five or six minutes to figure out that there was nobody in the middle.  
12 Other than that, we were in Quang Tri at a very, very quiet time. This drew prescient  
13 because the reason it was so quiet was because the NVA were moving people down to  
14 participate in the TET Offensive.

15          SM: Right, and I want to talk about that, but before I do, if you would, could you  
16 describe your first experience out on patrol and what happened?

17          SD: Okay, first patrol, we suited up. I remember the NCOs coming around,  
18 checking us, making sure we had everything we were supposed to have, and we went, we  
19 left the perimeter. We were gone. It was an overnight patrol, what we referred to as  
20 mortar security, and out we went. We just headed out and walked and walked. I was in  
21 the middle of the main columns. There was someone scattered out toward flank to each  
22 flank and it just seemed we were walking rather aimlessly around in these sort of lush,  
23 green fields. That night we just sat in on top of a knoll. We dug rather shallow fighting  
24 holes. I doubt if anyone could stand in their hole, probably you'd have to sort of lean and  
25 fire out over your shoulder if it really got troublesome. But, dug in and then just spent  
26 the night sleeping out. It was sort of like the boy scouts. That night, though, I found that  
27 I was a threat to everybody in the platoon because of my snoring. I had Sergeant  
28 Hernandez come over in the middle of the night and say, 'By God, are you trying to get  
29 us all killed?' and woke me up and told me to roll over on my stomach.

30          SM: Did that work?

1 SD: Well I guess it worked; either that or I didn't sleep anymore that night  
2 because I was so scared. But, it was a non-event. We just went out, and then walked  
3 back. The event came the next day when we returned because you returned to your base  
4 and the first thing you do is clean your weapons. I took out the magazine. Okay, I want  
5 to remember pulling back the charger guide, and then releasing it. Anyway, when I  
6 released the charger guide it slammed the bolt home and fired a round into the air, and I  
7 just saw the rest of my life go out the window. 'They're going to throw me in jail!'  
8 whatever. It was terrible because the thing was when the company commander showed  
9 up, he had just been at the battalion commander getting his ass reamed because regiment  
10 was screaming about too many accidental discharges.

11 So, I had this feeling that they were going to make an example out of me.  
12 Basically they did their best to scare the living hell out of me. Then the company  
13 commander told my platoon Lieutenant Courtney, 'You take care of it.' Lieutenant  
14 Courtney told Hernandez, 'Okay, pick your punishment,' and Hernandez then put me to  
15 digging a six by six by six as sort of a non-recordable punishment. About two hours later  
16 Hernandez said, 'Fill that damn thing in! Someone's going to fall in it. Just cover this  
17 up,' and they gave me 20 pounds of C4. I carried that the rest of the time. So, that was  
18 my punishment.

19 SM: What do you mean the rest of the time?

20 SD: Well, the rest of my time in country until wounded.

21 SM: You carried 20 pounds of C4 at all times?

22 SD: Right. Well, it was usually rotated around because every time they went out  
23 they would always carry 20 pounds of C4 and most of it got used up in the field for  
24 cooking when we were out in the field because you could take a little bit of C4, make a  
25 C-ration oven, you put a piece about the size of a quarter, and you could cook your meal.  
26 The old gas tablets would take I guess about maybe up to 15 minutes to heat your meal,  
27 but the C4 would burn with a temperature of about like 1500 degrees or something like  
28 that. Don't stamp on it or it will explode, but they would cook their meals with it so  
29 you'd wind up losing about a quarter to half of what you were carrying to cooking and  
30 then the people who were, okay, depending on the patrol you'd set off a stick of C4 with  
31 a team to wait to see if anybody came, so a certain amount was used every time.

1           One time when a patrol later when we went out there was an old church in the  
2 middle of nowhere. There probably was a village there many, many years ago and the  
3 church had quite a steeple to it and so the platoon commander was determined to bring  
4 the steeple down so we used most of the C4 trying to blow that up without much effect.  
5 But, that was the worst experience I had in Vietnam as far as my own personal action.  
6 It's the thing that left the biggest impression on me. It never happened again. But, still,  
7 at that time in, what, the December/November in I Corps, there'd been more casualties  
8 from Marines shooting Marines than there had been for active enemy contact, or at least  
9 that's what was said to me at this time. I was part of the problem.

10          SM: I'm sorry, go ahead.

11          SD: Anyway, the crux of the matter was, well, I loosed off a round. It didn't  
12 show up on my records. They just took care of everything there in the company and  
13 when I wound up going to Japan later when I was promoted to corporal, there was  
14 nothing in the record about it. It was all in house, all in platoon as far as they cared.

15          SM: Good. Did you have any encounters with the enemy in a firefight, say from  
16 the time you got there until TET of '68, end of January of '68?

17          SD: No firefights.

18          SM: Enemy contact?

19          SD: No enemy contact whatsoever. It was like being at Camp Pendleton.

20          SM: Wow. So what happened? When did your first enemy contact experience  
21 occur?

22          SD: That was January 31<sup>st</sup>, the beginning of the TET Offensive. We had moved  
23 from Quang Tri. Well, moving from Quang Tri was sort of like a Boy Scout outing. Let  
24 me move back before TET. The 173<sup>rd</sup> [Airborne] Light Infantry Brigade had come up  
25 north and they were taking over our base, and they came in with all of their helicopters  
26 and fancy equipment and they had their music and everything and electricity going. We  
27 didn't have electricity the whole time we were there as far as our tents. Every platoon  
28 had their electric generators going and everything. They were there for a long time.  
29 They were setting up the city. What made us laugh was that they put out their listening  
30 post that night inside our barbed wire so that didn't make us feel very secure about how  
31 they were going to be protecting the outer perimeter.

1           That night I remember the company gunnery sergeant, he was a huge man, a little  
2 bit like Woody Strode, the black actor in the '60s, bald head, big and strong. He just took  
3 the Army staff sergeants to the cleaners in some poker. Everybody was sort of  
4 scavenging and trying to trade for things. For example, the fanny packs were hard to find  
5 from Marine supply but every Army soldier in their supply organization had them and so  
6 we were trying to see what we could get away with in terms of trading and whatnot.

7           From there we then took choppers and flew to Quang Tri...not Quang Tri, to Phu  
8 Bai which was just south of Hue City and that was the 31<sup>st</sup> and this was the first time I'd  
9 seen a real structure of any sort since going to Quang Tri because all we'd been living in  
10 was tents; no wooden structures whatsoever.

11           We settled in, we even got some beer that evening if I remember correctly, and  
12 then I went on perimeter watch that night. In the distance that night we could see a fire  
13 fight going, and then my time on watch was over and I came back to my tent or hooch,  
14 whatever you want to call it, and we got an alert that something much bigger was going  
15 down and to get ready.

16           A few minutes later rockets started to arrive and I remember the biggest panic  
17 was I couldn't find my glasses because when I joined I had to sign basically a waiver  
18 because of my eyesight and if I couldn't find my glasses, God only knows who I might  
19 shoot. So, I found my glasses, then finally made it into a hole.

20           Then, we were told to get ready to mount up. About daylight finally some of  
21 these people were getting things together and we were told to move out toward Hue City.  
22 Up to this point, it seemed like a lark, everything was sort of TV, rumblings and flashings  
23 in the distance. We moved out and finally we got off about I guess 45 minutes later we  
24 got off the trucks and there was an ARVN tank parked in front of what looked like a  
25 block house and as we walked up close to it, it was destroyed, had been burned out and  
26 out of the driver's hatch was hanging the remains of the driver who had looked like he  
27 had been just cut in half sort of at a diagonal across his chest probably while he was  
28 trying to get out of the tank after it was first hit. It just blew up completely or there was a  
29 mine or whatever but he was just incinerated and cut in half and that was the first time I'd  
30 seen a dead person or anything like that.

1           We kept moving and we came to an intersection. We were getting right inside the  
2 city. We were passing houses. There was still some people milling around in yards.  
3 They didn't know what was going on either. All they'd heard was lots of noise and  
4 shooting, not so much in their neighborhood. We moved further up. We came to a  
5 circle, and it was strange because there was either an Esso or a Mobil station at one  
6 corner of the circle and then there were houses going around the circle, but right sort of  
7 dead in the center of the circle there was a dead NVA. I guess he was NVA. He had  
8 fresh web gear, a chest pack where he carried grenades and magazines, all his clothes  
9 looked new, and he was sort of crouched in the street with one arm pointing up. His  
10 elbow on the ground, his hand pointing up like he had been holding his weapon, and he  
11 died holding his weapon and someone took it away and you could just see his fingers still  
12 sort of gripped like he'd been holding the front of the stock.

13           We moved on from there and there was a causeway that led into the city proper,  
14 and we started moving along the causeway and then all hell broke loose up at our front.  
15 We were all down on the bank of the causeway and then to our right were the rice  
16 paddies. The battalion or company leadership, company commander, was Bachelor,  
17 Captain Bachelor, had got caught in an ambush at the front of the column and he and  
18 several, I guess about four, other people got killed. He wasn't killed, no, but he was  
19 severely wounded and we just kept moving up and moving up and I didn't know what  
20 was going on but finally when I...the people at the end of the causeway where it came to  
21 houses again were laying evasive fire to the left and as they would open fire, then we  
22 would make a dash across the street.

23           This is still fresh in my mind because I remember those were the first shots that I  
24 fired. The irony is that while I'd never been that great a shot, when I fired, I saw where  
25 all three rounds landed. There was a lamppost in front of this gate to the building where  
26 the fire was coming from and I put all three rounds in about a three-inch circle in that  
27 lamppost as I ran across the street. The whole senselessness of firing the gun sort of sunk  
28 into me, but at the same time I had to do something at that time because I was scared.  
29 But then knowing all four of them just destroyed that lamppost didn't help me very much.  
30 I wanted to do something more than that.

1           Now, we were in the downtown area and to our right there were buildings that  
2 were my image of Bourbon Street; stucco but balconies and wrought iron work  
3 everywhere, but still that Asian feel to it.

4           On the other side is a market and we...okay, let me back up. When we were  
5 moving into the city we met a column of tanks and construction equipment which was  
6 moving up to a base north of Phu Bai, and so we all joined together as one group heading  
7 for the MACV compound in the center of the south side of the city. We joined and got  
8 through what I was talking about before, and then from the right, from an open air  
9 market, there were RPGs and they came in and struck a tank and that took out the  
10 company radioman and that put that tank then...whether they panicked or damaged or  
11 wounded, I don't know, but they drove into a wall.

12           I remember the radioman because there are people that just stick in your mind  
13 because they're beautiful. He was every girl's high school sweetheart dream; tall,  
14 blonde, handsome, always a good word, and he lost both his legs, and that was that. I  
15 remember leaving a canteen and someone gave me an empty one in return and I headed  
16 on in. When the RPG that hit his tank was fired, I saw a flash off to the right but we had  
17 people on both sides of the street and I couldn't take a shot and yelled, 'Down in the  
18 front!' and when people went down, they were gone. It was, 'Flash, bang, run,' as far as  
19 they were concerned. We were still just making our way into town.

20           The rest of the day, the rest of the morning until early afternoon, moving in  
21 toward the MACV compound, there was some sniper fire but I didn't experience any fire.  
22 Finally, when my squad worked up to where we were at point, we didn't experience any  
23 firing at us at the point, but we could hear firing all around. Finally, just before we got to  
24 the MACV compound, the machine gun section actually walked point and who was it,  
25 Anthony was the gunner that I remember the most, there was Anthony and another fellow  
26 by the name of Charlie and I remember Charlie because we were in the same platoon, or  
27 same company at boot camp but not same platoon.

28           Anyway, they were at the point and I remember seeing the hotel which was the  
29 MACV compound and the Army guys there seemed quite happy to see us. There was  
30 nothing special about the place but it was just sandbagged to the limit that they could  
31 there to make it more secure, but it was just a regular hotel that you would think in a hot,

1 climate area with the very big open windows, great for throwing grenades into. These  
2 people were just really sweating bullets.

3 We got there. We entered the compound for a few moments and then moved on  
4 toward the river. At the river we stopped. At that moment we didn't have any orders to  
5 move across.

6 My squad was put to the left of the bridge going across the river and looking  
7 across, and looking across you could see the Citadel and a main gate entering the Citadel  
8 from the bridge side and there was a huge NVA flag on top of that gate. We were put  
9 there and Golf Company of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines who had come in with us was given  
10 the order to go across the bridge. It was just madness. What we had met coming in and  
11 then a bridge, almost about 150 meters across, funneling a company of Marines, they had  
12 two platoons, a company of Marines going across there just seemed asinine at the  
13 moment. It's one thing to go charging the front when you've got a wide front, but when  
14 you've got to put all your people in the space of about five meters and charge when  
15 you're talking about automatic weapons, that's insane. They went across.

16 We were laying down a base of fire and then the whole side of the river, the other  
17 side just disappeared in the smoke from the gunfire, RPGs, and then supporting fire from  
18 our side of the river as far as trying to tear up the walls and anything else or anywhere  
19 else that the fire could be coming from. That lasted until the evening. I would say they  
20 lost probably 80% if you think killed and wounded. That soured me because there was  
21 no need for that loss. The people who ordered the attack...okay, we're Marines, that's  
22 what we do, we did it. But, we don't want to be wasted and that was a waste.

23 SM: Was that issue discussed much between you and other Marines?

24 SD: No, it wasn't. It is something that we felt and we talked about later and later  
25 wound up being much later for me because I wound up getting Medevaced. But, it was a  
26 waste. I guess it had to be tried but it just was too set. It was an ambush, a classic  
27 Nelson 'crossing the T' type situation. It wasn't a matter of having a fighting chance; it  
28 was just a matter of shooting fish in a barrel. That spirit, that...the orders are go, you go.  
29 Nobody hesitated. There are no resistors. So, off they went and many of them didn't  
30 come back. That night it gets a little fuzzy here as far as where I was each night but I  
31 remember one night being at an LZ, the LZ by the river. It was either the first or the

1 second night and you could hear all sorts of shouting and shooting and it was bright on  
2 the other side of the river inside the walls of the palace; not really a palace, it was a 17<sup>th</sup>  
3 Century French style fortress, star fortress, a vaubin type fortress with the issues of the  
4 interlocking...what is it?

5 SM: Fields of fire?

6 SD: Yeah, fields of fire, designed for the age of muskets so that you could put a  
7 small group of people and rotate muskets to keep the walls clear and it was designed for  
8 what happened there and the bridge just put everybody in a very narrow column coming  
9 up there. Anyway, that night we watched them celebrating. Well, they were inside the  
10 walls of the Citadel and they were enjoying their victory I guess the same way we would  
11 have if it had been us, if the tables had been turned, 'We have survived, we have  
12 prevailed,' and I guess for them it was even sweeter because Hue was a symbol of their  
13 nationhood and the Citadel was a very important part of that concept.

14 The helicopters that came in that night and then the next day...I honestly don't  
15 remember any helicopters that night. The next day helicopters were taking out the  
16 wounded. That day there was a high school right behind us and we were starting to run  
17 out of fresh water and I made this, or someone made this suggestion about the school  
18 might have some water in it because if they've got a chemistry classroom they might  
19 have some water, some distilled water or whatever, and we also needed to check out the  
20 building. So, someone opened the door. Creative way of opening doors; you use a 106  
21 recoilless rifle, no understatement. But, inside the door they found near the steps going  
22 upstairs they found three M-1 rifles, M-1 garands, so there'd been guards in there or  
23 somebody'd been hiding in there and when everything started to turn sour they dropped  
24 their guns and ran and tried to melt into the population. We roamed around. There was  
25 nothing there that we could use. Then we pulled back out.

26 This would be the second day. I remember that night sleeping in the MACV  
27 compound. Our platoon was pulled inside there and the sleeping in a secure place after  
28 that previous day felt like the lap of luxury. That night I was still a new guy so I got  
29 perimeter watch and I was sent with two other guys to a billet of the Army guys who  
30 were there and they had what was, oh, it was a small building. Inside it seemed like a  
31 Quonset hut, but it wasn't a Quonset hut, just sort of a long, square building with one end

1 facing the outside and they had a sandbagged window and you could see the buildings  
2 across the street and I felt I was getting screwed this time because while everybody else  
3 was in the center of the compound sleeping I came out here to stand watch. Suddenly I  
4 wind up here. We've got Australians, US Army, all sorts of different advisors and it's  
5 more like a gourmet gathering instead of a fighting position. These people had lots of  
6 food, beer, and everything else so we were the lucky ones. We came out and stood watch  
7 with the gourmet club while the rest of the platoon was sleeping in the center in the  
8 sandbag bunkers and we had proper cots with air mattresses. That night, that was the  
9 only time I ever fired the M-79 in Vietnam. There was a building right across the street  
10 and every once in a while you could see some movement in the windows and then some  
11 firing from the windows, but whether what we did was effective or what they did was  
12 ineffective, they didn't attack that night so we were pleased. The next day there was a  
13 fight over a church and again, the combat is just confusing. You don't know what's  
14 going. Someone has to know what's happening but you're just not clear in terms of what  
15 your place is. People are shooting, people are firing back, there's noise, you hear a yell,  
16 the only thing that you understand is either, 'Go there,' or 'Come here!' You just rattle  
17 through it and try and keep your wits and your ears open so that you don't get left behind.  
18 At the church we had a recoilless rifle come up and there were enemy at the end of the  
19 street. They brought the recoilless rifle up to fire across the street and then there was a  
20 church manse behind the church and across the street and then the 106 team was taken  
21 out by fire from across the street. Then, a firefight started between us trying to get the  
22 106 people out of harm's way and the people across the street.

23 I remember this because we were in the little garage type building just to the side  
24 of the recoilless team. The fire team I was in was sent or told to run across the little  
25 garden that was there and get to the far side of the fence and then start shooting from the  
26 flank so that we could cover the people while they were getting the 106 crew in and then  
27 also pulling back the 106. The first two people went. I was the third person and I hit a  
28 tree root. I remember that. Again, I can still sometimes see myself hitting the ground  
29 because it was like that tree root was just waiting there for me for eternity for my foot to  
30 hit in the right place because I just went full spread eagle. Then, probably made the rest

1 of the way to where I was supposed to be on elbows and knees as fast as I would have if I  
2 had run. The next person came, he didn't trip, and then we did our thing.

3 We laid down evasive fire, that slowed things down a bit. Finally, it started to get  
4 a little darker, and we were able to get the people back but we were able to get the 106  
5 back as well a little later. I was scared. The whole situation; those bastards were trying  
6 to kill me, and that finally sunk in because until that time, there was always this sort of,  
7 'To whom it may concern,' but now it was sort of getting up front and personal.

8 That same day or the next day we came back to a hospital that was across the  
9 street from the church, toward the MACV compound, and this was part of the firefight  
10 where Sergeant Hernandez got killed, and Hernandez was in another building. We were  
11 facing an intersection and there was what looked like a hotel across the street and we had  
12 set up to face and cover the opposite direction while the main thrust was going the other  
13 way.

14 Our main thrust got bogged down in a firefight and then we started taking sniper  
15 fire. We got word that the other side was getting machine gun fire from a building next  
16 to ours and that's when my having the C4 came in handy because we had some engineers  
17 show up. They didn't have any explosives left but I still had my 20 pounds and so they  
18 took the whole satchel and they taped a hand grenade fuse to it. They got to the end of  
19 the hall and the building that was joining there was the building that the machine gun fire  
20 was supposed to be coming from so they took the C4, plugged in a detonator from a hand  
21 grenade, and then just heaved the whole satchel. I can remember feeling...I was at the  
22 other end of the building, the other end of the ward at that time but I can still remember  
23 feeling the heat from the explosion when that thing went off as far as the heat coming  
24 through the windows, and then someone yelling, 'Grenades, grenades!' At that time,  
25 that's when I had my maximum number of grenades and just start rolling them down to  
26 the people that went up nearest to the window and they started dropping them in.

27 About an hour later we got downstairs and we found a machine gun but no people  
28 at that time. I guess that was the closest I came to getting killed because when we were  
29 checking out across the street evidently a sniper got a good look at my position and I was  
30 trying to hide myself as best I can by looking around a window sill and about that time a  
31 bullet struck at about head level, about three-four inches to the right into the wall and I

1 just remember dropping to the floor, scrambling around on elbows and knees to the inside  
2 wall of the ward, the hospital ward, and pulling out the drawers of the chest of drawers  
3 there and sticking my head in the dresser. I wanted to get as far away from there as I  
4 could and at the moment that dresser seemed the right place to get away to.

5 SM: How long did you stay there?

6 SD: We moved out probably not more than ten or 15 minutes later. It scared me.  
7 The unknown is far easier to deal with than when you hit and get something when you  
8 know, you can react. But, knowing that that guy had a bead on me really disturbed me.  
9 It wasn't a, 'Rat, tat, tat, tat,' it was a single shot and he was trying, and that shook me.

10 SM: While you were working in this area, what was the size of the unit that was  
11 with you? Was it the whole battalion working in the same facility?

12 SD: This was company size. Okay, when we came down from Quang Tri, the  
13 battalion was still broken up and the platoon leadership had been sent to Da Nang for  
14 school. Two of the platoon commanders, a Lieutenant Courtney and Smith, Lieutenant  
15 Smith were sent down to Da Nang for school and being the logic of the Marine Corps  
16 here these two guys are combat veterans. They're in this school basically to give them a  
17 break or do some things that are required for paperwork reasons, all hell breaks loose, the  
18 biggest battle of the damn war, and they got to stay in class. The same thing with my  
19 squad leader at that time. Reyna, I think it was Reyna, maybe it was someone else, but  
20 Corporal Reyna had also gone down to Da Nang for school. So they thought it was just  
21 going to be a change of base and so this was a time to get these people into these classes  
22 and whatnot.

23 So, we went into a city with our platoon, the platoon commander was Sergeant  
24 Hernandez. After the company commander got shot, really the company commander was  
25 the gunnery sergeant, and God, I can't remember his name. Was it Smith? Smith was  
26 with the company. Courtney had gone down, and there was another lieutenant that had  
27 gone down to Da Nang for training. So, we had a gunnery sergeant in command of the  
28 company. Lieutenant Smith at that time just accepted the situation because the gunny  
29 was in the position to have the whole picture and Smith had to take care of his people,  
30 and Sergeant Hernandez in charge of our platoon.

1           That day when Sergeant Hernandez got killed, that just shook things up and there  
2 were other casualties, so there was a reorganization of the platoon. We had a sergeant  
3 who had been...he was one of these guys who saw the trucks and knew there was  
4 something happening in Hue City. He had been part of a CAP program someplace and I  
5 remember him because he was carrying one of these old M-3 grease guns. He just  
6 hopped on a truck and he wound up with our platoon. At that time he was there and he  
7 had the right rank, and so he filled in.

8           But, we had shrunk by about, oh, by that time probably 15 people, down by 15,  
9 and then the next day, that would have been the 4<sup>th</sup>, I got my first wound. We were  
10 checking out rooms in buildings near the hospital, and I was left at a corner to watch out  
11 toward the street while they went in and checked the rooms; getting a little more  
12 sophisticated as far as this, and you check the room with a hand grenade and then go in  
13 ready to shoot. So, I was outside. There was a door to the building that they went into  
14 and then along this little alleyway there was a wall enclosed so I had walls to my right  
15 and to my rear. We came in to the left and to my front was a street or the approach to the  
16 street and I was covering there if anything moved our way. A grenade landed in the  
17 garden and went off. I picked up a piece in the back of my left knee.

18           I was lucky. I should have had a lot more than that. I always assume that it was  
19 not someone throwing a grenade in the building and it went out the window because our  
20 standard frags would have left me with a lot more shrapnel. Anyway, I was walking  
21 wounded, so I was sent back to the MACV compound by myself. When I got there it was  
22 starting to get dark and so I went to the aid station in the MACV compound and they took  
23 care of me but I was not going to go looking for my unit in the dark with at least 700  
24 trigger happy Marines and God only knows who else out there. So, I decided to stay at  
25 the MACV compound that night. I went back over to the people who had taken us in the  
26 night before and said, 'Do you mind if I stand watch with you again?' and they welcomed  
27 me in. We talked about what had happened. One of the men that I had met that other  
28 night was some sort of intelligence type and he had been roaming around out in the city  
29 with the regional militia and had gotten killed. I'm not sure if he was regular Army or at  
30 that time civilian. I remember him packing a .38 rather than a .45 and I don't remember  
31 seeing him with a shoulder arm. But, he had just disappeared and someone told me that

1 his body had been found. It had been burned near the sports stadium that was nearby. I  
2 spent the night there. They felt a little bit of gratitude to me for just showing up the first  
3 night so they showed it again.

4 That next morning I was trying...I didn't know what the hell to do. They told me  
5 at the aid station to go to battalion rear. 'Well where's battalion rear? Is that Phu Bai?' I  
6 figure, 'Oh, I know how to figure out where battalion rear is; that's where the battalion  
7 commander is.' So the battalion commander was across the street. So, I walked across  
8 the street and I've got a hole about the size of a dime in the back of my knee. It didn't  
9 come out, the metal's still there. But, I go there and I explain my situation and for some  
10 reason, I don't know why, I wound up in front of the battalion commander and he says  
11 some platitude, 'Yes, son, okay, we'll take care of you,' and then, 'Sergeant, take care of  
12 him,' and they...

13 SM: Excuse me, sir?

14 SD: Yes?

15 SM: I'm sorry, I hate to interrupt. This is CD number two of the interview with  
16 Mr. Scott Dawson. I'm sorry, sir. Go ahead.

17 SD: That next morning I tried to figure out where battalion rear is and finally  
18 came to the decision that must be where the battalion commander is, and at that time the  
19 battalion commander was across the street.

20 So, I went across the street and I don't know exactly how but I wound in front of  
21 the battalion commander, explained my situation, and he said, 'Well we'll take care of  
22 you, son, don't worry,' and he handed me off to some sergeant who then put me to  
23 passing out ammunition to people coming in.

24 About 45 minutes later my platoon came in. Now there's about 16 people. The  
25 sergeant with the M-3 grease gun comes up and says, 'You still here? We thought you  
26 were gone. Come on.' Okay. I said goodbye and went back out with them, and I don't  
27 really remember anything happening much that day. We just roamed around, moved  
28 around. My leg started getting stiffer and stiffer and the next morning, this would have  
29 been the 6<sup>th</sup>, there was some movement and then we were going to move across a rice  
30 paddy. There was some sort of bank or something. We were all lined up on the road, we  
31 were already ready to move into line and make our move, and then mortar rounds

1 dropped down the middle of the street. No one was killed, but I picked up a second  
2 wound and this one, piece of shrapnel, entered my left arm at about the inside of the  
3 elbow and there was some nerve damage and my wrist just hung limp; it wouldn't work.  
4 So now I was both sort of gimp and one hand didn't work, so this wouldn't work  
5 anymore so they sent me back to get Medevaced.

6 I wound up back at the MACV for some first aid and then they sent me over to the  
7 university buildings by the river, by the helipad where I'd spent the first night. I was  
8 very insecure because the first thing they do when you get into a med center is first they  
9 cut up all your clothes and take away your weapons and then after that they put you in the  
10 middle of nowhere with no weapon and virtually no clothes and say, 'Wait.'

11 So my fatigues were basically shredded from where they'd cut off the pant leg to  
12 get to my wound behind my knee and then where they had checked for my shoulder. So,  
13 one leg, one arm. I looked a disaster. They put me in another sort of holding facility for  
14 people to be medevaced out. It was a triage situation where the most serious went out  
15 first and then those who were more lightly wounded went out next, and we just had to  
16 wait. So I wound up on I guess the fifth or sixth floor of the university building.

17 That night the NVA blew the Perfume River Bridge, and when they did, I know I  
18 was awake because I remember the flash. Now we were facing the other side, the side  
19 away from the bridge, but from the light, just the doors, and then also from the flash, you  
20 could see the flash and you could hear the rumble and at that point in time I was scared  
21 because I figure a nice big bang like that must be starting something bigger, and here I  
22 am with virtually no clothes and no weapon. I was not happy at all. Nothing happened.  
23 The bridge went down.

24 We'd heard from about two days before that the bridge behind us had been blown  
25 so there were no bridges, no more heavy equipment could get in for a while. Everything  
26 would come in by chopper or would have to be walked across the remains of the bridge  
27 behind us. So, I was not happy about this at all. I went the next morning and they took  
28 us downstairs to wait and this is the first time I'd been around South Vietnamese civilians  
29 to speak of. In Quang Tri, communicated with the bushes those days, until then had no  
30 contact really with civilians because the civilians had already pulled out of the places

1 where we were fighting, or those that hadn't, they weren't talking to anybody. They were  
2 just scared shitless and hunkering down and I waited.

3 While I was waiting people asked me in and another guy with me to eat with  
4 them. Evidently it was a professor or somebody, spoke English, talked to us. They fed  
5 us. I hadn't had a good meal, call it a home cooked meal or whatever the whole time, or  
6 since the week before. In hindsight I guess they were getting rumors about what was  
7 happening in the city, people disappearing and whatnot and if you spoke English and you  
8 were a professor and you were associated with the government in any way you were  
9 starting to worry, and suddenly I was not some imperialistic invader, but somebody who  
10 might be keeping the knock at the door at bay. But anyway, they were kind, they were  
11 civil, and they seemed appreciative.

12 I got bumped off the list for two choppers and then finally an Army chopper just  
13 dropped in. He had no flight plan, he just was flying around, looking for trouble, looking  
14 for something to do, and he gave a call to whoever was in charge of the landing zone  
15 there and they said, 'Come on in,' and they packed me and four or five other guys into  
16 the chopper. I wound up with my back facing the wind screen and the first thing I did  
17 when I got in there, the pilots, each one of them, shoulder holsters, hip holsters, and I  
18 said, 'If they've got this much hardware, that means that they've got less confidence in  
19 their flying ability than I do.' So the first thing that I did was grab onto a carbine that  
20 was in there and we took off. We took some parting shots from someone across the river  
21 as we banked around, and then I don't think I saw an altitude higher than 20 feet the  
22 whole way back to Phu Bai. He was just hugging the ground and anybody that wanted to  
23 take a shot was going to have to duck before he would have a chance to aim.

24 We got back to Phu Bai and then it's back to the same rigamarole of med  
25 centers, debreeing, trying to take the shrapnel out. But, the first, the leg wound was three  
26 days old at that time and it started to close and heal. The shoulder wound, actually I'd  
27 picked up shrapnel in both shoulders. The elbow wound and the shoulder wound were  
28 now a day and a half old and he basically said, 'Okay, I can go in, but if I go in and take  
29 it out, I'm going to have to tear out a lot. If you want it out, I'll take it out. If not, you're  
30 going to have some pains in your old age but it'll be something to tell your grandchildren  
31 about.' I said, 'Leave it.' So I've still got the shrapnel in the leg, elbow, and shoulder.

1 SM: When was it that you were injured the second time?

2 SD: The first one was February 4<sup>th</sup>, the second time February 6<sup>th</sup>, and then I was  
3 Medevaced I guess it was the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup>.

4 SM: What was the prognosis of your recovery, and especially given the nerve  
5 damage?

6 SD: Well, that was the problem, and the other problem was the hospital situation  
7 after the first week of the TET Offensive. Prognosis, nobody in Vietnam had any  
8 prognosis. If the nerve was severed, they would have to operate from wrist to armpit,  
9 find the nerve, and tie it back together and I might get 30 to 60% of wrist use and finger  
10 use back. There wasn't anything they could do for me there, and the hospitals in the  
11 Philippines and Japan were full, and so I was sent back to Tripler Army Medical Center  
12 in Hawaii. The neurology people there thought the same as far as having to cut up my  
13 arm to try and tie it back together and they started putting me onto exercise therapy, put  
14 my hand in a brace to reduce tension on the nerve, and about two weeks later it started to  
15 come back. I started to get some feeling in my fingers and by four weeks it was back to  
16 normal. The only immediate damage of sorts as far as I was concerned was my loss of  
17 water discipline. Until that time I'd been able to go with a canteen a day. After that I  
18 was spoiled. When I got back, that was always a problem. The hospital was amazing, it  
19 was beautiful.

20 SM: How long were you there?

21 SD: I was in the hospital about five weeks. The most moving incident that I had,  
22 there was one guy, he'd been shot I heard seven times, he was still alive, they got him  
23 back, and after the second week I was ambulatory so I wound up being asked to help  
24 move this guy to the elevators and he was going up for an operation but at the same time  
25 his wife had shown up at the hospital and delivered their first child and they brought her  
26 and his child to the elevators to meet him so that to give him a little extra reason to want  
27 to pull through.

28 The funniest thing at the hospital was there was this one, how is the best way to  
29 describe him, loud mouth sergeant who had been in charge of officer's club or some sort  
30 of club in Hue City and he had got shot through the thigh and the result was it had gone  
31 all the way through and it was like a window. You could look when they were changing

1 the dressings and he had his leg up in a position you could see daylight through the other  
2 side of his leg. When he described his adventures and misadventures in Hue it sounded  
3 like something out of a 1950s occupied Japan movies. He was there half complaining  
4 that his scam or whatever was through, and then one day an officer came in and told him,  
5 ‘Your request to extend your tour of duty has been approved, and so as soon as you’re  
6 better we’re sending you back,’ and I’ve never seen anybody scream, ‘Chaplain!’ so loud  
7 or so fast in my life. He didn’t want to go back.

8 The nurses, very, very professional. The head nurse was a Captain Koski and  
9 she’d just gotten promoted and she sort of had that in her mind whether she was going to  
10 stay regular Army or not because she’s a captain and has to show her authority to all the  
11 others. Most of the other nurses were more light hearted and trying to spread cheer while  
12 at the same time maintain some discipline in the ward. Most of the people there were out  
13 of Vietnam but then there were also a mixture of automobile accidents and other things in  
14 there as well. A lot of time just chewing the fat.

15 My dad, I sent a little cryptic message because I didn’t have much time and just  
16 put in an envelope, ‘Was wounded, am alright, will call,’ which immediately sets my  
17 mother off like a rocket pad, ‘What did he lose? My God! The writing’s so terrible.’  
18 From Hawaii I did call and try to put them at ease but that still didn’t do it so my dad got  
19 in touch with a friend of his who then contacted an Air Force colonel, I don’t remember  
20 his name, who came to the hospital to visit me. I remember Captain Koski was sort of  
21 incredulous to this because the rest of the guys have girls visiting them or some buddies  
22 from the barracks coming by to say hello, and here I’m getting an Air Force colonel,  
23 ‘What’s going on here? Who are you?’ type of feeling. So he came and then he and his  
24 wife arranged to take me out to dinner one night and I guess being an Army brat has its  
25 advantages after all. They even told me, I was able to get a little bit of intelligence. I  
26 kept pumping him, and he asked if there was anything he could do for me, and, ‘I’d like  
27 to know what happened to my unit and know that the guys are alright,’ and he was able to  
28 tell me. I don’t know if that was a breach of security or whatnot, but he just basically  
29 said that they had moved out of harm’s way and were now in a firebase north of Hue City  
30 waiting for their next move.

1 SM: Before you were evacuated, how many from your squad and platoon had  
2 been wounded or killed?

3 SD: When I left, I left about 12 people and we went in with 44. Those killed  
4 would be about 12. I don't remember the numbers. People would just disappear, but  
5 between eight and 12. When we first went in, we were the battalion, and for example, the  
6 battalion chaplain got killed and some of the corpsmen also were killed. Of the platoon,  
7 between eight and 12 and then the rest were by that time out of action because of wounds.

8 SM: When you were fighting during the TET Offensive, was your unit able to  
9 call in either air support or Naval gun support or anything?

10 SD: No, not in Hue City. The whole time I was there, I do not remember a tank  
11 firing. I remember the 106s were allowed and when, what do you call it, the Marines call  
12 it Ontos.

13 SM: Yes, the multiple 105?

14 SD: Yes, and that is a monster when it lets loose with all six 106 recoilless rifles.  
15 It's a God-awful noise and a heavenly sight to behold when you're clear away from the  
16 backflash and everything. It just tears everybody apart.

17 But, we saw, what is it, the prop. They were flying for the South Vietnamese Air  
18 Force. I used to know the plane designation, but it was a prop, a fighter-bomber, from  
19 the Korean days, and it would supposedly be able to carry more bombs than the airplane  
20 weighed, and they just hovered around the Citadel I remember one day and were firing  
21 rockets but there were no bombs dropped. So during that time in Hue city there  
22 was...what we had in hand was what we could use. So what we carried, we used. I don't  
23 remember the tanks being able to fire. Those were orders from above.

24 There was one fiasco with tear gas. When we were moving, the third day, third or  
25 fourth day and moving against the hospital, and somebody found these looked like a fat  
26 briefcase and it was a multiple gas grenade launcher and they didn't quite know how to  
27 work it. Its like, 'Someone find the manual and we'll figure out how to shoot this thing,'  
28 and they did figure out how to shoot it but the problem is nobody had a gas mask because  
29 one of the first things you find is very useless in jungle warfare is a gas mask, and so this  
30 boot cleared out about half a block of territory of Marines because of the gas. Once that  
31 cleared we went in and nobody else would come in. But, there was a learning curve; the

1 next time they used it, they didn't screw it up. But still, that was a problem because city  
2 fighting and what you do out in the boondocks are very, very different. Again, the city  
3 basically became a free fire zone. It had to be because if you turned the corner you might  
4 be face to face with somebody. You didn't have time really to think. You just had to  
5 react or maybe die. That was that. But, the gas was ultimately effective in moving and  
6 getting the enemy to pull back as well. It was a little bit of a rough patch there for us as  
7 far as the breathing was concerned. But, again, until I got medevaced, there were no  
8 heavy weapons used. There were no air strikes.

9 SM: You couldn't call in artillery?

10 SD: No heavy artillery, no. This was the south side of the city was...okay, use  
11 the example of Wilmington, North Carolina, that old residential area down around  
12 Market Street in there, warehouses, most of them two story, smaller than American style  
13 but that kind of built up urban neighborhood and moving around, always coming around  
14 the corner blind. You had to see what was happening or you had to react very, very  
15 quickly.

16 SM: That of course increases the potential problem of friendly fire incidents. Did  
17 any happen while you were there?

18 SD: If they did, I didn't know it. We were, like I said before, the issue of the  
19 grenade was that from inside, my personal feeling was that it wasn't because the typical  
20 US grenade is far more deadly as far as the shrapnel. That's right. When there was an  
21 attack on a power station in Hue city. During that time we were sent to the roof of the  
22 high school I mentioned before. There was a flat space, flat roof up there, then going on  
23 to a tile roof. We set up a machine gun there. We took up positions to provide support to  
24 the people attacking either the power station or a bank building, and while we were up  
25 there we got mortared. That was, okay, was it friendly fire or them? I don't know. I  
26 doubt if it was friendly because I don't think we had our 81s with us yet. But, I  
27 remember at that time when that happened, Sergeant Hernandez was very angry but his  
28 anger was primarily based upon the fact that he dropped his shotgun and that fell off the  
29 roof and broke. The mortars took out the machine gun team and also took out the ladder  
30 that we had climbed to get up to there, so it was a hell of a time trying to get this guy  
31 down.

1           An irony there was that I met this guy one more time on the Medevac flight and I  
2 think I may have saved his life because I was below him and when we were on the C-131  
3 being Medevaced out of country, I had to go to the bathroom and I gripped his stretcher  
4 and I felt blood and his wounds had reopened and he was bleeding and his blood was  
5 filling the stretcher and I called the nurse and they got me out of the way and they were  
6 able to take care of him. But if that had just continued, I don't know how long he'd have  
7 lasted.

8           SM: Well take you back one more time when you were doing the fighting in and  
9 around Hue City, do you know whether or not you were fighting against VC, NVA, or  
10 both?

11          SD: At that time I knew nothing. I've read some about what was going on and  
12 then supposedly they were all NVA. But, to be honest, I don't know. The uniforms, the  
13 web gear, was new. These were fresh troops. If they'd been resupplied and trying to  
14 make them look fresh and starchy, then they may have been VC. But, there was no way I  
15 could tell the difference.

16          SM: Were you at all surprised by this attack when you guys moved to Hue?

17          SD: Was I surprised? Not really surprised because we were just surprised to go  
18 into Hue City. The fact that someone might shoot at us was a given for anywhere in the  
19 country. This was a new place for us and therefore the fact the people there might not  
20 like us was just expected. That we met with something as big as we did, we were  
21 surprised. I'm talking about at my level at that time. I don't know about the people at  
22 company or battalion level, did they have inkling of anything coming? I was still a PFC,  
23 just trying to stay alive and make sure nobody forgot me when we moved out. So, there  
24 was no feeling of surprise but there was a knowledge that this was big. Did we know  
25 what was happening in Saigon or anywhere else that first night in the MACV and when I  
26 went to the MACV compound the second time? I heard the news, but that didn't mean  
27 anything to me.

28          SM: Had you been receiving any kind of correspondence from home talking  
29 about what was going on?

30          SD: No, no. There were just letters, newsy letters, family letters, this sort of  
31 thing, but there was no discussion about protests or that sort of thing.

1 SM: How about newspapers or magazines? Did you have access to anything?

2 SD: I got two packages when I was in Vietnam before when we were in Quang  
3 Tri, and one came in a box for Rolling Rock beer and contained a Bible and four National  
4 Geographics. The other was the remains of a box filled with Underwood Deviled  
5 Chicken and Deviled Ham and different sort of canned condiments. The National  
6 Geographics I received, a little ironic because one of the Geographics had an article on  
7 Hue City, and when we went into Hue, we just stored all our gear into water proof bags  
8 and if I'd known where we were going, if I'd have kept that, I would have probably  
9 wound up the most popular person in the battalion command because I probably had  
10 more information about Hue City in the Geographic than they knew at all when we first  
11 went in. But magazines? No magazines, no newspapers. That first from December to  
12 early February, I don't remember seeing a Stars and Stripes or anything like that,  
13 occasionally hearing Chris Noel on the radio, but no real communication with the outside  
14 world. This was my world.

15 SM: You mentioned listening to the radio. Did you hear broadcasts from the  
16 Hanoi Hannah broadcasts from North Vietnam or any of the subversive broadcasts out of  
17 South Vietnam?

18 SD: No.

19 SM: No? What about recreation though? What else besides perhaps listening to  
20 the radio did you have?

21 SD: Cards, played cards. It was just out of boredom. We got a – well it was later  
22 – but reading, I started. Folks would send me strange books. I wound up reading *The*  
23 *Sand Pebbles* which was really encouraging, and then someone sent me a book about  
24 Hasidic Jews, Chaim Potok and *The Chosen*, and I can still remember images from  
25 reading the book. I haven't read it since, I haven't looked at it since, but it just resonated  
26 with me at the time. But, there was no intellectual pursuit on the sidelines while I was  
27 there. There was no communication with the outside world so to speak.

28 SM: What about were there any movies?

29 SD: No.

30 SM: Did you guys ever get a chance to see a USO show, anything like that?

1           SD: No, not while I was with the unit, no USO. Like I said, when I first arrived  
2 there was word that Bob Hope was there, but I was going one way and he was going the  
3 other so we may have crossed paths but I never saw him. We didn't meet those niceties.  
4 We just didn't come across them. There was one conex container that was our PX and  
5 they carried some toiletries, shaving gear, that sort of thing, but I don't remember any  
6 magazines and I just didn't need it, didn't look for it.

7           SM: Was there any alcohol use?

8           SD: Okay, there was beer distributed occasionally. Before TET, I did not...okay,  
9 there was no heavy drinking that I remember. I don't remember seeing anyone  
10 completely drunk. Some people who didn't drink when we had beer available would  
11 pass it to others and some guys would get a little tipsy and go to sleep quicker than  
12 others, but really drunk, no. Later, a staff sergeant who was assigned to the platoon  
13 seemed to have a drinking problem and seemed to be going through a bit of DTs because  
14 he couldn't get anything to drink. But, the problem where we were was not that you  
15 might want to drink, but the problem was finding something to drink.

16           Like I said, at Quang Tri, I don't know how long they were there but we had  
17 barbed wire, we had the perimeter, but there was nobody around us. There was no  
18 contact whatsoever. I never saw a civilian inside the perimeter and saw only that old lady  
19 out in the hills that one time. So, we might as well have been on exercise in Camp  
20 Pendleton. R&R while I was in service in Vietnam, I did not have an R&R. When I later  
21 was wounded again and I was in the battalion rear, the battalion first sergeant came to me  
22 and asked me if I knew of anyone who had been on R&R when I got my third wound  
23 because someone had sent a buddy of his on R&R instead of me. So, if I had not been  
24 there, then that meant I would have stayed there when I came back. The recreational  
25 facilities, I would say for me, were minimal and that was my deck of cards and the  
26 camaraderie of my friends.

27           SM: Well, after your hospitalization, how long was it before you went back to  
28 Vietnam?

29           SD: I was five weeks in the hospital and then I got back about three weeks later,  
30 so I got back mid-April.

31           SM: And you were fully functional at that point?

1 SD: Yeah. When I went back, I spent about a week at Pearl Harbor and then  
2 back to Okinawa. Okinawa, I was put into a security organization for while I was there  
3 and I was part of transit security while they were waiting to process my papers and send  
4 me back. At that time, Martin Luther King was assassinated and I remember whether it  
5 was a demonstration or a riot, the friend and I who were patrolling the barracks at that  
6 time decided to get out of the way of this mob that was moving toward the NCO club.

7 SM: What was the composition of this mob?

8 SD: They were all black. They were angry, and they were noisy, and at that time  
9 of the evening and being the only two white guys there we felt discretion was the better  
10 part of valor. Rather than continue our patrol we decided to get out of the way and look  
11 discretely from the inside of a doorway where they couldn't see us and they moved on to  
12 one of the clubs. There was no news the next day about any altercations but there must  
13 have been some tension that night.

14 SM: Do you remember anything else about the reaction of Marines or other  
15 people you had contact with, perhaps more personalized types of reactions?

16 SD: No. To his assassination? There was general disbelief. Okay, we were a  
17 cross section of society. We were the Georgia crackers and the colonel's sons and the  
18 Detroit ghetto blacks. We all came together. In the field we all worked together. But,  
19 we knew that we were different, and maybe that's the issue you were trying to get before  
20 as far as tensions. But, you didn't bring them out in the open. If you had those kinds of  
21 feelings, you were Marines first, and the first thing you got to do if you want to play  
22 games when you get home, good. First you've got to get home, and to get home, you've  
23 got to all work together.

24 SM: I was curious, in your first unit with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Alpha Company...

25 SD: 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad.

26 SM: I'm sorry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad, and you were in Quang Tri, what was the  
27 morale of the unit like generally, both in the squad platoon company and then in  
28 battalion?

29 SD: It was good. We were happy Marines. We didn't have to polish our shoes.  
30 We didn't have to worry about starching our covers. Depending on where you were,

1 saluting the officers was not a problem. So, Marines in a combat zone are at their  
2 happiest. Follow orders, but you skip most of the bullshit.

3 SM: When you came back, what was your unit of assignment then?

4 SD: Returned to the same unit.

5 SM: Oh you did?

6 SD: That's probably what was taking time because I came out of Vietnam  
7 basically paperless, and so when I got back and I was coming back, it was a matter of  
8 finding all the papers so that everybody could put their stamp of approval on in terms of  
9 sending me back. So, that's my assumption.

10 SM: Had anything changed or had much changed in the unit when you got back?

11 SD: When I returned, the unit was on Hill 861 outside of Khe Sanh. There's a  
12 series of hills on Khe Sanh in the valley, then there's a series of hills, then you go down  
13 into a plain again into Laos. It was 881, 861, then down the road a way, down the  
14 ridgeline a way, 681, and we were at hill 861. At that time, when I arrived back, I knew  
15 six people. Those who had rotated out, those who had been wounded and not come back,  
16 and those who had been killed...I remember arriving at Phu Bai, going from Phu Bai to  
17 Quang Tri, then going by helicopter to Khe Sanh. At Khe Sanh I spent one night and  
18 remember being taken into the bunkers and told to find a place to sleep until tomorrow  
19 and a helicopter would take me off and it was the image of World War I; underground  
20 dark, heavy feeling, bright lights here and there sort of pinpointing places, but shadows  
21 all over the place and spurts of activity.

22 The next day after leaving that whether it be a CP or barracks area or general  
23 space, took a helicopter up and the only person who really remembered me was  
24 Lieutenant Courtney, probably because I was that turkey that cranked off a round inside  
25 the perimeter and said he was glad to see me back and I went back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad.  
26 Corporal Reyna had been killed two days before in an action. The young black man that  
27 I had mentioned before that we didn't get along so well had also been killed. There was a  
28 patrol, they got pinned down by a heavy machine gun from another slope. People were  
29 lost trying to get out of the field of fire.

30 The next day, next day or day after that, we had a patrol planned. They were  
31 going to do something different to avoid detection. 861 was really two hills; 861 and 861

1 Alpha. 861 Alpha had been abandoned because there was too much space for one  
2 company, so they decided that we would go out and through 861 Alpha and then go into  
3 the valley via that route.

4 That day Lieutenant Courtney was taking the point to get us through. He'd  
5 checked it out before evidently and he stepped on a mine, a bouncing Betty. He was  
6 killed. I wound up carrying him back and the damage there was horrendous. He was still  
7 moving, nerve reactions, whatever, contractions, whatever, it was...anyway. He died.

8 Then, that just sort of queered the whole day and the company commander called  
9 us back in. I don't even know who the company commander was then because  
10 everything focused on the platoon. I remember Captain Bachelor from before, he never  
11 came back. Our new platoon commander, Lieutenant Bolen who had been rotated from  
12 battalion intelligence or whatever had come and he just seemed soft, but he was a good  
13 guy. Courtney had that...he had been one of us before, and Bolen came out of OCS,  
14 college and into Vietnam. So, there wasn't the same sort of bravado about him, same sort  
15 of comradery. But, when Courtney was commander we called ourselves Courtney's  
16 Thieves. So, when Bolen came in we wound up being Bolen's Bandits and that sort of  
17 thing.

18 SM: In terms of nicknames, I was curious, did Hill 861 have a nickname?

19 SD: Not that I know of. We just referred to the numbers. 881 got a lot of news  
20 because there was quite a terrible assault there. We didn't have any nicknames for it.  
21 There was a low hill, came up to a peak, then came down again, a flat area which was  
22 then used as the landing zone and then at the end of the landing zone there was a 4.2 inch  
23 mortar. Four deuce probably was older than the battalion commander, maybe older than  
24 the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment if anything's older than that. But, it was there and then that was  
25 the end of the perimeter there going around the hill.

26 SM: When did you arrive there just outside of Khe Sanh?

27 SD: It would be late April.

28 SM: And how long did you stay there in that area?

29 SD: I remember being there until early July.

30 SM: How much contact did your unit make while you were patrolling in that  
31 area?

1 SD: All right, while we were there, for a long time there'd been very, very little  
2 patrolling. Our Alpha Company was the first company out of 861 since the really heavy  
3 days of Khe Sanh began, to run a company sized patrol. Then we were the first to run  
4 platoon-sized patrols. Then, they balked at squad sized but we were the first, our  
5 company was the first, to run fire a team listening post. There was a very, very high level  
6 of insecurity there because of the proximity of the border. We checked the area around to  
7 avoid getting caught with our asses in a sling as we went out the gate, but there wasn't as  
8 much patrolling probably as there should have been.

9 I remember when we ran our platoon patrol, we went up one of the adjoining hills  
10 and we found a crater full of bodies and there was a black man, one black soldier in the  
11 crater and there were a bunch of Vietnamese bodies. This struck me as strange because  
12 normally the Vietnamese were quite concerned about their bodies. The culture says that  
13 you've got to take care of the bodies, the Confucius concepts and the idea of past and  
14 future generations for showing respect. But what angered me was that when we made  
15 radio contact, the Army was able to identify who the soldier was, his rank, everything  
16 about him. He knew he was there, and the fact that the body had been left there irritated  
17 the hell out of us. One of the reasons you choose the Marines is everybody comes back,  
18 and we got proof of that a little later.

19 SM: What was the identification of the Vietnamese with this American?

20 SD: There was no identification. Whether they were Vietnamese and he was  
21 there as an advisor or whatnot, we had no information about that.

22 SM: Did the Army come and collect that body?

23 SD: They came and got him. Was he Special Forces? Were these tribesmen,  
24 whatever, we had absolutely no information. The hill, as it was, was just, well, it was our  
25 castle. We were sort of inside our walls and every once in a while we'd step outside to  
26 check the perimeter. Everybody knew that Khe Sanh was being evacuated and so no one  
27 wanted to be the last person to get shot at Khe Sanh. While we were carrying out patrols  
28 there was not aggressive patrolling to keep the area clear because the border meant that  
29 we might run into something a lot bigger than us.

30 SM: Did that ever happen?

1 SD: When we were pulling out of 861, over at Hill 681, whoever made those  
2 maps, why'd they all have to have 81? It's confusing as hell. But, at 681 they were  
3 running a platoon-sized patrol. The NVA closed the ambush at the gate of their  
4 perimeter. The platoon was basically wiped out. A few people got back through the wire  
5 and back into the perimeter, but basically they were wiped out. To get things under  
6 control we were called over to 681. Now this was disconcerting because the days before  
7 that we had spent all of our time destroying our position and getting ready to evacuate.  
8 We had been using up all our ammunition on target practice so we wouldn't have to carry  
9 it all out, destroying our bunkers, everything, and then here we've rendered our position  
10 useless and then were told to wait. We weren't happy about that.

11 That same day looking down at Khe Sanh, they blew the excess ammunition there  
12 and that's the first time I ever saw a mushroom cloud. The ordinance they blew up was  
13 that much that it just created this huge ball of dust that then went up and spread like an  
14 atomic explosion. It was scary and awe inspiring in terms of the amount of firepower  
15 that they had had there. Anyway, we were sent over to 681 as a reaction force to support  
16 them and first we landed on...their position was the top of a saddle. There were two hills  
17 and there was a finger that went off from the north end of the saddle and we were placed  
18 on that finger to set up in that position as a temporary position.

19 That day we were taking fire from the valley and they brought in air strikes,  
20 napalm. They succeeded not only in whoever was down at the bottom of the hill,  
21 moving them away, but they also burned us off the top of the hill. They didn't bomb us,  
22 but the fires spread and we had to pull back toward the perimeter and then set up new  
23 positions and we were going to spend the night there. During the night they were  
24 attacked again and then we had to change our position and go back into the perimeter.

25 When I wrote to you before I talked about the power of the radio and that night  
26 we had a fire control observer with us at the tail end of our position and I was with our  
27 new platoon sergeant and this fire control officer and his radioman and I was with them  
28 as we pulled back. What I saw them doing with artillery and coordinating mortar fire,  
29 artillery, whatever else was available, I don't know where it was coming from, but it was  
30 awesome. We pulled back into the perimeter and we were in position along the north hill  
31 of the saddle. The NVA made it inside and took positions inside our perimeter and

1 decided to hold or they were pinned down and they couldn't escape. It was dark,  
2 suddenly a flare would go up, I was tail end Charlie for our platoon and the connection  
3 with the next platoon. Was it 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>? I don't know. There were calls from in front of  
4 us for help. They had wounded. The guy next to me who was connection point, he went  
5 over and during that time, again, the cat calling, the yelling, 'Who are you? Prove it!  
6 Who was the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States?' questions about football, questions  
7 about this, that, and the other trying to prove that these guys are who they are. The guy  
8 who went over the first time got shot. I went over and got into the hole and then I and  
9 two other people carried him down and we took him over to the LZ at the saddle and then  
10 came back. In the meantime the platoon had gotten the order, 'Fix bayonets,' and they  
11 went over the top. When I got back to platoon they were back in the trenches and had  
12 secured the perimeter.

13 The next day I wound up on the party cleaning the lines. When we were digging  
14 out the NVA who had come in, they were kids. Well, hell, I was a kid. At that time I  
15 was still 18, hadn't turned 19 yet, but just the size difference, the lack of facial hair, the  
16 build, they truly looked like junior high school kids to me and I remember one and he had  
17 his arm sort of wrapped around a construction pole that he was holding like it was  
18 comforting him and you could see the tear trails through the dust on his face. I won't say I  
19 became a pacifist but the idea that there wasn't that much difference between him and me  
20 sort of sunk in. He was doing his thing for fatherland and freedom, and I was doing my  
21 thing to save the world from communism.

22 Anyway, we had gotten different calls at different sides of the Pacific and there  
23 we were. The bodies were taken and I think one of the reasons probably the Vietnamese  
24 often feel so strongly about us is the way we did handle the bodies. The bodies were  
25 burned because we had no way to bury them there, that hard clay, we couldn't bury them,  
26 no one's going to send a chopper to pick them up. They had been stripped of anything of  
27 value with regard to intelligence when we were getting the bodies ready to dispose of  
28 them, looking at their wallets and effects, a little bit of cash, a picture of a girl, letters in  
29 Vietnamese which would be of interest to the intelligence people, but there was no real  
30 difference between what he had and what you would take from me if the tables were  
31 turned. Again, that was something that left an impression on me.

1           We returned to position. Evidentially there'd been a penetration before because  
2 from the smell of it there was another body buried behind our line where we were on the  
3 perimeter, a foul smell, something you don't forget. Backtracking, we'd had some new  
4 people join the platoon and one of them was a young Mexican kid. Usually you try to  
5 find someone to latch onto. Maybe when I talked about Asaycek before, he was the  
6 person, he was my contact point, he was the person I wanted to learn from. Okay, this  
7 kid latched on to me and when we set up on the lines there, it was the third or fourth day,  
8 every time there was movement on the top of the hill, we'd get mortared. This time a  
9 round dropped right into the trench in front of his hole. There was the trench but then the  
10 holes went horizontal into the hill so the blast, that part that was right in front of it, that  
11 part just focused right in there and he was literally killed by a combination of shrapnel  
12 and compression. That also got to me because we'd spent a lot of time talking and there  
13 was a girl he was going to marry, all these personal things, but we were just talking to  
14 each other to keep the time. We didn't really develop that close of a friendship, but still,  
15 he had sort of chosen me to help him and I sort of felt it failed, I failed. I was depressed  
16 by that.

17           SM: How did his death affect the rest of the platoon?

18           SD: He was a new guy. No one really knew him that well. So, when Lieutenant  
19 Courtney was killed, even though there were only a small number of the original people  
20 back, the people that had come after us, he was the only one they had known and he had  
21 that roughness, that charisma, and again, you knew he'd been one of us. So when he  
22 died, it hurt. When the stranger buys it, 'Oh, he's gone. Someone else will come.' That  
23 was that. Okay, back to the big picture again.

24           The ambush that originally brought us to this location, there were seven bodies  
25 beyond the gate that had not been retrieved, and command from I Corps was we do not  
26 leave without our dead. We all come back or we stay until we all can come back. We  
27 were there about a week and the last day before we left, that evening, or the afternoon of  
28 the day before, we abandoned the forward slope; in other words, the slope where the  
29 bodies would be. Heavy artillery, Army 175s, Marine 155s, whatever, were dropping  
30 rounds on the reverse slope. The area was bombed as well. The heat melted the ponchos  
31 that were left in the trenches or left covering holes, whatnot. That evening there were

1 gunships, the C-47s, Puff the Magic Dragon or whatever they were calling them then,  
2 were roaming the area, dropping flares, spraying rounds. There was artillery coming in at  
3 the same time. It was almost like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. They picked a crew for going down.  
4 They issued rubber gloves and facemasks and then asked for volunteers for a reaction  
5 force. We sat up and waited for something to happen and then they brought eight bodies  
6 back. Some NVA had wound up in a hole as well so they weren't able to discriminate  
7 and they brought him back as well. The next day, we pulled off the hill.

8 To the best of my knowledge I was the last person on Hill 681 and that was only  
9 by a few seconds because I was beating feet as fast as the next day to get off that place  
10 and the next guy was about three meters in front of me, but I was tailend Charlie. As the  
11 helicopter pulled off about 20 seconds later artillery started to pour on the position  
12 because they wanted to make sure that the NVA didn't get any souvenir photos to show  
13 how they had driven the Marines away. We pulled away and I don't remember where we  
14 went that flight, but I do remember our next place that we went was a place called the  
15 Rockpile. That was almost like a vacation. It was these huge pillars of stone scattered  
16 about and on top of one of them was a radio reception facility for intelligence or  
17 communication, I don't know. We were there for about two weeks. It was green, it was  
18 lush. So, it would have been a beautiful place to spend a summer vacation. That's 681,  
19 how we got there and how we got off. That was that.

20 SM: Well, how much more time did you spend there? When you made contact,  
21 was this pretty much all NVA now?

22 SD: Yes. 681, again, we're right there very, very close to the Laotian border and  
23 then Khe Sanh is only a couple of kilometers south of the DMZ. So, there's no VC up in  
24 that area, that's all NVA.

25 SM: Any civilians that you came across?

26 SD: No. From 861 looking into Laos, you could see the remains of a village in  
27 the distance and you could also see what looked like revetments for artillery pieces, but  
28 couldn't see any artillery pieces.

29 SM: Where did you go after that? I'm sorry, go ahead.

30 SD: From the Rockpile, we went on an operation, and I guess this is my first real  
31 operation out in the bush. In Quang Tri it was just patrolling. We were taken in by

1 chopper. We were told the next day that Alpha Company and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon would be point  
2 going up a hill that had been selected for assault. Whether it be by bad luck because  
3 someone didn't understand the roughness of the terrain or a map-reading mistake by  
4 someone and we weren't where we were supposed to be. I think it was Charlie Company  
5 of 11 got to the start line before we did, and battalion gave them the permission to go up  
6 the hill first. Their point squad got up to the hill and eight dead, four made it back down  
7 the hill, all wounded, and for the grace of God, there go I because we were slated to go up  
8 that but because we could not get there at the start off time, they sent Charlie Company.

9         That night early evening we spent clearing fields of fire in the elephant grass and  
10 this was the first time that I had really been given...I was given the position of fire team  
11 leader. I had four guys under me, counting myself. I was worried, I was hyper.  
12 Anyway, we got ourselves set up, set out the claymores, distributed things the next  
13 morning. That night, hearing noises, lots of noises out, hearing noises like people  
14 moving, hearing sounds like equipment clicking, clanking, in the distance. Got  
15 permission to throw grenades. We didn't have any real fighting positions there. There  
16 was no wire so they were operating under the assumption that the enemy didn't really  
17 know where we were, either, and so no firing of weapons unless you have a firm target.  
18 Radio permission to use grenades, heaving grenades to the distance where I thought the  
19 sounds were coming. Okay, no more sounds. Was someone out there? Were they trying  
20 to avoid us? I don't know. Was I hyper and just scared? Probably. But, there were no  
21 more noises.

22         The next morning one of our guys was burying his machine gun rounds because it  
23 was too heavy for him and I got after him, the noise attracted the squad leader. Okay,  
24 this was a black guy and neither the squad leader nor I were in a situation to get with him.  
25 It was sort of the situation that we had before. He was a street tough, whether he joined  
26 the Marine Corps because it was a situation some judge told him, 'Go to the Marines or  
27 go to jail,' or whatever, I don't know, but the only thing he ever talked about was his  
28 experience shooting somebody in the Detroit riots. Whether he was trying to impress us  
29 or not, I don't know, but we didn't want to have a situation here, like this, in the middle  
30 of the field. So, he called down a corpsman from company headquarters and that was the  
31 first time I had seen a...he really ragged this guy. The corpsman was black and he was

1 incensed because those machine gun rounds were basically to save his life. The machine  
2 gun laid down a base of fire when the corpsman had to go to someone. If there were no  
3 rounds, he was probably going to get killed because the enemy had nobody shooting at  
4 him with enough firepower to force him to keep his head down. So, he just really tore  
5 into this guy and gave him hell. There was no way I as a white lance corporal or the  
6 white corporal could have done what this guy did to him and that was basically both scare  
7 him, humiliate him, and tell him what his responsibilities were. That was that. We  
8 moved out.

9 We went up the same hill where we'd had the firefight the day before. We took  
10 the hill. There was no resistance. There were some people running, NVA running down  
11 one path and there was some shooting there but no real return fire.

12 From the day before, the whole hill had been bombed mercilessly, artillery and  
13 air, and it was just...what it looked like it had been clear cut by a chainsaw or just a  
14 random chainsaw, just heavy splinters, broken, thick, heavy trees and two man, two,  
15 three, four man bunkers built into the floor; nothing really standing high where you  
16 would have a field of fire or where you could see it, but very, very low to the ground on  
17 the top. Okay, I'm disjointed, sorry about that.

18 SM: That's okay.

19 SD: When we came up the hill it really sort of spooked us because there were  
20 stairs going up the hill and to the left and right of the stairs there were unmanned fighting  
21 positions, and so you thought about the day before and the guys going up with that first  
22 group. It must have been spooky and scary to them and they really walked into it.

23 SM: Any idea what their losses were?

24 SD: NVA losses?

25 SM: Both.

26 SD: I have no idea. We found no bodies on top of the hill. There were eight  
27 dead, that whole first squad, was either dead or wounded, eight of them, and four  
28 survivors. I didn't hear about other casualties for the people still approaching the top of  
29 the hill, but I don't think there were any other fatalities. Nothing serious other than those  
30 that first got up there to the top. We got up to the top. We kept moving on to another  
31 hill.

1 I remember sitting on this hill and down at the bottom of the hill in the evening I  
2 was in a hole with our corpsman and we could hear jingling in the distance and there was  
3 a watering spot down at the bottom of the hill and we called for and got the starlight  
4 scope and we could see movement there so we called in mortars and when I think back  
5 about it, it was like we were playing a computer game and there was a detached feeling  
6 about it. There wasn't the fact that we were trying to kill people. It was sort of like we  
7 were trying to contain something and so we got the mortars behind them and walked  
8 them back toward our position, stopped, and then moved them back again. In hindsight  
9 that's always...I've thought about it a lot because I was trying to kill those guys and at  
10 the time it was natural, there was no feeling, but in hindsight it's always sort of bothered  
11 me.

12 We finished our operation there and then we got orders for Con Thien. We  
13 arrived at Con Thien. I don't remember how, but we were there. These huge bunkers,  
14 like a platoon barracks except you were dealing with structures that had five-six foot  
15 walls and four to five layer beds. Again, the image of World War I comes up as far as  
16 what was there. The next day we were going to go out on our first patrol. We got our  
17 equipment together, we mounted up, we got outside, and a helicopter came in, whether he  
18 was delivering supplies and picking up people who were rotating out, and he landed. He  
19 started to land to take off. He landed again, told somebody to get out. They got out. He  
20 took off again, he landed again, called the guy back. He got on the helicopter. About this  
21 time you could hear the tubes pop in the distance and the mortars. This time the  
22 helicopter took off and got the hell out of there. The mortars landed on the LZ and about  
23 six guys were wounded including me. I guess, I don't know, some guys didn't have on  
24 their flak jacket. I had my flak jacket on but I didn't have it snapped because we were  
25 still mounting up. You wanted the looseness, whatever.

26 Anyway, I caught a piece of shrapnel in the sternum and in the left knee. That  
27 was number three, third Purple Heart. Department of the Navy had a policy; if you were  
28 wounded on two occasions and hospitalized for more than 48 hours each occasion, or if  
29 you were wounded on three occasions, you were removed from Vietnam. You were  
30 given a choice of duty stations; the Philippines, Okinawa, which was not part of Japan at  
31 that time, or Japan Proper, and I chose Japan. So, I was Medevaced out.

1           The battalion headquarters was still at Phu Bai. I spent a week or so at Phu Bai  
2 waiting for processing. At that time the first sergeant asked me if I wanted to stay in  
3 country with battalion headquarters. He looked at my record and obviously it didn't say I  
4 was shooting off guns in the perimeter in the first week or two weeks I was there. He  
5 said he'd like me to stay and in the back of my mind I knew there was a standing order in  
6 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division that said anyone with an O311 MOS will be in the field. I was happy  
7 to get out of Vietnam, and the fact that they'd already hit me three times, you start to get  
8 superstitious. So, I said, 'Sorry, top, but I'll take my chances in Japan.' So, went through  
9 the paperwork and out I came. There was one problem and that was that my first two  
10 wounds, they only had the tag for the second wound and so I had to chase down the  
11 corpsman who had treated me for the first wound. He was still there, and he verified that  
12 he had treated me on February 4<sup>th</sup>. So, that was three, and so I got my change of  
13 assignment to Japan.

14           I'd already been awarded the two Purple Hearts because they just operated on the  
15 issue of you reported to the hospital what had happened to you and so who was it, Crulak,  
16 who was Commander in Chief Pacific for the Marines, had presented me my first two  
17 Purple Hearts at the hospital and I remember being very surprised when he showed up  
18 because he's about 5'2". He was a lieutenant general in the Marine Corps, and when he  
19 was in the hospital talking to us, it was just all I remember is the softest, gentlest voice  
20 you could expect, soothing words, kind words, thoughtful words, and just sort of out of  
21 character for what I was expecting from him.

22           Anyway, I got my change of orders, change of assignment, and was sent to  
23 Okinawa again for papers to get straightened out, and there was also one other problem;  
24 you could not enter, at the moment, you could not enter Japan with open wounds and so I  
25 had to wait in Okinawa until my wounds were sufficiently healed that I could take care of  
26 myself to meet the standards or whatever it was for entry into Japan. I did my thing, they  
27 packed the wounds and I'd unpack them and dress them and whatnot. Everything got  
28 straightened away and then off I went to Japan. That was middle of August when I  
29 arrived in Japan. I was there until January, mid-January. The experience in Japan was  
30 very good, and to a certain extent that's why I'm here now. I liked it here.

31           SM: How much time did you have left in your enlistment?

1 SD: I originally enlisted for three years so I had another year and a half to go.  
2 Well, to make a long story short, when I got back to the states the Marine Corps had so  
3 many people coming in and so many people coming back from Vietnam that they didn't  
4 have enough beds in the states and so they gave me a choice of take the duty assignment  
5 of our choice, which might be Vietnam, go back to Vietnam, or get out. So, I chose the  
6 third option of taking an early discharge.

7 SM: What was the relationship like - you talked a little bit about your time in the  
8 Japan - the relationship between the Marines that were stationed there and the Japanese  
9 civilian population?

10 SD: There were no problems. Well, there were problems because they wanted  
11 our money and we wanted to get laid. So, there was friction. There were also people that  
12 did stupid things when they were there. I was assigned to the Provost Marshall's office.  
13 I came from being a rifleman, and then suddenly I'm an MP, standing the gates at  
14 Iwakuni. So, I had some contact with civilians on an official basis at the gates, usually  
15 some NCO or some officer trying to smuggle a young lady into his quarters for the night.  
16 Off duty relations, if you were civil and polite, the Japanese were very, very kind to you.  
17 If you were a drunk and a lout, they were contemptuous.

18 I had situations where I'd be, on a Sunday, near Iwakuni base there is a popular  
19 tourist attraction, Kin Tai Bridge, and then there's Iwakuni castle, and because my pay  
20 records were slow in catching up with me I didn't have any money, so I'd walk to Kin  
21 Tai and just take in the sights of tourist places; cheap thrill for me. I'd just go there and  
22 sit near the bridge and you'd have school kids come up to you to practice their English.  
23 The adults didn't bother you, but again, it was just pleasant. It was a civilized place in  
24 Asia, which I had not experienced up to that time. So when I arrived there I was not very  
25 sympathetic to things Asian and probably was a little hostile.

26 After being there a while I began to appreciate the differences, both in culture and  
27 the differences in lifestyle and could be a little more open about it. The people were kind  
28 to me. Working at the security gates, it was a little bizarre because at that time the treaty  
29 negotiations were going on between the United States and Japan about the return of  
30 Okinawa. There would be demonstrations out in front of the gates and before the  
31 demonstrations we would get information from the Japanese police about when the

1 demonstrators would arrive, how many demonstrators would arrive and demonstrate, and  
2 what time they would leave. Then, we were also told that there would be three levels of  
3 security; outside there would be Japanese police. The next level would be the base  
4 security guards, Japanese security guards. Then, finally, the MPs. Japanese police could  
5 hit Japanese. Japanese security guards can hit Japanese. Marines do not hit Japanese.  
6 No way this is to happen. If you get someone that for some reason makes it past those  
7 first two layers, do not lay a hand on him. You hold him firmly, do not – other than  
8 holding him and securing him until you can give him to quote ‘The proper authorities.’  
9 Do not touch him. They don’t want a picture of some six-foot Marine laying out a five  
10 foot Japanese demonstrator with a Billy club. So, the orders there were very precise.

11         On the base, relations to Japanese? Okay, they were made more tense because in  
12 the barracks I was in with the Provost Marshall’s office. The Provost Marshall’s office  
13 would take temporary people from the other members of the Marine Air Wing stationed  
14 at Iwakuni and bring them into the organization for three months at a time. One of my  
15 roommates, a sergeant, before he came to the Provost Marshall’s office, had gotten drunk  
16 and come home by bicycle. The problem was, when he went out, he walked, but he came  
17 home by bicycle. Now being not so smart a guy, he finally decided, ‘Well, I’ll keep the  
18 bicycle.’ Well, not only did he keep it, then he also decided, ‘Well, to make sure no  
19 problems happen, I’ll paint the bicycle.’ So, he kept it, he painted it, and then he got  
20 caught and then we had to arrest him for petty theft and send him to the Brig. Now, this  
21 sort of thing did not help create good relations with the local populous. But, in the main,  
22 it was things like this were taken care of very quickly.

23         When I would go out, I had no problems with people. I’d go drinking. I would  
24 sometimes go drinking outside the quote...I’d go to the off limits areas because they had  
25 better bars. The bars at that time, number one, they were luxurious. You think of the old  
26 Busby Berkeley films, the rotating balls and the shiny walls and the girls in shimmering  
27 dresses and nobody challenged me when I went into these places. Now I don’t know if  
28 there was a cover charge, but I was this big gaijin, this big foreigner, and nobody was  
29 going to pick on me. I just go drink and then people would come and talk to me. I met  
30 one fellow who then I met again in Hiroshima and he worked for a department store and  
31 he showed me around Hiroshima. He was looking for someone to practice his English. I

1 met a truck driver who was just looking for someone to drink with. We'd talk, try to talk.  
2 I didn't speak any Japanese and they didn't speak much English but we'd drink and talk  
3 and the bartenders would pour absinthe on the counter and set it on fire and say, 'Wow,  
4 hey, soda! How about this?' I'd say, 'Yeah, that's pretty strong stuff.' Then he'd give  
5 me a drink. It was, what, R rated fun in the bars. As long as you didn't, like I said  
6 before, didn't become obnoxious, then there were no problems. Did I go out in civil  
7 society? Did I go out to a church out in town or did I go to picnics for different festivals,  
8 celebrations? No. That was not what I was into in those days.

9 SM: Good enough. Well, when you left Japan, did you know you wanted to go  
10 back?

11 SD: To the States?

12 SM: No, back to Japan. Did you know that?

13 SD: I knew I wanted to continue...I didn't know what I wanted to do at that time.  
14 I knew now I was going to go back to college. I'd made that decision. Now at that point  
15 in time, college was still at least a year and a half away, until the end of my enlistment,  
16 and so before I really made a firm commitment to coming back to Japan, well, I'd have to  
17 get out of the Marine Corps before I could do that. I enjoyed my experience. Did I want  
18 to come back? Yes. Could I come back? I was young, hungry for information, hungry  
19 for knowledge, and horny. Now, that combination leads to education and marriage. So,  
20 education would not stop me from coming back. Marriage probably would, and so  
21 thinking about that, did I want to come back? Yes. Would I come back? I had no idea.

22 SM: When you returned to the United States, where did you enter the United  
23 States and what was the reception like there?

24 SD: I reentered at Norton Air Force Base, which was about 12 miles from  
25 Redlands, California where I went to high school. While I didn't go back to Redlands at  
26 that time, I got to Norton and the main thing they were worried about was drugs and  
27 guns. They were searching everybody, searching all seabags, all luggage of any sort to  
28 make sure there was no contraband. It was just very, I call it very strict, very severe.  
29 They wanted to make sure you knew that you were back in the civilian peacetime Marine  
30 Corps and that they were checking everything very carefully. If you had something and

1 you wanted to get rid of it, get rid of it over here, and if you don't have anything, bring  
2 your stuff here and let us inspect it.

3 I had leave and so immediately I went on leave to where my parents were and at  
4 that time and at that time my dad was stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I flew across  
5 the states to Virginia and then flew back to...well, I got another hop, and this time was  
6 much less luxurious. It was a four engine, C-56 flown by an Air Force reserve unit. I  
7 was getting very antsy because we took off three times and changed two planes before  
8 they got one that they felt would make it all the way and then landed at Dulles Air Force  
9 Base and then took the bus to Redlands, visited some people in Redlands, or tried to visit.  
10 One person in particular disappointed me because he turned me away at the door.  
11 Whether it was because I was in uniform or because he had just forgotten me, I don't  
12 know, but it was sort of a feeling, 'I don't want anything to do with you.'

13 I visited the doctor that I had worked for at a short time as a test tube cleaner and  
14 my mother had worked for him as a receptionist in their office, in the doctor's office, and  
15 he put me up for the night. Whether he had a...oh, he had served in the Coast Guard  
16 during World War II and had served in the Pacific as a small boat operator, and I guess  
17 he had some sympathy for my situation. Anyway, his wife had recently passed away,  
18 and he let me stay in a room for the night and cooked me breakfast the next day. So, it  
19 was pleasant and he and I talked for a while and then he went somewhere and I went to  
20 sleep. The next day I went to Camp Pendleton, checked in, and while 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup>  
21 Marines sticks with me, I do not remember the regiment I was in at Pendleton.

22 But, I was regular infantry regiment and spent the next, what, four-five months  
23 playing games in the hills, because of budget restrictions we didn't fire blanks. We  
24 yelled, 'Bang, bang!' and a couple of times played aggressor. That was great fun. I can  
25 understand how the people can get off on that sort of thing. It was one, it was really  
26 rather comic. We were playing aggressor and we were supposed to get caught. They  
27 were supposed to run a night assault on our position so we had to sit on the top of the hill  
28 and just wait for them around the bonfires and whatnot and hope that people didn't get  
29 too worked up for some of the things we had done the day before. We were waiting and  
30 the company commanders put their troops on line and they got everything going and they  
31 marched their people into a ditch. There had been a ditch freshly dug, a trench, to lay

1 cable of some sort and they didn't know about it so they had started on one side of this  
2 road, they started up, and then they just dropped their whole company into the ditch and  
3 we're sitting up the hill waiting for them to come and they never came, so I guess we  
4 held them off.

5 The next morning they, instead of attacking us, had set up on a position on  
6 another hill and so we said, 'Okay. Let's see how far we can push this,' and we got the  
7 slowest guy in our unit, not very smart, and we broke the rules. We brought a hard  
8 helmet. We were supposed to only have soft covers. We had one helmet. We gave him  
9 the helmet. He had his M-14 and we sent him down to where they were gathering water  
10 with their canteens and we sent him down with a bunch of canteens as well and then he  
11 just joined their people going back into their unit and walked up to their CP and went to  
12 the company commander and said, 'Excuse me, sir,' and he turned around and then he  
13 held his rifle into the air and started shooting off blanks. He then told the company  
14 commander, 'I'm sorry, sir, you're dead,' and from our position where we were watching  
15 from the other hill through binoculars, it was really hilarious watching all the feathers fly  
16 and the screaming and the yelling and the raising the arms and he's just sort of standing  
17 there oblivious to the whole thing. There were times that were fun.

18 Another time we got isolated on the base by a typhoon and heavy rains that  
19 washed out the bridges and hungry Marines, when the mess halls are empty, are  
20 desperate, and they wouldn't let us go to the C-rations that they had stored away because  
21 those were in case of an emergency and just because we're hungry and we cant get food  
22 from the mess hall is not an emergency. So we had people out laying snares for rabbits,  
23 chasing down snakes. One guy went to special services and checked out a bow and  
24 arrow and went trying to hunt rabbit with no effect. But, those sorts of things at that  
25 times seemed very funny, and made life stateside at least bearable.

26 SM: What was the food like in Vietnam?

27 SD: We had standard canned C-rations. I actually, I enjoyed ham and limas. The  
28 worst thing going was the ham and eggs. A can of pineapple was pure gold. No matter  
29 where you were, when you opened that can, that pineapple tasted cold. I remember one  
30 time sort of after we left Quang Tri they set us down in a location and we had basically  
31 what boiled down to a barbeque. We had steaks and beer and potatoes, and occasionally

1 something like that would come up. One time at 861 they delivered hot meals from  
2 regiment or battalion or wherever, and I mean real hot meals, mess hall type stuff in the  
3 containers, and distributed it. So, things like that would happen occasionally but mostly  
4 canned C-rations. One time we got the LRRP rations, the dehydrated stuff. But, pretty  
5 stable fare. You learned to make due. For example, you'd take the cocoa and the cream  
6 substitute, a little bit of water, and make a chocolate syrup to put on your pound cake,  
7 little garnishes to break the monotony of the food.

8 SM: Well when did you get out of the Marine Corps?

9 SD: I got out, it would be August, the first or second week of August of '69.  
10 Okay, immediately upon getting to the unit in California I asked to be transferred to the  
11 east coast because my family was on the east coast then. Finally, I got accepted and I  
12 was sent to the Marine barracks at Norfolk. I arrived at Norfolk and someone came down  
13 the line, looked at my file, saw that I shot marksman, and was now sergeant, and I don't  
14 know what possessed him, but he sent me to the rifle range as a coach. So, my last three  
15 and a half, four months, I was a rifle range coach at Damneck, Virginia and finished my  
16 career in the Marine Corps being armed with an M-1 rifle. The base there, because we  
17 taught both Navy and Coast Guardsmen marksmanship, and on Navy and Coast Guard  
18 ships they were still using the M-1 Garand, we were also issued M-1s. So, the last time I  
19 qualified for marksmanship, I qualified with the World War II weapon. Have you ever  
20 used an M-1?

21 SM: Yes, sir.

22 SD: You've got the clip that you load in from the top and that was really a  
23 challenge getting used to when working the range. We get crews coming down from  
24 Quantico to qualify, and these guys were a real pain in the butt because most of them  
25 were officers in staff jobs who came down often thinking they were God's gift to  
26 America and were not willing to take any advice whatsoever. Maybe I wasn't the best  
27 shot in the world but I could definitely read their spots in terms of what they were doing  
28 and adjust and some would listen and some wouldn't because they were determined to do  
29 it their way. That was real fun.

30 People would come down and shoot for a week, would qualify on Friday  
31 morning, and then to finish off the day on Friday afternoon we'd play softball for a keg of

1 beer, and of course all the people Friday morning would be wanting to go home and so  
2 they'd leave us in the afternoon with about a half a keg of beer and there were only eight  
3 of us left at the base of our detachment after that so we'd put away a lot of beer. It was  
4 the greatest time that I ever had in the service.

5 Then, it came for me to make the decision about getting out. They came to me,  
6 gave me my choices, back to Vietnam, duty assignment of our choice, or get out. When I  
7 said, 'Get out,' then they immediately set me up for an interview with the career advisor  
8 in Norfolk. I had to go down for an interview with him. There was a gunnery sergeant in  
9 there, ramrod straight, lean, muscular, real Marine, and he looked at me and said, 'Well,  
10 son, what sort of plans do you have?' and I said, 'Well, I'm trying to get into college and  
11 I sent off letters to see if I can get admitted even without transcripts and whatnot,' and he  
12 said, 'That's fine. Get out of here. You've got a better future than I can plan for you at  
13 the moment. If you want to come back in a few years after some college, give us a call,'  
14 and off I went. At that time I had been writing to a junior college near where my family  
15 lived at Fort Lee, Virginia. The president of the university still used his old title, Colonel  
16 Carson. So, I made an appointment with him, I showed up in uniform, and said I wanted  
17 to get back to school but I had no transcripts, no recommendations, and no TOIC  
18 scores...not TOIC...

19 SM: SAT?

20 SD: Yeah, that's right, you remember, no SAT scores. He said, 'Nice talking  
21 with you, son. Follow me.' He took me into the registration office and said, 'This young  
22 man is coming here this fall. Take care of him.' And so they got me started and I spent a  
23 year at Richard Bland College in Virginia and then transferred to University of North  
24 Carolina at Wilmington, and then after Wilmington I got admitted into Duke. The first  
25 three years of college I was regular GI Bill and then I made the transfer to vocational  
26 rehabilitation. After getting out of the service, I was rated at 50% disability because I  
27 retained all the metal and the doctor said that basically I would be developing an arthritic  
28 type condition in the joints where I had wounds, and so that was one knee, one elbow,  
29 and one shoulder. So, he was right. I'm starting to experience pain at this time of the  
30 year. My shoulder and elbow are acting up, but no serious complaints. The thing that  
31 was funny to me, while it can be a job risk, my profile was to avoid work that involves

1 prolonged sitting which I guess that means I'll just be standing up in the classroom the  
2 rest of my life.

3 SM: When you came back to the United States and as you were reintegrating  
4 yourself into American society, did you have any difficulties?

5 SD: Did I have difficulties? Well my situation was unique in that I was coming  
6 into a military family. I didn't completely leave the military. I gave up my enlisted man  
7 club privileges for O Club privileges because my father was an officer at Fort Lee,  
8 Virginia. So the people that I often socialized with were military. I picked up a little  
9 money working bartender at different parties for people. I'd always make a point of  
10 wearing my Marine Tie pin. Someone at the party every night would be hanging around  
11 the bar getting a drink and they'd say, 'Where'd you get that?' and I always used to smile  
12 and say, 'I earned it.' There was a certain amount of respect that I felt, and so there  
13 wasn't a feeling that I was a criminal or guilty of something. They said, 'You went, you  
14 did, that's okay. Good for you. Glad you got back.'

15 When I was at the junior college, probably 50% of the guys in the college were  
16 avoiding the draft, and I knew one guy who had been in junior college for almost five  
17 years and he was getting desperate because he needed to maintain his student status but  
18 he was running out of courses. There were other people for other reasons who were there  
19 but a lot of them were just to avoid the draft. If they could maintain their student status,  
20 they would. When I got to Wilmington, at that time Wilmington had relocated I guess  
21 about three or...no, not even two years before because you could still see marks on the  
22 ground left from the construction period. There were just the three main buildings of the  
23 campus and the library. I remember, I was a history major and my advisor suggested I  
24 take a political science course. There were three political science professors. One should  
25 have been retired, but he was a gentleman from Baltimore, graduated from John Hopkins,  
26 and was teaching political science there. I was in his class. Okay, the chemistry was  
27 wrong. I didn't like him. The one thing he kept talking about all the time was his war  
28 experience and that was working in the draft board in Baltimore and choosing these little  
29 unlucky suckers who are going to go out and fight for their country and that sort of thing.  
30 At the time of Kent State, it was a conservative campus. There were those there who  
31 said, 'Okay, these anti-war, pro-commie, protestors got what they deserved,' and that sort

1 of thing, and that rattled me because I still had this image in my mind I went there to fight  
2 for something, an idea that was good. I hadn't lost that. Shooting protestors on a  
3 university campus in the United States was the exact opposite of what my purposes were.  
4 This was not part of being American and this was nothing to revel in. I tried to make my  
5 point across but it was just sort of lost in the noise and the only other thing I could think  
6 to do at that moment was to drop the course. I wanted out of that course. I didn't want  
7 anything. My advisor said, 'If you drop it now, you take an F. Put up with it.' I did.  
8 I've been angry at myself every since because I felt I failed myself and I failed what I  
9 truly believed in.

10 SM: Could you tell any other differences in terms of the atmosphere of the  
11 country as compared to before you went to Vietnam, and then when you came back from  
12 Vietnam?

13 SD: No. As a high school student, I was politically naïve. When I got back to  
14 college, I was busy trying to catch up with a couple of years learning different  
15 vocabulary. I was just trying to catch up. I was a bit of a loner and so to a certain extent  
16 what was going on around me didn't bother me and while I had the GI Bill I was also  
17 working and so I kept busy and kept to myself.

18 I did get involved with the church where I went to college in Wilmington there  
19 and I was advisor to a junior high school group. I created a bit of a stir there, because I  
20 didn't really teach the Bible. I put them to work and had them doing programs at old  
21 folks' homes. There were some kids that considered themselves playwrights, song  
22 wrights, and whatnot. Okay, then we'll do something at an old folk's home. When they  
23 finished they created a little bit of a stir because they bought me a case of beer, and that  
24 created a little bit of stink in the church because junior high school students are not  
25 supposed to buy their church advisors beer. But, I sort of stuck to myself. I got caught  
26 up in my own world. I didn't really worry about the war and what was happening because  
27 I was trying to achieve my own goals then. The war was part of my past, not part of my  
28 future.

29 When I got to Duke, that place was much more politically charged but there was  
30 nobody that had the same experience that I had among my peer group. So, they just  
31 looked at me as a curiosity. We talked a little but they didn't pursue it. Again, the

1 politics just sort of flew by me. At Duke, there were four Vietnamese students. There  
2 were two seemingly normal guys. There was one guy that seemed to be going crazy  
3 because he kept brushing his hair so often that he had a bald streak along the side of his  
4 head, and he was supposed to be some sort of mathematical genius, and then there was  
5 one guy in his late 30s who was in the political science department but by reputation was  
6 basically there to watch the other three. I used to talk to the older gentleman who was  
7 there because somewhere he found out that I had been in Vietnam and then he started  
8 talking to me. He came to me and started talking to me trying to find out where I was,  
9 where I did, and he had been a regional commander in the central highlands and when the  
10 country collapsed, it collapsed...this was '75, in the spring of '75, when south Vietnam  
11 just fell apart. He was going berserk, and he would sometimes come to me just to talk  
12 about if I'd heard anything, thinking I would have sources of information or anything.  
13 You saw he never gave a feeling that he would then let down or deserted, but there was a  
14 lot of tension in his voice and in what he was talking about.

15 SM: Did you ever encounter any kind of hostility as a Vietnam veteran on these  
16 various college campuses and elsewhere?

17 SD: No. Again, I didn't wear it on my shoulder. If someone talked to me, they  
18 asked me about it and they raised the subject. I didn't protest for the war, I didn't protest  
19 against the war.

20 SM: Did you ever feel uncomfortable talking with anybody about your Vietnam  
21 experience?

22 SD: No. There weren't that many instances. Like I said, I didn't actively bring it  
23 up. I wasn't going to live in the past. So, if someone wanted to talk about it, if they  
24 knew it I was willing to talk. But, not that many people pushed it.

25 SM: Did you talk much about your experiences with your father?

26 SD: Not really. When we got back there was a different feeling, there was a  
27 different relationship between us before because I had come to the family kind of late and  
28 now I was coming back in a very much later situation and at a different level of maturity.  
29 So, we recognized this difference but we didn't really talk about the war. He didn't ask  
30 me about what I did. He knew what I was from the letters that I had sent back. They  
31 were always addressed to him and my mother, so he read all the letters that I sent back

1 and so he knew what was happening, and then from his contacts he was able to find out  
2 information about me when I was in the hospital.

3 SM: How did you feel about some of the exchanges and policies that occurred,  
4 for instance, with the Johnson administration leaving and Nixon coming in, you had  
5 Vietnamization, of course eventually the complete American withdrawal, and then the  
6 fall of Saigon. How did these things effect you, and did you think about them much as  
7 they were occurring?

8 SD: I thought about it when I was at Duke because at that same time I was having  
9 this interaction with the Vietnamese students there. I felt we had deserted an ally, we had  
10 left them high and dry. That didn't mean I thought the war was one that we could win.  
11 We could win if we'd had the determination, if we'd been willing to realize what kind of  
12 war it was. It was a Civil War. It was not World War I. It was not war in the trenches to  
13 be won by massive firepower. It was a Civil War in which you had to fight using your  
14 brain and you had to fight getting the cooperation of the people on the ground. You  
15 could not be the enemy of all Asians. You had to be the friend. People just didn't  
16 understand this. You don't win friends by basing your war on a body count system. I felt  
17 we were poorly led, that it was a domestic policy driven war by politicians who didn't  
18 understand what was happening and by generals who in the main were fighting the last  
19 war. I've read things about the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons and people  
20 saying that was the way to go, but I don't know. My only contact with civilians in  
21 Vietnam was really that one instance in Hue City. They treated me civilly; they treated  
22 me like we were fellow human beings in an island of chaos. They were kind to me. I  
23 didn't have this feeling of superiority or this feeling of, 'Why can't you fight your own  
24 war?' We invited ourselves in and by doing that we had a responsibility to see it through.  
25 We didn't do that. I think that much of the distress that individuals have felt is...the fact  
26 that we didn't win, that we came away and there was no honor in the way we came away.  
27 You fight and you are proud of what you achieved. We fought, and we were proud of our  
28 ability, our skill, and the fact that maybe we saved some of our friends. But, we walked  
29 away with very little honor with regard to the result of the war.

30 SM: What did you take away from your experiences in Vietnam that's most  
31 important to you?

1           SD: I grew up. I grew up very, very quickly. I learned my limits, I learned what I  
2 could expect of other people, but more than anything else I just grew up. That served me  
3 well. I enjoy life. I'm always looking for something new, something that will excite me  
4 a little, will keep me on edge because I've walked close to the other side and I know I can  
5 enjoy life because nobody's going to shoot at me anymore. I think this sort of relaxed  
6 feeling has served me well, this sort of contentment that I sense from being able to walk  
7 away. I'm proud of what I did. I'm proud of my experience. I'm proud of my friends.  
8 But, I also have doubts about did I really do my best. When you come out of a life and  
9 death situation, you come out and you're okay. Was there anything that you did that  
10 caused pain to someone else? Did you fail a buddy? Was there something that you did  
11 that caused someone else to get hurt? That worries you. I still sometimes wonder. So,  
12 there's a sense of satisfaction that I brought away. There's also a sense of doubt.

13           Well, the other thing that brought away, it kept my interest in Asia, and in part if I  
14 had never gone to Vietnam I would have never really come to Japan. I would have never  
15 experienced this culture. That also got me started. So, it's still very much...it changed my  
16 life and I guess in the long run it's made my life better because I remember one time  
17 running into a junior high school friend in North Carolina, and he was so narrow. There  
18 was no left or right to be interpreted. There was no flexibility in his thinking and he  
19 didn't have a sense of difference in the world. I'm glad I didn't become like that. I  
20 didn't want to become just a one way, one path individual, America right or wrong, love  
21 it or leave it. I made the decision that followed that path, but the whole experience  
22 expanded my horizons and made me look at both sides of the street. One of my  
23 professors accused me of being a closet communist. He says, 'Your actions basically  
24 seem like that of a neo-conservative, but your philosophy would be more in tune with the  
25 streets of Leningrad in 1917.' So, I don't know where that puts me now.

26           SM: What did you think when this professor said that to you?

27           SD: I thought he was off his rocker. I really hadn't thought that much about it.  
28 But okay, it started some thinking. At that time, I was reading E.H. Norman who was a  
29 socialist commentator in Japan in the 1930s and Norman was making great sense about  
30 class distinction and feudalism in Meiji Japan leading to the militarism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
31 and all of this class activism was resonating. My rhetoric at that time seemed to follow

1 that sort of philosophizing. But, again, my actions normally lean more toward the  
2 conservative.

3 SM: You mentioned earlier that you had some thoughts about how the war was  
4 fought, in particular the body count, the war of attrition. How much of those thoughts  
5 occurred to you at the time, versus how much of that has been hindsight and your  
6 reflection?

7 SD: At the time, it's all reflection. I was just another jarhead, only thinking one  
8 day to the next and hoping I could get out of the place in one piece. In hindsight, we lost  
9 the war at nighttime. We never controlled the night. That's what guerillas thrive upon;  
10 the darkness and the movement. If they can't move, they can't collect taxes. If they  
11 can't move, they can't ambush you. So, we never stopped that movement at night.

12 We became spoiled by the helicopter. The helicopter got us in and got us out, but  
13 the idea of physically moving through an area and then coming back, making the total  
14 sweep, that's a much different process in terms of maintaining control on the ground. So  
15 the helicopter was both a boon when you needed speed, but it also created a situation  
16 where the enemy knew that you came, you flew away, and now the area was totally free.  
17 There was usually no doubt. You retreated to your little firebase and left the space where  
18 you'd just fought over empty again and theirs again. The war, Marines make very poor  
19 martyrs and civil wars need martyrs and heroes, not body counts. You don't win the  
20 people, and that's who you had to win. Really it wasn't our job to win the people, it was  
21 the ARVN's job to win the people. But if we could have established that we are not the  
22 bad guys. We are here to help you, not to be your new leaders, then I think many things  
23 could have been achieved. But, geography, and the determination of the enemy, and the  
24 lack of will of the people in Washington, basically said, 'Sorry, we'll let you swing in the  
25 wind. We'll go home and muss about this for the next 30 years.'

26 SM: Is there anything that you think we as a nation should take away from the  
27 Vietnam War in addition to some of the things you've already mentioned?

28 SD: As a nation, we've got to fight our own ignorance. There's always this talk  
29 about isolationism and internationalism. It's not really an issue because we've always  
30 been isolationists. In the main, we've always had these two wide oceans and they  
31 separate us from the news and as a general population we ignore news that is not local.

1 We've got to be more sensitive to other cultures, more sensitive to other people. We've  
2 got to study and if we study then and if we learn, then there's a possibility of  
3 understanding when the next situation comes to play, such as what we're experiencing  
4 now in Afghanistan.

5 I pray that we're not being driven by our ignorance and not willing to learn by the  
6 experiences of the others, because the French played the same game we did and we had  
7 French people capable of advising us and we were not willing to take that advice or to  
8 make good use of it. You had people like Bernard Fall who wound up getting killed with  
9 a patrol of Marines near Da Nang I think, who had a lot of skill, a lot of know how, and  
10 in their work they tried to give it to us and we rejected it because we felt we knew better.  
11 That arrogance based upon a past victory...

12 SM: This is CD number three of the interview with Mr. Scott Dawson. Okay, sir,  
13 you were just saying that in terms of your perspective now, the value of American life,  
14 and I just wanted to cover a moment back what you said since the other CD ended so  
15 abruptly, but basically, if you would, say that one more time, that your feelings now are  
16 that although American life is precious...

17 SD: When you put your uniformed, when you put your soldiers, your Army, Air  
18 Force, Marines, in harm's way, you've got to expect casualties. The main thing is, when  
19 you put them in harm's way you've got to put them there for a reason, a just reason, a  
20 good reason. If the motivation is good, the people will support you and the soldiers and  
21 Marines and sailors and whatnot will put out their best and they will bring you home a  
22 victory. The political will in Vietnam was lacking. The military skill on the field was  
23 never lacking. So, when you come home, the thing you want most is respect. I never felt  
24 the feeling I wanted people coming up and shaking my hands and saying, 'Good job,' but  
25 I wanted too feel a sense that people cared, that people did not hold me and those others  
26 who served with me in contempt, and when you put people in the line of fire they've got  
27 to know that the country loves them, too, not that they just sacrifice because they love  
28 their country, but the country loves them too, that they should be...they want that respect.  
29 If you're going to put people in the line of fire, you've got to be willing to back them up,  
30 both morally and politically, and hoping that both, the moral and political path is the  
31 same.

1 SM: Did you ever feel that people here in the United States upon your return  
2 didn't treat you that way?

3 SD: I felt tension at times, but I never was...like I kept saying before, I didn't  
4 wear my experiences on my sleeve. Someone really had to sort of search for them if they  
5 wanted. And so I was disturbed over what I sometimes saw on the news, but it never  
6 really hit me. I left. I graduated from...finished my Master's at Duke in '76 and came to  
7 Japan. So, after '76 that was sort of out of the picture for me.

8 SM: Is there anything else that you'd like to discuss today?

9 SD: No, I guess that about covers it. The main thing would be that, okay, I  
10 served, I pride in my service, I have some dissatisfaction in the way my country behaved,  
11 but okay, I'm a survivor. I look back at it with a feeling of no regrets. I have no regrets  
12 about what I was involved in and the people that I fought with and I have no animosity  
13 about the people I fought against. It was a straight knock down fight and we seemed to  
14 take heavier punches than they do, not in terms of lives lost but in terms of the results.

15 SM: Have you been back to Vietnam since the end of the war?

16 SD: No, I haven't. I've looked at tours coming from Japan, going from Japan to  
17 there, looking for the option. My wife isn't very excited about that. But, if the right  
18 chance comes up, I'll go.

19 SM: And what do you think about the way the US policy has evolved in terms of  
20 normalizing relations with Vietnam?

21 SD: It is basically a mirror of domestic politics. There needed to be a time of  
22 cooling down on both sides. The reopening has basically been opened by domestic  
23 politics, not diplomacy, and I would like to see an opening between the two countries.  
24 I'd like to see, also, a softening of relationships, not so much dogma on both sides.

25 SM: Thank you very much.

26 SD: Thank you very much.

27 SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Scott Dawson.