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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Douglas Shivers  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
October 4, 2002  
Transcribed by Shannon Geach

**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 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I am conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Douglas F. Shivers. Today is October 4, 2002. I am on the campus  
3 of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Shivers I take it you are in Little Rock,  
4 Arkansas?

5 Douglas Shivers: Correct.

6 RV: Sir, I'd like to start basically with some biographical information. Can you  
7 tell us where you were born and where you grew up?

8 DS: I was born in Littlerock, Arkansas, February 24, 1949. I lived here until I  
9 was 13. My mother then remarried. Her first husband had died in World War II in basic  
10 training, actually was 34 when they drafted him. She married and moved to El Dorado.  
11 We grew up down there. I finished high school in 1967, attended Southern Sate  
12 University, which was called Southern State of South Arkansas University, I believe for  
13 one semester. Joined the Army in January off 1968.

14 RV: You said your father who died he was drafted for World War II?

15 DS: No, no my mother's first husband had died in World War II. She had  
16 married my father shortly thereafter, not worked out, and then gotten divorced.

17 RV: What I'm after is what kind of military exposure did you have as a child?

18 DS: My stepfather that came into my life when I was 13 was a World War II  
19 veteran, he had a Purple Heart. He had been in the 309<sup>th</sup> or 306<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery from

1 Arkansas; the entire National Guard unit went to Alaska. They spent three years  
2 basically fighting the Japanese for a year and a half, and just stuck there for a year and a  
3 half. After Midway things kind of fell off up there. But he was hurt during one of the  
4 bombing attacks there. Wasn't during a bomb attack. Actually there was a small battle  
5 on the island, and he actually got cut by a Japanese bayonette. The man was shot dead by  
6 somebody else.

7 RV: Did he tell you about these stories?

8 DS: He told me some. It wasn't something that I remember a lot of the time. Of  
9 course being a stepchild, things aren't always exactly smooth sometimes when you're  
10 growing up like that. I was already 13. I didn't really pay as much attention to that as I  
11 did after I'd been in the service myself. I was involved I scouting a lot. I was an Eagle  
12 Scout for example. Went all through the scouting. The Demlay, which is a Masonic  
13 thing also.

14 RV: Ok, so you had exposure to the Boy Scouts. Your stepfather had served in  
15 the military. You went through high school, what were the years when you were in high  
16 school?

17 DS: Well, it was '65, I was a sophomore, '66 junior, and '67 was when I  
18 graduated El Dorado High School.

19 RV: By the time you graduated, the United States was heavily involved in  
20 Vietnam.

21 DS: Yes, on my high school debating team, we debated about our presence in  
22 Southeast Asia, in fact.

23 RV: Interesting. What did you think of the war at that time when you were in  
24 high school?

25 DS: Well, having grown up on John Wayne, you don't really know what war's  
26 about or what the military is really like until you get out there and do it. Then you realize  
27 you probably should have stayed home. That's a young man's whatever. Stupidity  
28 perhaps. It was more of an academic thing when I was in school. Looked at it always,  
29 just marveled at everything that was going on. I didn't really know that much about it  
30 until I actually joined, almost a little rage or complaints about what college was costing.  
31 I joined the Army I was going to show him. I guess I did my own stupid way.

1           RV: Right, let's talk about that. When you got out of high school, you went  
2 through one semester of college and you joined then?

3           D: Joined after one semester at Southern State, which is now South Arkansas University  
4 in Magnolia, Arkansas. I joined like January 28<sup>th</sup> I think of 1968, which was not a good  
5 time to join. It was winter. I went through basic at Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri then,  
6 which was very cold.

7           RV: It must have been very cold there.

8           DS: It was very interesting, yes.

9           RV: So you volunteered, and you did this I guess you wanted to do this for your  
10 own self, but also for your dad, to get back at your stepfather?

11          DS: I think most of it as just my own innate curiosity as a young man growing up  
12 during the war, kind of thought maybe I should do this perhaps, almost a corny, patriotic  
13 type thing as well as being fed up. Part of that is just being 18 and being a young man  
14 also.

15          RV: Why did you choose the Army?

16          DS: I looked at several of them. I just had always had an affinity for the Army. I  
17 talked to the recruiter several times and looked at the various programs they had, and  
18 finally picked this particular out in ASA, which is the Army Security Agency. It looked  
19 kind of like a romantic spa type situation or something, which was far from that. But at  
20 the time I didn't know.

21          RV: So you go to Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri, and this is 1968, what was your  
22 basic training like? How can you describe it in general?

23          DS: It was fairly tough, and it was just endless days of work it seemed like when  
24 you hit 15 minutes it was a lot of time. We got up early, we marched everywhere. It  
25 snowed a lot. This is about the time that TET of '68 hit in Vietnam, which is the big one  
26 which politically kind of turned the citizenry against the effort over there I guess. Even  
27 though I think we won militarily on the ground quite handedly it was a surprise. Over  
28 night they went from bad to worse. They cranked down. We were honored with being  
29 with the first units to have a five-day bivouac instead of two days, where you go out and  
30 live in the woods basically. It snowed four of those five days. I mean it was a nightmare.  
31 It's the one time in my life I think I went one week without a bowel movement because I

1 ate so little, worked so much there was nothing left over. To give you some graphic input  
2 there.

3 RV: Wow, that's fine. What was your most challenging aspect of that basic  
4 training?

5 DS: I think that period when we were out and it snowed on us so much we were  
6 walking like six miles through the rifle range. I wasn't warm for a week except when I  
7 was about the second mile of that one-way march to the rifle range, we'd shoot all day,  
8 pack up and march back. We had little bitty pup tents, literally little bitty basic like  
9 World War II type tents. We had no matches. We had nothing to keep warm. You had  
10 to keep your boots inside of your sleeping bag with you because they'd freeze at night or  
11 cut your ankles or the back of your Achilles tendon is right there kind of. I found that out  
12 the hard way. You shaved out of your steel pot. It was very, very basic. It was very,  
13 very miserable actually.

14 RV: Did you have any contact with your family while you were going through  
15 basic?

16 DS: Just letters, things like that. Not other contact though. We were there it was  
17 the Army, no doubt about that.

18 RV: How long did it last?

19 DS: It was about 10 weeks I think. Right around 10 weeks, something like that.

20 RV: Did you witness any injuries or any difficulties by the other men? I guess  
21 you certainly witnessed the difficulties, but can you describe what those were?

22 DS: Of course I turned 19 during basic. My birthday's in February. When I  
23 joined in January I turned 19 during basic training. There was a lot of guys who'd been  
24 drafted that just finished college, and had been drafted out right afterwards. I remember  
25 one guy was 26, which was pretty old for basic training actually. He was kind of a small  
26 guy. He was a history teacher, which is strange, that's what I'm looking in doing myself  
27 right now. I remember he marched in front of me I kind of had to help him a lot and push  
28 him and talk to him. He got through it. Finally he went in and I think he went into  
29 Armored unit or something. A lot of guys had turned down commissions that were  
30 college graduates. Almost every single one it seemed like got a combat arm of some  
31 type. Almost as punishment it looked like.

1           RV: During your basic training, did you keep that patriotic feeling that you said  
2 you had a little bit of that?

3           DS: Yes, we pretty well did. We sung all the songs about being an Airborne  
4 Ranger and all this. They offered us things like that, and I even was an assistant  
5 instructor in the bayonette training. Was on kind of like the drill team. Like you see the  
6 guys that do the guns, and you go out and march and you kick them around and swirl and  
7 do various things, kind of like an honor guard type deal. We performed at the actual  
8 graduation ceremony. I guess you could say I kept it all the way through.

9           RV: Excellent. What kind of weapons training did you receive in basic?

10          DS: In basic it was mostly the M-14. We threw a few grenades. It was basically  
11 the M-14, which we didn't see much after that. We were the last ones to use the M-14 I  
12 think after that they switched to the M-16s. Fourteens were a lot heavier, standard  
13 NATO rifle with the 7.62 caliber bullet far. The heavier gun isn't used in Vietnam very  
14 much except as a snipe weapon some I think.

15          RV: Had you handled weapons before you go to basic?

16          DS: Being a son of the south, I grew up hunting some, fishing. So I'd been deer  
17 hunting and squirrel hunting and things like that before, not a lot but some.

18          RV: What was your personal preference with weapons. I mean you did the M-  
19 14s. Did you train on grenades? Any rocket launchers or anything like that?

20          DS: No, just in standard basic. It was just really the M-14s and we threw some  
21 grenades, but mostly just the M-14s; basic training literally.

22          RV: How would you rate your training experience? Do you feel like you were  
23 trained well basically?

24          DS: I thought we were trained pretty well really. It was not much relief. You  
25 were in the Army; you did it their way pretty much. The ones that did were handled  
26 pretty roughly. It was obviously in your favor to not to know you really--Not to be too  
27 good or too bad actually.

28          RV: I've heard that before about kind of blending in.

29          DS: Much better. If they know your name they've got somebody to pick out for  
30 whatever reason; it's not good.

1           RV: Were any of your instructors Vietnam veterans or had they seen any combat  
2 before?

3           DS: I think all of them were just about. Some of them were even a little nervous  
4 and jerky. Most of our DIs, our drill instructors had been. The captain we had just a little  
5 bitty guy he had also been there. Our favorite instructor was a black sergeant that had  
6 just gotten back that was real good. I'll never forget him saying, 'You're not in your  
7 mama's kitchen any more, boys.' He told us pretty straight. I don't remember the man's  
8 name but he was a good soldier, I liked him.

9           RV: Was his name by the way Draper?

10          DS: I have no idea.

11          RV: I interviewed another veteran recently, and he spoke of a black DI who was  
12 excellent at Ft. Leonardwood.

13          DS: This was a great guy, he was a real tall black guy. I'm 6'2", he's taller than I  
14 am he's probably 6'7" and real thin.

15          RV: What did they tell you about Vietnam?

16          DS: We asked him things like, 'What's it like to be in combat'? 'What's it going  
17 to be like'? He said, 'Well, they're just as scared as you are. Don't worry. They're just  
18 as afraid as you are of them.' I thought it made a lot of sense actually. We're all human  
19 in the first place.

20          RV: When you finally did get to Vietnam looking back at your basic training,  
21 how prepared do you think it made you?

22          DS: Well about as much as you could be prepared. You can't really do it. Of  
23 course in the winter it wasn't really the greatest training for Vietnam. Wasn't very much  
24 snow over there that I saw anyway. It rained a lot, it was hot a lot. Other than the  
25 climatic differences, then I went to Ft. Devins, which was also cold. It was in  
26 Massachusetts.

27          RV: This is for your advanced training?

28          DS: Yes, my advanced training spent almost a year there. The training that I did  
29 was good, but you never can quite get it all. Of course I wasn't in an infantry unit, so I  
30 guess what I had was ample in basics. In knew how to shoot a gun and keep my head  
31 down.

1           RV: Let's talk about your advanced training. What was that like?

2           DS: That was different than anything I'd ever actually anticipated. It was the  
3 Army security agency; we were involved in MI branch. Now I think it's back into MI or  
4 military intelligence, at that part it was separated and they've kind of cloned it back into  
5 it. We were involved in communications security and various forms. They took you up  
6 there, and then they trained you, and after you develop a certain level of expertise and  
7 they would move you in a different area essentially. There was a lot of Morse code  
8 training, which was a real pain. Various military acronyms. Things, just the basic  
9 information if you needed communications and basic radios. They slowly divided us into  
10 different areas. We obviously became more proficient in one are or another. Some more  
11 people who were actually intercept operator s that could take real quick Morse code. A  
12 lot of them went to Sinop, Turkey and places like that where they were intercepting  
13 Russian sometimes, since they still used Morse code a great deal. The ones that were  
14 very good tend to get those kinds of jobs. I was not as proficient. Thank God, I didn't  
15 want to go into Turkey anyway. I didn't want to go to Vietnam either though. I asked  
16 for Germany, but that's another story. I got in this O-5G training, which was a  
17 communications, security monitor. We actually monitored our own troops, and showed  
18 them where they had screwed up essentially or made mistakes in the communication  
19 procedures. It was sometimes giving them shot. They were doing things in the clear  
20 where Charlie was intercepting and we could intercept them, and things of that nature.

21           RV: How did you get into that?

22           DS: Well, I guess it was by virtue of elimination. I wasn't quick enough to be  
23 what we called diddy bops, or the guys who intercepted. They just more or less put me in  
24 that area. That was it. That was no choice.

25           RV: When you actually first went to your advanced training, how did you get the  
26 military security, military intelligence?

27           DS: When I enlisted, joined the army for four years, I was allowed to pick what I  
28 wanted. I picked the Army security agency, so I could pick that area, but not exactly  
29 what I would do inside of it.

30           RV: Alright, so basically you trained for a year there. This was in  
31 Massachusetts?

1 DS: I think it was eleven months, it was almost a year.

2 RV: You trained in just basic communications and learning all the equipment?

3 DS: Right.

4 RV: How long into that advanced training until you found out you were going to  
5 Vietnam?

6 DS: We didn't know until the very end. We got our orders. You did not know  
7 until like the last minute.

8 RV: Did you suspect that where you might be going?

9 DS: We had an idea of course. It was 1969 at that time. You never know. I  
10 asked for Germany, I thought I'd go over there and see Europe, and that would be nice,  
11 and I wouldn't have to go over there and do this other thing, but that's not what  
12 happened.

13 RV: Describe how you felt when you got those orders and you knew you were  
14 going.

15 DS: It was kind of like, 'Oh, well.' I didn't really know what to think. I was just  
16 a kid. I was 19 then I think. I took my leave, went home and talked to my parents. Of  
17 course my mother wasn't crazy about the idea, having lost her first husband in World  
18 War II. I was the only one of the two brothers, and I had one sister that ever went in the  
19 military actually. I'm sure she worried a lot. I heard later she was really upset while I  
20 was gone, especially at Christmas time.

21 RV: Yes, how long was your leave?

22 DS: It was 30 days I believe because I'd be gone for a year. You get 30 days a  
23 year. Sometimes you get to take, and this time I did take the whole 30-day I believe.

24 RV: You went home basically?

25 DS: Yes, I went home stayed there and then I went back or I reported to I think  
26 Oakland where I had to go to be shipped overseas.

27 RV: Describe when you were leaving, I guess going over to Oakland, did you  
28 land in Oakland and usually you board a plane for Southeast Asia? Were you housed  
29 there for a few days?

30 DS: We had to be issued new equipment. I took a plane out of El Dorado, which  
31 is where I was living then, where I went to high school and everything. I flew out there.

1 You show up at the repo depot, your employment depot, and you walk in and you show  
2 them your orders, and they give you two pairs of this and two pairs of that and a duffle  
3 bag and give you all your equipment. Then you just wait around until you get your flight  
4 essentially. You're there for a couple of days, basically processing time I guess maybe.

5 RV: So you were there for a couple of days and you boarded the flight. Can you  
6 talk about that flight overseas when you left the United States?

7 DS: Then they were flying everybody in great big beautiful airplanes. It was a  
8 fairly easy trip except I've never flown 13,000 miles before. Like being born on the  
9 plane before you go there, and be ready to get off. It was a never ending plane trip. We  
10 had to switch planes a couple times. I went through Anchorage. Flew from California to  
11 Anchorage, which if you look on a globe, that'll look like it's should work. But  
12 apparently it's a pretty quick hop. Then to Japan. Actually we had an engine go out on  
13 the way over, which I thought was foreboding deal. We landed in Japan and they had to  
14 do something to an engine. They put us over in the Enlisted men's club EM club they  
15 called it. We were just flabbergasted. Beautiful Japanese girls were dancing with these  
16 lucky airmen over there. I thought, man what a deal these girls are beautiful. We drank  
17 beer, stuck a bunch in our pockets as we could. Ate steak and eventually got back on the  
18 plane when they fixed it.

19 RV: So from there you went straight to where, Okinawa?

20 DS: We were in Japan then. That was Akita, I believe. When we left Japan we  
21 went straight just to Saigon.

22 RV: What was the mood on the plane?

23 DS: We didn't know we were kids. Just like anybody before they've ever been  
24 there. You don't know. It's kind of euphoric. I mean there's some guys returning  
25 obviously some officers and some NCOs. Your noncoms, your sergeant types that have  
26 been there before; they're a little more subdued, most of us are semi-rowdy. They had a  
27 beautiful stewardess everybody was oogling the whole way. Scandinavian girls or  
28 something; had a great accent and they were all just gorgeous it seemed like.

29 RV: So you were kind of distracted there?

30 DS: Yes, they definitely distracted. Oh, it was a big party at this point.

1           RV: Right. So you land in Saigon. Describe that when you landed and got off  
2 the plane.

3           DS: Well, we got off the plane, and there were soldiers waiting to get on the  
4 plane. Of course they had faded uniforms, and ours were all brand new and you could  
5 tell we were new guys or FNGs as they called us. For 'freaking new guys' would be the  
6 polite way to say that.

7           RV: Say whatever you need to say.

8           DS: You can figure out the rest. That's vernacular I guess you might say.  
9 Anyway, they were waiting to get on the plane and they were cheering and they were  
10 happy, and they were saying stuff like look out for the claymores. They walked past us  
11 and got on. I think I remember I think that's the first time I saw some of these big metal  
12 sardine can that they sent human remain on it, which I didn't catch what it was at first.  
13 But those were obviously human remains going back. They were dead soldiers.

14          RV: How would you describe the morale of the American troops that you were  
15 landing with?

16          DS: Everybody still seemed, I didn't see any morale problems anywhere at least  
17 initially. There weren't any that I could tell; even the guys getting on the plane. This  
18 was still 1969, things hadn't gotten real bad back in the States yet, I don't think. If I  
19 remember, it seemed fine. We were young men.

20          RV: Did you understand at that point why you were there?

21          DS: I knew we were there to stop Communist aggression in Southeast Asia,  
22 basically the Domino Theory was essentially what everybody knew. We were there to  
23 help people. Always kind of compared it to North and South Korea. Help South Korea  
24 make its own self-determination and be a democracy.

25          RV: What was your first contact with the Vietnamese people? Was it there in  
26 Saigon?

27          DS: I guess contact would be when we settled in there I was originally at Tan  
28 Son Nhut Air Force Base. Was a huge Air Force Base there. From there I was processed  
29 and sent up. That's the first place I ran into where they had a lot of foreign nationals or  
30 Vietnamese that would live on base and do things for you. They did all the menial work  
31 we didn't want to do. They could be paid, probably good for local economy too. They

1 would shine the shoes and take care of the cleaning problems. Did a lot of the KP work  
2 and things like that.

3 RV: What was your impression of the Vietnamese people at that point?

4 DS: They were fine. I didn't know. I'd never been around any Asians at that  
5 point. Initially I was still kind of glad to be there I guess in a way. We went downtown  
6 to Saigon, and went to the bar and things and had fun for a little while.

7 RV: How long were you there in Saigon?

8 DS: Initially the first time I was there, I was only there for maybe a few weeks. I  
9 was sent up to Pleiku. We had four platoons in our unit basically. Third platoon was the  
10 headquarter unit there in Saigon. The second platoon was in Pleiku. The first platoon  
11 was in Da Nang. The fourth platoon was in Can Tho, which is in IV Corps, down in the  
12 southern part of the country. We did the support operations for Comsec. They would  
13 parcel us out as needed to go. We'd go with the unit for a while. We'd listen to them,  
14 and give them classes on what they did wrong and things like that to some degree.

15 RV: Can you describe that fuller? What exactly your job was?

16 DS: In the second platoon, first of all, I found out there I was allergic to Malaria  
17 pills. I thought I had a free ride home. Sent me back down. I thought wrong. They sent  
18 me down to Saigon again. A doctor down there said, 'No you can stay in Saigon. It's a  
19 relatively free, non-Malaria area.' I said, 'What do you mean relatively free?' He said,  
20 'Just that. Most people don't get it here.' Actually I never took another pill again  
21 because I got some big hives. Even though I did two tours, I never worried about.  
22 Obviously a mosquito never bit me because I don't have malaria today. Back to what we  
23 actually did though, we were kind of like Big Brother in a way. Literally, we would go in  
24 and listen via an Air Force Command. I've listened to generals talk. Nurses talk that was  
25 really interesting. Whatever unit we'd be listening to, when I was in the first tour  
26 especially, we would normally go in and tap into their phone exchange and wire into it,  
27 and then sit there all day long and record what they were saying. Doing various different  
28 things. Wire tapping or eaves dropping on our own people. Trying to keep them from  
29 getting information out.

30 RV: Were you on the ground doing this or where you in the air?

1 DS: We were on the ground. We were in the telephone exchanges. There were  
2 big telephone exchanges. It's actually had been built up somewhat. It was a country and  
3 they had telephone exchanges like you have here like Southwestern Bell. We'd go in  
4 there, and the mechanical people or the technicians would wire us in. The monitor, like  
5 myself would stay there all day long and monitor it and record things and write little  
6 synopsis on our little pads and how many calls they did and things like that.

7 RV: Did the people know they were being recorded?

8 DS: No. Sometimes they knew if the officer in charge didn't want to get a bad  
9 rapport, he might spread the word around. You could tell sometimes they would know,  
10 but they weren't supposed to know.

11 RV: Did you ever listen to combat situations or was it mainly just instructions in  
12 the field?

13 DS: It varied. I heard some generals once talking about the arch light, which is a  
14 B-52 bombing strike coming out of Thailand. They were giving coordinates and things  
15 like that. I wrote all that down and I thought I had a big deal. These guys defiantly were  
16 saying things they shouldn't be saying. The report was never sent in because they were  
17 generals, and you didn't mess with generals (laughs).

18 RV: Which generals? Do you remember who you listened to?

19 DS: They were Air Force generals; I have no idea who they were in hindsight.  
20 They were like major generals; they had a couple of stars.

21 RV: Did you like this work or did you find it boring or exciting.

22 DS: It got boring after a while, because there wasn't much to it. It was basically  
23 sit there and record and flip around. After a while I got the promoted fairly fast, and then  
24 became an analyst, which was a little more fun. Then you took the raw information and  
25 try to sit down and figure out what was going on in that unit, and wrote a report based  
26 around the raw data that had been taken by the monitors.

27 RV: How long were you doing the listening and then you transition to the  
28 analyst? How long was that?

29 DS: My first tour probably six, eight months. Probably six months, something  
30 like that. I was a monitor and then I was moved in to an analyst. I got promoted fairly  
31 fast up to the E-5 rank. There's nine enlisted rank. I go tot the E-5 level pretty quick.

1 RV: The first six months you were there, you're in Pleiku?

2 DS: About a month they sent me back down to Saigon because of the Malaria  
3 pills.

4 RV: You stayed down there in Saigon then?

5 DS: Right we stayed at Saigon, most of the time. But then they would send us  
6 out to other places too. You know you're stationed at Saigon, you might go to Can Tho  
7 for two weeks on a mission. You'd do a convoy, and you'd drive down there and you  
8 would do whatever the monitoring request was.

9 RV: What kind of side arms did you carry?

10 DS: We had a gun in every pocket it seemed like. Longer you were there, the  
11 more guns you collected. You would swap out or somebody would be leaving, you'd  
12 trade them for something. We were issued 14s, M-14s originally, which we carried on  
13 guard duty there in Saigon. After a while we were going to the field more we had M-16s.  
14 We all had top-secret clearances, if I didn't mention that we did. We had top-secret  
15 crypto clearances. We would carry .45s, and if there was any courier work, sometimes  
16 they were short on guys who could do this, which was kind of silly in a way. Anyway I  
17 carried a .45 when I was doing any courier work. I had an M-1 carbine and later we  
18 acquired some M-79 grenade launchers. We tried to stay pretty well armed whenever we  
19 went anywhere. You never knew what was going to happen.

20 RV: Describe that courier work you did.

21 DS: The courier work was just that. They gave you some stuff to carry and you  
22 would wait for a chopper somewhere and you'd catch it like you would a bus here in the  
23 States. It would fly you somewhere; it had regular stops and pick-ups. You would drop  
24 off, you would pick up this document, fly over here and drop it off someplace else.  
25 These helicopters. Of course those guys thought they were John Wayne in helicopters. It  
26 got kind of scary a couple times. Those things are just big tin cans. We always carried  
27 two flak vests. You sat on one for obvious reasons, and you wore one because they were  
28 shooting up from below you.

29 RV: Did you ever get fired upon?

30 DS: Yes. We had been flying at night. They had green tracers. We had red  
31 tracers. They had like .51 caliber machine guns. We had .50 caliber, so they could use

1 our bullets we couldn't use theirs. I thought that was pretty sneaky for Communists.  
2 Sometimes even the red traces were theirs. Every seventh bullet is a tracer. Sometimes  
3 there'd be a solid line of green tracers right outside your door in your widow there. That  
4 wasn't cool, I didn't think. These guys want to go around and shoot them. I'd always  
5 pull out my clearance sheet that said top-secret, even if it was confidential I always  
6 carried top secret, that way I could get the guys attention. I'd tap on the pilot's head and  
7 show him that and do my finger up and he had to fly away from this incoming, which I  
8 thought was a good idea, personally.

9 RV: That's a pretty good security mechanism.

10 DS: Well, it worked.

11 RV: Describe living in Saigon, what was that like?

12 DS: Well, Saigon when you're a young man and all the sins that are available  
13 there. You know the bars and bordellos of Saigon; we had a riotous time I guess. All  
14 men do in all wars, when they have a chance.

15 RV: What did you do exactly?

16 DS: For entertainment purposes when we went to Saigon we'd usually go to a bar  
17 and try to pick up a girl. A Vietnamese girl, which normally called out X number of  
18 piasters. It was a prostitution deal obviously. You'd pay them whatever was going rate  
19 and you could pick them out just like you go to the candy store almost.

20 RV: I guess it was really easy to get these girls?

21 DS: Yes, it just took money. I mean sure.

22 RV: When you were in these bars, were you around people who were on leave  
23 from the field?

24 DS: Yes, there was all kinds of guys. You'd have a mix of humanity there.  
25 Saigon was really interesting, like any Southeast Asia place is. I mean there's just mass  
26 humanity teaming and bicycles and dong carts as we called them. It's just a mass  
27 humanity everywhere. There was all kind of soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, officers,  
28 enlisted. It was just a mixed humanity.

29 RV: What was the morale like? I'm sure they were happy to be there in a bar  
30 versus in the field?

1 DS: It was pretty good overall. You did see some racial problems come in after a  
2 while. A lot of the black soldiers, I don't know what happened out in the field. But there  
3 were some incidents. You'd see them. They'd have these black hand salutes they would  
4 do. It would take them five minutes to shake hands sometimes it seemed like. We  
5 always thought that was funny, which they didn't like of course either. There wasn't but  
6 a few in our unit and they were all great guys out in the field. Obviously there were some  
7 problems with some units. I wasn't really privy to a lot of that. But I did see them being  
8 a little aggressive sometimes on the streets of Saigon. But never pointing guns or  
9 anything. At least I didn't see that.

10 RV: There really weren't any race issues that you noticed?

11 DS: That I saw personally, no. We'd hear about somebody shooting in the  
12 barracks and things like that. But it didn't happen where I was, not for racial reasons.  
13 Later for tension reasons we had some incidents, but never that I know of any racial  
14 reasons. We all got along fine, in the units I was in.

15 RV: Describe those tension-related incidents.

16 DS: Well, that was later on during my second tour to jump ahead a little bit.  
17 During the second tour, when I'd come back I'd spent four months after I finished my  
18 first tour, I had gone to Ft. Meade, Maryland, where I was with the 414<sup>th</sup> Armored there  
19 for about four months. It was right there down from D.C. on the beltway, where Ft.  
20 Meade is located. That's where NSA headquarters is for example. It was pretty boring.  
21 People didn't like you very much. I was spit on once in an airport. Had my uniform on  
22 because I was a GI.

23 RV: We'll get to that point how you were reception backing the United States.  
24 During this first tour again, back. You were there a year. You were basically stationed in  
25 Saigon, you did this courier work. You went out on missions. Like you said you went on  
26 these two-week missions down to Can Tho, what was that like? Describe.

27 DS: There was actually several missions like that. Can Tho, I was with the 5<sup>th</sup>  
28 Special Force for a month at their headquarters unit, Cam Rahn Bay I believe. We'd go  
29 and we would fly. We'd get in the C-130, we'd drive our truck in there with our ammo  
30 on the back of it. We would fly down there or we would drive down there depending on

1 the situation. Then you'd unload and hook up. We had this mobile unit essentially. You  
2 would listen to the traffic and do the reports like I mentioned before and turn them in.

3 RV: So basically you're down there, you listen to what was happening and then  
4 you come back?

5 DS: Right same thing when we were with the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces and things like  
6 that. Whatever was going on we were sent there.

7 RV: You did some traveling there? What did you think of Vietnam the country  
8 itself?

9 DS: Other than obviously the holes in the ground from the bombing in some  
10 cases, which you see more when you're flying in a chopper. But it was a beautiful  
11 country actually. There was Buddhist little monuments or whatever they have, alters  
12 everywhere. It was really a pretty country other than the fact the war was going on and  
13 tearing it up. Pleiku, the Central Highlands was extremely beautiful. It kind of reminded  
14 me of north Arkansas, a rainy place where you have mountainous areas and rivers and  
15 things like that. The country's a beautiful country.

16 RV: As you were there longer, what did you think of the Vietnamese people?

17 DS: The longer you were there I think you tended to look down on some of the  
18 Vietnamese soldiers. They didn't seem like they really wanted to do the deal very much.  
19 It was their country. I think they kind of just caved in and let us do it. I think a lot of the  
20 problem though on further reflection and more education now is with the officer corps  
21 was probably corrupt.

22 RV: You're talking about ARVN here?

23 DS: Yes, ARVN.

24 RV: You feel like they just kind of caved?

25 DS: Except for their elite units, some of which were pretty elite. The first two we  
26 ran across where the trained ARVN airborne from Tan Son Nhut. The ARVN airborne  
27 trained right across from us, which is the reason we got hit a lot because we were right  
28 there. Plus the (?) was close by. They parked them in the bunkers. Some of them were  
29 great. I never had any problems with them per se, but it just didn't seem like they. I  
30 guess they had been at war so long it didn't matter anymore. I don't know. The  
31 corruption was so great. I didn't think the general population was really behind it that

1 much. I never had any complaints of any of the ARVN soldiers I was around per se or  
2 any of the Koreans I was around.

3 RV: What were the Korean like?

4 DS: The Koreans were great guys. We were going somewhere. Maybe when we  
5 were going with the Special Forces that time. We stopped at one air base, and it was  
6 going to be several hours before we got our connecting flight and some ARVNs walked  
7 by and asked me to watch their vehicle. I said, 'Sure.' They said, 'Come on, Sergeant,  
8 you can go with us.' I was a buck sergeant by then, and I had two other guys underneath  
9 me. I said, 'Sure.' These guys could walk like jackrabbits. We walked over to their  
10 compound, which was several miles away. I had no idea what I was getting myself in for  
11 here. We walked over there and went to their officers' club. We sat there and drank beer  
12 until we couldn't drink it. They told me their war stories and how they're there for two  
13 years and not one year like us. They were real proud. They were real tough about it.  
14 They liked us a lot. We drank until we couldn't drink anymore. Then we had to walk  
15 back this four or five miles, whatever it was. It didn't seem to bother them as much as it  
16 did me. But I had a large time.

17 RV: Can we talk about if you don't mind, your religion there? There's a cliché  
18 that when you're in the field, when you're in a war situation, people tend to get more  
19 religious.

20 DS: I know I've always heard that. I guess maybe if you're in the hole getting  
21 pounded by artillery that's probably more true. I think that's probably my least religious  
22 period in my life. I guess because I was just young and tough and I was going to live  
23 forever. There's nothing wrong with me whatsoever, I probably had my least amount of  
24 any religious inclination the whole time I was in the Army. I just kind of lost touch with  
25 it completely. As I got back and was around my mother more and things like that, I  
26 started going to church again. But when I was in the military it was almost a non-event  
27 for me.

28 RV: Was there a lot of alcohol use amongst the troops?

29 DS: Yes.

30 RV: Was this basically in the bars? I guess you witnessed this in Saigon more.

1 DS: In the bars and on the bases too. There's not much to do. Like if you see in  
2 anything, there's long period of nothing going on or you're bored to tears. Then  
3 something happens which you wish hadn't happened perhaps. There's long boring  
4 periods where you don't do very much. Alcohol was readily available. We had bars on  
5 base. Enlisted mens clubs, they were called EM clubs or NCO clubs. Like a sergeant,  
6 like you can go to both. I was actually both, an E-5, I could go to both places. I usually  
7 went to the EM club though. But I mean they had nickel nights for beer. Quarter for  
8 mixed drinks. You could just hurt yourself with a few dollars.

9 RV: What kind of beer did you have available?

10 DS: Well, they'd have most of the standard brands. Sometimes you got stuck  
11 with nothing but Carlin and Black Label, which was never that great. But depending on I  
12 guess what had been flown in. You could usually find what you wanted, in the nicer  
13 clubs you could, especially NCO clubs you could. EM club wasn't quite as stocked, but  
14 there was usually plenty of booze around everywhere. All you could drink. It was  
15 incredible.

16 RV: How about drug use, did you see a lot of drug use?

17 DS: I didn't see any during my first tour. I'd heard about it a little bit. But I was  
18 still a boy from El Dorado, Arkansas, an eagle scout and I was straight arrow. I wasn't  
19 around it very much. Not at all the first year. I only heard a few whispers about it, but I  
20 never saw it at all, my first tour.

21 RV: How about your second tour?

22 DS: Second tour, the first thing they told me, 'Sergeant Shivers, things have  
23 changed. Try this.' I wasn't even checked in yet. I said, 'Guys I can't do this.' They  
24 said, 'Yes, you can.' They had a joint rolled. I said, 'I haven't even checked in.' They  
25 said, 'Don't worry it's already taken care of.' I said, 'What's happened?' While I was  
26 gone that four months I was in the 414<sup>th</sup> up at Ft. Meade, that's when Nixon sent the  
27 troops into Cambodia chasing that big NVA headquarters unit. The guys when they  
28 came back it was totally different. It was like black and white. It's the strangest thing.  
29 It's like a 180 happened. Even in my unit where guys had all top-secret clearances and  
30 most of them had some college at that point it was just overnight. It went from straight to  
31 Haight-Ashbury almost.

1           RV: Wow! Why do you think that was?

2           DS: I think then, during those few months, I guess that it really soaked in more  
3 about the whole negative situation back in the States. I mean we saw it all the time on  
4 TVs anyway. When I was there all the riots were going on in D.C., the Days of Rage or  
5 whatever it was. They'd block all the traffic in D.C. one day. It was just incredible what  
6 was going on. It was all kinds of protests. I couldn't believe it sometimes. We put a  
7 man on the moon and we had this going on and we had these riots. It was just incredible  
8 what was going on in the United States at that time. It was just real busy.

9           RV: You first witnessed this in person I guess, maybe when you went back to  
10 Maryland to do your training?

11          DS: The what?

12          RV: The four months you spent back stateside; did you witness any of these  
13 protests?

14          DS: Only on television. I didn't actually go. It just wasn't' advisable. It was  
15 obvious by the clothes we had and our short haircuts. The only shoes we really had were  
16 these low quarters, which were the military dress shoes. We stuck out like a sore thumb.  
17 Most people treated like you were second-class citizens. It wasn't worth the put-downs.  
18 I mean I went down to D.C. a few times, but it really wasn't worth the put down.

19          RV: When you flew back to the States, what was that like for you? Did you  
20 know you were going back for a second d tour?

21          DS: I volunteered to go back for a second tour.

22          RV: Why did you volunteer to go back?

23          DS: I got just sick of where I was at Ft. Meade, Maryland. It was just a boring  
24 deal. There was some tension there between some of the blacks, not with me, but with  
25 some of the other guys that were really hard-core southerners you might say from South  
26 Carolina. Especially those guys can be a little more radical sometimes I think. There  
27 was a little bit of problem. There they'd talk, it would just be talk stuff. Nothing ever  
28 happened physically. You could see some tension was developing then. It just wasn't  
29 any fun. I mean it was boring; we had nothing really to do. We were just hanging out  
30 actually we were doing nothing on a daily basis. We were getting our little APCs, Armed  
31 Personnel Carriers, we'd drive around out in the woods somewhere and sit back and have

1 some beers stashed. We'd drink beer and just goof off all day, there was nothing going  
2 on. It was easier in a way to go back. Actually, when I got back I was glad to be back, as  
3 strange as that sounds now. I was back where I understood what was going on. It was  
4 just like going home almost when I got back to Vietnam a second time. It was strange in  
5 hindsight especially. I remember feeling relieved to be back out of the States and all this  
6 commotion going on.

7 RV: Wow! That's interesting. You were committed to the Army for four years,  
8 is that correct?

9 DS: Doing it for four years. I got out a little early, because when I got back off  
10 my second tour, if you had six months or less, they gave you an early out.

11 RV: So, when you went back to Maryland to Ft. Meade, you knew that you were  
12 going to be in for another couple years?

13 DS: I had a couple of years.

14 RV: You thought perhaps this was the better deal, just to go back?

15 DS: I just couldn't stand it. It was just too strict. I don't know. It just was very  
16 trying and I didn't like it at all.

17 RV: How were you treated by the civilians in the United States when you came  
18 back?

19 DS: As a big military area, I guess they get so used to you, and spending money  
20 and everything. You don't get the respect I don't think or the treatment you should,  
21 especially during Vietnam for obvious reasons we know about now. I got spit on in the  
22 airport once. I wasn't treated that well. People would ignore you. Look down on you a  
23 little bit. It was distasteful.

24 RV: Can you describe that spitting incident?

25 DS: That happened with a little girl when I was in Washington. It was called  
26 Washington then, it's Reagan International Airport now. I walked by this young college  
27 girl, she just turned around and spit on my shoes and walked by. I turned around and  
28 gave her a look. About that time an MP walked up I told him what happened he just told  
29 me to go on and shake it off.

30 RV: This is when you're coming back from your first tour?

31 DS: Yes.

1 RV: She didn't say anything to you?

2 DS: No, one of those smirks deals. Like, 'You're not any good,' kind of looks.  
3 The look.

4 RV: Did you find that was common experience with Vietnam veterans coming  
5 back or was that sporadic or what?

6 DS: I've heard some other people say the same thing. I don't know how  
7 common it was. They didn't come spit in my face or anything, they just kind of spit at  
8 my shoes. It hit my shoes when I walked by, but it was on purpose. They were showing  
9 the fact they thought I was some kind of baby killer, rapists, murderer, whatever I don't  
10 know. Which couldn't be further from the truth.

11 RV: Did you feel like telling her?

12 DS: It wouldn't have done any good. There wasn't an open mind to deal with.  
13 She'd already had a judgment obviously. She didn't know me.

14 RV: Yes, obviously. When you were there in your first tour, how much TV  
15 exposure, how did you know what was going on back in the States? Were you able to  
16 watch TV every night?

17 DS: We didn't really have to, we had the *Stars and Stripes*. We had radios.  
18 *Stars and Stripes* was a military publication. I don't remember any TVs. We had some  
19 outdoor movies we'd go to. We hung a big sheet up, we'd throw beer cans at it when  
20 we'd watch the movie. It was something out of MASH or something.

21 RV: Were you able to keep up with the news back home?

22 DS: There may have been some TVs. I don't remember any TVs offhand at all.  
23 There must have been some somewhere, but I don't remember any.

24 RV: Let's just talk about your second tour. You go back in country, where are  
25 you assigned and what are you going to be doing?

26 DS: On the second tour I went back, in fact I went to a briefing there at NSA  
27 headquarters before I went back, which is fairly interesting. I'd seen some of the work,  
28 I'd done during the first tour. They were using it as briefing material on this Project  
29 Touchdown. I got an award for it during the first time. In fact it was late in my first tour.  
30 Back when the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry had captured an NVA/VC Intel unit, below ground. They  
31 were intercepting our information. They were kind of like our counterparts. They were

1 intercepting it. They had written down in long hand English, which amazed me on small  
2 rice paper, pieces of rice paper that were rectangular shaped. About half the size of  
3 regular piece of paper. They had the call signs down there, and whoever they were  
4 talking about. They had a little synopsis of what was going on. They were collecting  
5 intell like on the big red one or the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, whoever they were monitoring  
6 they had it down there. It was a great thing we found. The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry found, they  
7 called me in to be an analyst on it. These little pieces of rice paper with initials over in  
8 the corner. There were hundreds of them. I was going through them and I could tell  
9 which ones I'd been through and did a big report on it. They had that as briefing material  
10 at the NSA headquarters, which was kind of interesting. I asked a bunch of questions,  
11 they didn't know who I was at the times. But I was the guy that had little 'DS' over in  
12 the corner, which I explained to them. They all got excited for a little while. But after I  
13 had the briefing I flew back. Basically I had another leave, went home saw my parents  
14 again. Flew back, got the same deal, checked in like I told you real quick. The guys  
15 picked me up at the airport, they knew I was coming. Had my old bunk back and  
16 everything.

17 RV: How did you parents feel about you going back for a second tour?

18 DS: My mother almost died I think. I heard later my sister, she cried about  
19 everybody gone. She passed away this last summer. It was a very trying time for her  
20 obviously. I missed two Christmases. For many years I heard about the Christmases I  
21 wasn't there. I'm a sad deal for her, obviously.

22 RV: Where did you go in country, when you went back to Vietnam the second  
23 time?

24 DS: The second time, we by then had moved to Long Binh or actually the  
25 plantation end of Long Binh, which was about 30 miles. I forgot which direction, east or  
26 west of Saigon. It was in that area, but it was 30-40 miles from there. It was a huge  
27 Army base, and plantation was the very end of it. In fact, it had practically been overrun  
28 in '68, which was not always a good feeling. During the big TET Offensive, they  
29 actually overrun them. They had them inside the wires there. I had been there towards  
30 the end of my first tour, went back there to the same place. We would do missions out of  
31 there. We would go somewhere or we would stay there. The longer I was in my second

1 tour, the less we had to do. As more and more units were leaving Vietnam, they were  
2 already doing the draw down then. It started in the 199<sup>th</sup>. Nixon started withdrawing  
3 troops, so there's less and less people to support. After a while, we didn't have a whole  
4 lot to do towards the end. I was giving classes to incoming officers on this Operation  
5 Touchdown, which had the first year we used it as a big training class to go out. Mostly  
6 during my second tour, that's what I did was go out and give classes to incoming officers  
7 or grunts or whatever they might be, on this particular threat, this communication security  
8 threat and how to counter it, and what to do and how to use their little code books and  
9 stuff like that.

10 RV: Make sure they didn't spill any secrets or they acted properly while they  
11 were talking.

12 DS: Right. It was kind of an orientation deal, plus they had to have like anything  
13 you have to be retrained sometimes and reminded of things. We'd go out sometimes and  
14 give classes to them out in the field, or do a monitoring mission or whatever it would be.

15 RV: How was it like when you went to the field to talk to these guys? Were they  
16 resentful of you, that you had a rear position?

17 DS: I'm sure some of them did. I probably would have been too, if I had been  
18 these young guys. Most of the time their butts were on the line. We were telling them  
19 the right stuff, and I had a pretty good program down. We had captured equipment we  
20 used and demonstrations. It got to be where it was a pretty good 25-30 minute whatever.  
21 We could make it longer or shorter if we wanted to type of presentation. Actually it was  
22 good information for them. Hopefully it saved some lives.

23 RV: How often did you go out in the field to do that?

24 DS: Whenever we were assigned. It would vary. It might go a couple times in a  
25 week. We might not go for two weeks. Might be somewhere for two weeks, it would  
26 just depend on whatever mission came down, and we were told what to do and where to  
27 go.

28 RV: Did you, back at your base, near Long Binh; did you pull guard duty?

29 DS: I had guard duty every...Even when I got to be an E-5, which is fairly  
30 quickly. I had guard duty every fourth night I was there for both tours. Every third of

1 fourth night I was on guard duty. I had big markers with machine guns and everything  
2 there.

3 RV: What did you do? You just hung out in the bunkers or did you walk around?

4 DS: We would normally stay in the bunkers. If we heard anything we'd shoot  
5 flares up. We always went out and checked our clackers or all of what they called  
6 Phugas, which was basically Napalm on the ground. It was pretty nasty stuff, wired up,  
7 and claymore mines. You always go up and check to make sure they weren't pointed  
8 towards you, which Charlie would do sometimes. They'd come in and turn them mines  
9 around. So when you shot them off they start shooting about 10,000 ball bearings at you  
10 instead of him. I always made sure they pointed in the right direction. Had to be careful;  
11 had of course the C-4 in there, which was pretty explosive. You sit there and wait and  
12 see what happened. You'd be up in a tower or down on a ground in the garden bunker  
13 type deal or up in a tall one, which was made out of huge basically telephone type poles.  
14 You had them M-60 machine gun, you had the clackers, which was the firing pins for the  
15 Napalm on the ground as well as with claymore mines. Then you had flares. You had  
16 M-79 grenade launchers. You had your M-16s, you had everything laid out and loaded  
17 and ready. If something happened you had plenty to shoot with for a while anyway.

18 RV: Did anything ever happen when you were on duty?

19 DS: Not really. We would get shelled sometimes. There wasn't very many  
20 actual times we got hit. I was fairly lucky, it either happened the day before I go there or  
21 the day after I left it seemed like the whole time I was over there. A few times you might  
22 pop off some rounds if you heard something out there, just to make sure and keep them  
23 honest. Not that I know of, did I ever actually shoot anybody. I may have, but not that I  
24 know of.

25 RV: So, you did fire your own weapon?

26 DS: I did fire it, yes sometimes. When we heard noises, yes we would shoot.  
27 We'd shoot up flares and pop off some rounds and see what happened. If we got any  
28 return, then we knew to ask for help real quick and fire what we had. That never actually  
29 happened to me. It was supposed to happen a couple of times, but I never was in a full  
30 assault or anything. Thank God.

31 RV: Yes, tell me about when you were being shelled, what was that like?

1 DS: Well, that's really a pretty scary deal, because there's nothing you can do.  
2 Bunkers are only designed for near misses. If you get a direct hit, you're just going to  
3 blow up like tomato juice can. You're just going to be a big pink splash. So, that was  
4 kind of scary. All you could do was grab the ground and pray. I'd been blown out of the  
5 bed one time in the middle of night. That was the closest I ever got to getting a rocket  
6 right on my head apparently. I never slept on the top bunk again. We had some sniper  
7 rounds a couple times come close. We were driving our trucks down the road going on a  
8 mission. Of course the incoming happened all the time in various places. Incoming  
9 happened all the time. Most of the time they weren't close, but you could always hear  
10 them. It was always scary and the ground would shake. Sometimes they got close, but  
11 usually they weren't.

12 RV: Did you ever see the enemy at all?

13 DS: I probably saw him daily and didn't know it. As far as no, not that I know  
14 of.

15 RV: You mean you might have seen Viet Cong?

16 DS: Yes, because the Viet Cong were just local farmers most of the time. It  
17 could have even been NVA. I mean they were all the same race of people. They didn't  
18 wear the uniforms out in public I don't imagine they could. The NVA were regular units  
19 so they tended to be in the field, your VC could be anywhere though. I think in one place  
20 right after I left, they pulled a barber off the wire. He'd been tried trying to come in. The  
21 guy had been cutting people's hair the day before, was a sapper coming in the next night.

22 RV: That's pretty unusual.

23 DS: They have them inside the compound working, doing everything in the  
24 world for you. They would be marking off stuff. They knew right where to put the  
25 charges or mark the mortar and everything.

26 RV: What kind of defenses did you have against something like that with the VC  
27 or actually in amongst yourselves?

28 DS: Well, we had the basic weapons I mentioned on guard duty. Of course you  
29 had radios, you could call in air support. I've watched the choppers, the Cobra gunships  
30 they would work out in teams of three sometimes. When I was on guard duty I watched  
31 them a couple times, and was glad I wasn't in the receiving end of them. One of them

1 would come over and had these mini guns that shot several thousand rounds a minute.  
2 They're basically gattling guns, modern gattling guns. Had muffle barrels. They would  
3 come over, and you'd just hear kind of a 'beep!' Kind of a blast, and you'd see a wave of  
4 fire come out of it. Only every seventh round was a tracer. It was a solid sheet of fire  
5 coming out of it. It would pass, the second one would come in, do the same thing. It  
6 would pass, then the third one would come in and it would pass. By then the first one  
7 was back around again. You catch three of them working on one position. Whoever was  
8 on the ground, if they weren't under the ground literally, in a tunnel or something, they  
9 were dead.

10 RV: What was your impression of the enemy, starting with the Viet Cong? What  
11 did you think of the VC?

12 DS: From that first mission especially, I was really amazed that these people that  
13 I thought were pretty uneducated, were taking that Project Touchdown I mentioned, they  
14 were taking in longhand English, American communications. I was flabbergasted. I  
15 didn't think enough of them had that much schooling basically to do that. They weren't  
16 writing it in Vietnamese, they were writing it in English. The reason I could read it. I  
17 was amazed at that sophistication in that respect. They had some rude equipment but  
18 they had converted it over and it worked. That was all that counts in a war. If it works or  
19 not. It didn't look fancy. Some of it was captured American equipment. Some of it was  
20 a Sony radio had been converted to send and receive. I was amazed that this particular  
21 unit that I dealt with a lot, not on a direct level but through their work, what they were  
22 doing. I was impressed. They obviously were very dedicated.

23 RV: Why do you think they were?

24 DS: Whenever you protect your homeland, you've got a much stronger situation I  
25 think. Just like when we went into Germany in World War II, Germans fought even  
26 harder. When you protect your homeland you're going to be fighting harder. I don't  
27 think they looked at it as a civil war as much as we did. The corrupt Vietnamese  
28 government I think had a big influence on that. In fact most of them weren't that  
29 educated and they just had to go do it. They took a tremendous casualty. Bu they never  
30 showed up, they didn't have the freedom that we have to show every stupid mistake that

1 we made. We essentially won the battles and lost the war. Or at least our surrogates that  
2 essentially pulled out in '72.

3 RV: What about the NVA, what did you know about them? What was your  
4 impression of the regular Army?

5 DS: I had never had any contact with them per se. Again, the evidence I saw and  
6 people that I talked to that had been involved with them, they were pretty dedicated and  
7 very good. I went on Special Forces for month at Cam Rahn, they had some captured  
8 equipment and stuff. It's pretty ingenious, turning coke cans into hand grenades and  
9 things like that. They could make due with very little.

10 RV: Did you have any R&Rs while you were there?

11 DS: On my second tour I took two R&Rs. I didn't have any on my first tour,  
12 which was surprising, for whatever reason. I went to Bangkok twice during my second  
13 tour, especially towards the end. I'd taken them both almost back to back in fact.

14 RV: What was Bangkok like?

15 DS: Bangkok was great. It was again a young man's virtual paradise as far as  
16 going to bars and restaurants. Went down to the beach, we all had girls, and we just had  
17 a large time. We just partied the whole time.

18 RV: Was it a good morale booster?

19 DS: It was great, what do you think?

20 RV: Sounds like it would help you get away from the war.

21 DS: It was wonderful. I would have liked to have gone to Sydney, but I could  
22 never get enough time or something. I don't know how that worked that in two years I  
23 couldn't get a time to go over there. They said I didn't have enough time in country. I  
24 was amazed at that answer. So, I went to Bangkok twice.

25 RV: What about USO, did you ever see any shows?

26 DS: We saw some, not a lot. There would be some, we watched them  
27 occasionally; they were nice when they were around.

28 RV: What were they like?

29 DS: Just about what you see on television. A bunch of screaming GIs and there  
30 was as bunch of good looking girls or Bob Hope up there on the stage telling jokes and  
31 doing things. It's just exactly like you see on television.

1           RV: You did see Bob Hope?

2           DS: No, I think he drove past where I was once. But I wasn't ever in the right  
3 place to actually see him.

4           RV: Did you guys have any pets while you were there?

5           DS: Yes, we did. Especially that second tour we had several dogs. In fact, one  
6 of the guys took his dog home with him. We called him Earl the dog.

7           RV: Earl the dog?

8           DS: Earl the dog. He was a good dog. He was always fighting with the big black  
9 dog in the next unit. He usually lost. Every once in a while he'd get him really by the  
10 you know whats and he would win then. The other dog wouldn't come back for a while.  
11 He was a pretty particular dog. We'd give him steaks and he wouldn't eat it. If you  
12 picked it up and put it on a plate then he would eat it. He'd go back behind, kind of away  
13 from us. He was a real interesting dog.

14          RV: I guess he was a Vietnamese dog over there in Vietnam.

15          DS: He was just a white dog, I don't know what kind he was. He was just a mutt  
16 I'm sure like the other ones. We had a couple of them like that over there that were  
17 pretty neat dogs. Had some cats. In fact, one of the cats got pregnant and died I think.  
18 But we had dogs around.

19          RV: Did you ever see any wild animals when you were doing your tours around  
20 the country?

21          DS: I think some mongoose tried to come in on us a couple times. We fired on  
22 them though; we didn't know what they were.

23          RV: You mean tried to come in the barracks?

24          DS: On guard duty, they'd be out there messing around in front of you and you  
25 hear a noise and you just cut loose just in case. Fire couple flares up. Of course the ODS  
26 and the officers they would call you to know what was going on and you'd tell them.  
27 They'd say ok. But I never had an encounter with lions or tigers or anything like that.

28          RV: Did you see any snakes?

29          DS: No, I never saw any snakes I don't think. The biggest roaches I ever saw in  
30 my life. The most aggressive roaches I've ever seen in my life. Those bugs, I don't  
31 know. I've seen them come straight at me before. It was weird. Mosquitoes were bad.

1 We had little tiny fans in our hut and we'd scrounge up and turn the barracks into  
2 individual cubes. You'd have your black lights and your posters in there and things like  
3 that. Have little fans over your bed where it would blow constantly to keep the  
4 mosquitoes off you normally. Sometimes they'd get in. Especially big cockroaches were  
5 really aggressive. I'll never forget a couple times when they flew straight at my face, like  
6 they were attacking almost. Kind of weird.

7 RV: Can you talk a little bit about the drug use your second tour? You said it had  
8 really changed.

9 DS: It changed from a bunch of Dudley Do-Rights almost to...Still we did our  
10 job and everything, but there was a lot of marijuana around.

11 RV: I was going to ask you what type? What did you see?

12 DS: I did see people do other things than that, but nobody that I knew did  
13 anything beside drink beer and smoke. Some people did get into needles. I've talked to  
14 guys that have done that. I've been around them, and they tried to talk me into it. They  
15 weren't actually from our unit, they were some guys we just ran into. I thought they were  
16 crazy. There was a lot of heroin I found out also. I didn't even realize what it was. I was  
17 going through a unit, we were next door to over there at Long Binh at one point. Had a  
18 couple of different locations over there. But it was a cavalry unit, only it was the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav  
19 or whatever it was. There was a bunch of little bitty vials about the size of thimbles on  
20 the ground. It like carpeted the ground. There was hundreds, thousands of them. I didn't  
21 know what they were. I asked somebody they said, 'You idiot, don't you know what that  
22 is?' I said, 'I had no idea.' 'That's what the heroin comes in.' That's what the little kids  
23 on the highway would hold up when we would drive there. 'Yes, they're trying to sell  
24 you heroin.' It just blew my mind, I had no idea. I was just completely ignorant about  
25 that. Apparently it was going on pretty heavy in some of the combat units. When I was  
26 facing some of these guys, I would ask them about that. They said, 'Yes, they brought  
27 the dogs in so they can smell the marijuana, but we can put the heroin in our cigarettes  
28 and they can't tell.' I thought that was fairly interesting.

29 RV: Did you ever see any officers doing drugs?

30 DS: No, but I heard that some of them did after I left. They tried to actually kill  
31 our CO after I left (laughs).

1           RV: I was going to ask you about fragging in just a minute.

2           DS: I never saw any officers doing drugs per se.

3           RV: Let's talk about that fragging incident. Did you ever hear of fragging?

4           DS: We heard of it. During, this is again the second tour I think. Maybe it was  
5 the first half of the second tour. We had one guy I later found out from New York that  
6 threw a thermal grenade – we didn't have except on guard duty. We didn't have any  
7 hand grenades like you see, these pineapple grenades like you used in World War II. We  
8 didn't have those. Remember we had thermal grenades, phosphorous grenades to melt  
9 down equipment if it were captured. If you get overrun you melt down all your crypto  
10 stuff, all your classified stuff you melt down. We had those kind of grenades. They were  
11 just white hot. It could go through the block of a car engine. One of us, whoever it was.  
12 I'm not sure I think it was a Puerto Rican from New York that threw one on top of the  
13 NCOs barracks. Of course it had a tin roof and it melted through in just no time. Landed  
14 right next to the cook. If it had landed on him of course, it would have killed him. So,  
15 they got unhappy about that.

16           RV: What happened to that guy?

17           DS: They never caught the guy to my knowledge. I only found out about it  
18 towards the end of this deal. He kind of 'fessed up right before he left. He also  
19 apparently shot a round once through the NCO barracks. Also he threw a gas grenade at  
20 the officers' barracks, which brought a lot of heat down on us. Then he did it to our own  
21 ME club, and it really got everybody mad. Why gas us? Had these plastic baseball  
22 grenades that were – was gas. It was tear gas.

23           RV: Right, this guy was kind of angry.

24           DS: I don't know if he was angry or crazy or a little of both I don't know. You  
25 get kind of crazy after a while when you've been gone a long time. He, to my knowledge  
26 was never caught. They did have several formations and told us they were going to send  
27 the MPs in to search our lockers. Didn't really want to do it, because I think they were  
28 afraid of what they were going to find. The drug aspect there. They never did it, but I  
29 think they scared this guy enough that he at least stopped it somewhat.

30           RV: How much effort was there to curb that drug use?

1 DS: There was some. They planted, or else some guys who were snitches  
2 apparently that caught some guys and got in trouble. They got shipped out and they lost  
3 their clearances. Since everybody had basic training you turn into any infantrymen when  
4 you get in trouble. They got sent to the field as soldiers, which is a bad thing to do. It's a  
5 real step down. You're a lot more into the line of fire obviously that way. If any of them  
6 got caught, they usually got sent to the field.

7 RV: What did you think about the leadership in Vietnam? I guess your  
8 immediate supervisor, immediate commander and then all up through the top.

9 DS: Well, I thought my first tour they were good, but they transferred the officers  
10 about every four months, which I never could figure out. Like they were getting their  
11 ticket punched, they wanted to get their time in a unit or something. In a year you could  
12 have three commanders. I thought that was ridiculous. We had good commanders  
13 though and good sergeants, pretty good sergeants and good officers. The second tour, we  
14 didn't have very any officers around us. Mostly in charged by the NCOs and a few  
15 lieutenants. The few lieutenants were kind of idiots. In fact the one that almost got killed  
16 somehow, in the calamity of events the second lieutenant became a first lieutenant and  
17 became in charge. That man, I had more time in Vietnam than he had in the Army when  
18 he was in charge of us. He was an idiot. He was the one they tried to frag after I left.  
19 They weren't very effective this second time. Especially the last half of the second time  
20 it seemed like the longer I was there, maybe my attitude was going downhill too at the  
21 time, but they didn't seem like they were ever as good.

22 RV: As you spent time there, what did you think of the overall military  
23 commanders and the military policy of the United States in Vietnam?

24 DS: It was obvious we weren't trying to win anymore.

25 RV: When did that become apparent?

26 DS: That was I guess during the second tour I kind of got that idea that we were  
27 just treading water. Nobody wanted to try anymore. You just didn't want to get killed.  
28 Nobody was really trying anymore like they were at first. That gung-ho was gone. When  
29 you go to the field units you saw more and more disenchantment. It seemed switchless.  
30 When I got back in September of '70 is when I got back from my second tour yes,  
31 because I got out in September '71. So, sometime in there in April of '70 to about

1 September of '70 it seemed like the whole thing just changed over there, and the  
2 demarcation or the line in the dirt that I can associate with was we went in to Cambodia.  
3 It seemed like that changed everything.

4 RV: What did you guys hear about that incursion?

5 DS: The ones that went over there in my unit. My unit went I just wasn't there  
6 when it happened. They said it was a beautiful country, but they didn't see anything  
7 except they saw a few American units way out in the field that looked like they had been  
8 there for a long time. You couldn't even tell they were really soldiers except by the  
9 weapons. I mean their hair was long, and they were just--almost, not rogues but they said  
10 it was much, much different than what they were used to. These guys must have been  
11 some long-range troops that had been out there a long time. It was much, much different.

12 RV: Did your attitude of American policy overall, change? You said when you  
13 first got there in your first tour it was the Domino Theory; you were stopping Communist  
14 aggression. Did that evolve; change at all?

15 DS: Well, I always thought that. In fact, when I was going back for my second  
16 tour was when a guy tried to pull me off a bus in Oakland, a hippie, a long haired,  
17 stringy, blondish-white haired hippie tried to pull me off a bus. I told him I volunteered  
18 to go back for a second tour. He said, 'I hope you stay there!'(laughs).

19 RV: Really? Where was this?

20 DS: This was in Oakland. We were getting on the buses to go out to the airport.  
21 This hippie was there. Of course I was getting ready to punch him when the MP came  
22 up, and I explained to him what happened, he ran him off. Off the base or whatever, he  
23 got him away from us. What was the question, I forgot where I was?

24 RV: The evolution in your mind of American policy and why you were there.

25 DS: When I got back from my second tour I was still there, and wanted to be  
26 there essentially. I really always have kind of been a patriotic, American kind of guy.  
27 But I could tell we weren't trying to win anymore, which bothered me. I always thought  
28 we would win. I had no idea what was going to happen later. I couldn't see it. They  
29 weren't beating us, but we weren't winning either. I think the problem was at the  
30 Presidential a level. I don't think they were trying in Washington. I don't think it was

1 the commander's fault in the field. I think the politicians gave the war up or wouldn't  
2 allow it to be won.

3 RV: You went over there during the Nixon administration basically those were  
4 your two tours?

5 DS: The first one was Johnson, the second one was Nixon, yes.

6 RV: So, Nixon is in January 1969, can you compare those two Presidents? What  
7 was your attitude towards Johnson's policy and Nixon's policies?

8 DS: Well, there wasn't a lot of change. Actually Nixon was actually the one that  
9 started to withdraw. I think Johnson, micromanaged the war too much from Washington,  
10 and then he made huge mistakes on how it should be fought. I think the commanders in  
11 the field should be deciding what to blow up and not somebody 13,000 miles away. You  
12 just can't run a war like that. Johnson, and I guess Nixon at the same degree, of course I  
13 was long gone then. He did get pretty tough towards the end on the North Vietnamese. I  
14 think they should have been bombing Haiphong Harbor, Hanoi from the very beginning  
15 and not doing the things. There was a special zone you had to fly through in order to  
16 bomb Hanoi and stuff. The guys I met later who were in the Air Force, they said it was  
17 just murder on them. It was just incredible what they were forced to do.

18 RV: What did you think of the Vietnamization policy; turning the war over to the  
19 Vietnamese? Essentially turning it over to ARVN.

20 DS: Basically turning it over to ARVN. I didn't have a lot of strong knowledge  
21 or thoughts on it at the time. Of course I was aware of it, that's the reason we were  
22 slowly pulling out. We'd have a unit be taken over by them basically as far as the duties.  
23 They'd take it out, send the American troops home. It didn't seem like it was working  
24 that well. I wasn't that aware of that the time. Again I was young and just trying to get  
25 through my time there. I didn't have a lot of strong feeling either way on it.

26 RV: When you found out you were leaving, were you disappointed in a sense? I  
27 know you said you were 'happy' to be back there.

28 DS: When I finished my second tour though, I was ready to get out of the Army.  
29 I was sick of it. I couldn't hardly stand it anymore. I was very glad to be going home  
30 and being out of it. In fact, I started getting worried going to the airport in that last trip. I

1 thought, good grief this would be the time they get me. For the first time in a long, long  
2 time I actually got scared driving down the highway.

3 RV: I was going to ask you were you ever scared over there?

4 DS: Well, I got blown out of bed; I was scared after the fact, and micro rounds  
5 and stuff. Sometimes we were scared yes. But I think the scariest I was for some  
6 strange reason was when I was leaving thinking this was the time they were finally going  
7 to get me.

8 RV: Driving to the airport?

9 DS: Yes, it was just kind of funny. It was fairly safe, but you never know.

10 RV: Right, did you fly out of Tan Son Nhut?

11 DS: I flew out of Tan Son Nhut, yes.

12 RV: What was that flight like for you? Was it all military and were you in your  
13 uniform?

14 DS: It was all military, we were all in uniform. We had to be. It was great to be  
15 going home. I finally had my FTA, my flight to America. Back to the land of round  
16 eyes, which was American women. It was great we were ready to go, flight to America.  
17 We also used that as 'fuck the Army' for that too. FTA meant two things for us. We  
18 were getting out of the Army and we had our flight to America.

19 RV: Did you fly back into Oakland?

20 DS: I flew back to Oakland, that was the most amazing thing. Spent about 72  
21 hours of being in there as a sergeant and fairly in charge of what I was doing, within 72  
22 hours of being in Vietnam I was in my mother's kitchen in El Dorado, Arkansas.

23 RV: That is incredible.

24 DS: That's a cultural shock.

25 RV: What was that like for you?

26 DS: I didn't know what to think. It was just like I went to sleep and woke up in  
27 two different worlds. The processing and everything was done real quickly. We just  
28 turned everything in and they ran us through a physical, that wasn't a physical. We just  
29 signed our paper saying we were ok. They never tested anything really, except for ears a  
30 little bit. When I got home I didn't know what to do. I had a whole bunch of money on  
31 me at the time. It was like 1,100 dollars, it seemed like a lot of money. It was all in 50s.

1 I had 22-50s on me I remember that. Backpay and everything. We even had some guys  
2 that doctor our records to make sure we got more money when we got out. We knew  
3 people in personnel. We'd just extend the number of days you had coming leave. If you  
4 had six, they'd make it 36 or something like that. We gave ourselves a little severance  
5 pay that way. Actually I didn't do that. The guys that knew me did it for me, and some  
6 others of us. When I got home I just stayed in the house for a couple weeks, I didn't  
7 know what to do. I mean colors especially kind of blew my mind.

8 RV: I'm sorry, colors?

9 DS: Colors, because I wasn't used to seeing anything but brown and green.  
10 Everything was either brown or green. The ground was brown and we were wearing  
11 green and everything was green or brown. The Vietnamese had some colors on them of  
12 course, especially the women had their long things they wore and they had some colors.  
13 It was like going from black and white to color.

14 RV: What was the reaction, I guess you landed there in Oakland, you were still  
15 around the military personnel. What was your personal experience with civilians when  
16 you got back from the second tour?

17 DS: I don't remember my first, I remember my first big encounter with civilians.  
18 When we left Oakland there, we caught a taxi into town. We had orders, whatever it was,  
19 tickets for something. Four or five of us got a taxi into there, and into the terminal. I don't  
20 know how far it was. The guy said it was going to be so much per head. Like 10 dollars  
21 per heads I thought was kind of high. Well, turn your meter on. He turned his meter on  
22 when he got there so I gave him eight or nine dollars on that. He wanted like 10 bucks  
23 apiece from us, which I knew was a rip off. He said, 'I'll call the police.' I said, 'That's  
24 fine. I've been ripped of from cab drivers for the last two years, it's not going to happen  
25 here. I'll find one for you.' I called a policeman for you. The guy took off. We told  
26 them what happened. I'd written down all the stuff on the little card there when I was in  
27 the back seat. I gave them all the information. They were pretty pissed at the guy.  
28 Trying to steal from soldiers coming back is basically what they were doing.

29 RV: So you caught a flight out of San Francisco back to Arkansas?

30 DS: Yes, back to Little Rock.

31 RV: What was the reception like when you got home?

1 DS: My parents were glad to see me, but there wasn't any parades or anything.  
2 You just show up, you've been gone, now you're back. It was weird.

3 RV: I can only imagine it was so different from Vietnam veteran's versus World  
4 War II veterans.

5 DS: The war was going on. The 10-year deal, I was there for two years, you just  
6 got home and you were back. All your friends were there, and they were doing the same  
7 thing. Most of them hadn't been anywhere anyway except going to college or whatever  
8 or working. It was kind of strange.

9 RV: What did your friends say? Any of them go to Vietnam?

10 DS: It was just kind of like it didn't happen much. Nobody asked me a whole lot  
11 about it, some and they knew I'd been there and that, but it was no big deal really. Just  
12 another guy came back. It was like a non-event, really.

13 RV: When you saw the news at night and the war was continuing after you left,  
14 just for a few more years for the Americans what were your feelings on that?

15 DS: You kind of turn it off somewhat. I would watch it though. I was shocked  
16 when Saigon fell. I was shocked and outraged over that. During the other times, I just  
17 kind of watched it. I could see that we were winding down. Almost by '72 we had  
18 almost everybody out of there anyway. I think the 82<sup>nd</sup> was one of the last units to leave  
19 from Da Nang. I don't know. There wasn't nothing you could do about it. You just tried  
20 to live your life and I was going to school on my GI Bill. I just didn't think about that  
21 much.

22 RV: Nobody really questioned you too much about it?

23 DS: Not a lot. There was still protesting going on, but I didn't care. I was  
24 studying at the time and using my GI Bill and working another job at a freight company.  
25 Just going about my life. Just trying to make up for lost time.

26 RV: Was it a relatively easy transition for you over all or difficult?

27 DS: I think it was more difficult than I realized. I talked to another guy, none of  
28 us really totally got maybe straightened over the deal sometimes. Think it lingers with  
29 you a long time, probably forever. It's just such an unusual experience. It comes back a  
30 lot. I can still hear helicopters and think about Vietnam.

31 RV: Really?

1 DS: Yes, it's the first thing is the choppers were always flying over you. Always  
2 were hearing helicopters. That immediately is just like going straight back. When I run  
3 into other veterans and we tend to talk about this way too much it seems like in bars, over  
4 beer and this and that. I'm sure everybody else gets sick of hearing it, I even get sick of  
5 hearing it some times. I still can't stop not talking about it or answering questions or  
6 whatever.

7 RV: It was a significant event in your life.

8 DS: Yes, no question.

9 RV: One question I want to ask about your experience in country, in Vietnam.  
10 How about Agent Orange or any other defoliants, did you have contact with that?

11 DS: Agent Orange, yes. I've got some problems with that now I think. I've got a  
12 swollen left hand that I've had since I got back. I've had my left hip replaced when I was  
13 39 for an unknown reason. It just died. It was called an infarct, which is like when you  
14 have a heart attack, the vein shuts down. This one vein that feeds your hip or actually the  
15 ball, if it shuts down for any reason, then your left ball eventually dies and starts flaking  
16 off and your hip jams up. They've got to go into replacement. So, at 39 I had that done.  
17 Pretty unusual, wasn't any car wrecks or anything. They don't know what caused it. I  
18 think it was Agent Orange. My swollen left hand, I'm looking at right now as I'm talking  
19 to you is the same thing. It's been like that ever since. I think I drank some Agent  
20 Orange mixed in Kool-Aid at one of these units I was with, one of these fire support  
21 bases. They a lot of time would use Agent Orange as a defoliant in what they called  
22 Indian pumps. They would spray it out like any kind of a pump would. It was an  
23 herbicide. Anyway they would spray it out of course around their fire support base to kill  
24 all the foliage, where the bad guys couldn't get close to them and they could see them  
25 coming and shoot them. It would drift back and get in the water supply. Apparently they  
26 just put Kool-Aid in to kill the taste. I didn't know that until I had been out to some of  
27 these places. I'm sure I drank some.

28 RV: So, you think that's where your main contact was?

29 DS: I think that's where my main contact was. It was getting it inadvertently  
30 mixed in the water supply.

1           RV: Have you talked to any other veterans who have experienced similar  
2 symptoms?

3           DS: Some of them have Agent Orange deal. Some of them had it spilled on them  
4 when they were in the field, different things. I've gone to the VA about it. They  
5 basically denied it completely. I think there's a definite correlation there. That's the only  
6 place that I know that I got it, but you never know.

7           RV: Looking back now at America's experience in Vietnam what is your opinion  
8 on the policy that the United States had over there?

9           DS: The policy was probably good that they helped the people, had their own  
10 self-determination and had no problem with us. Altruistic reason behind it, which is  
11 hopefully what it was. The way it was carried out though, I think was incredibly stupid.  
12 I mean you don't fight a war with one hand tied behind your back. I think Colin Powell  
13 and Schwarzkopf's conduct in the Persian Gulf War shows you that overwhelming force  
14 is better for you and the bad guys. If you just wipe them out all at the very beginning,  
15 then it's over. That's the end of the story. Of course Vietnam was different. Geography  
16 was a force versus the desert they had in Desert Storm. But I think overwhelming force  
17 is the only way to fight a war. If you're going to do it, I mean get it over with. War is  
18 not good. The longer it lasts, the worse it is for everybody, environment, people  
19 everything.

20           RV: Do you think the United States could have won the war, could have  
21 definitely changed what happened if had not fought that way?

22           DS: Yes, I think they could have won it, yes. No question.

23           RV: You said you were outraged and shocked at the fall of Saigon in 1975, in  
24 April. Tell me about that.

25           DS: Yes. I've been in the embassy there, I've been all over Saigon, I knew it real  
26 well. I was watching everybody leaving, scurrying around like a bunch of rats leaving a  
27 sinking ship, which is exactly what it was. The helicopters landing at sea, they pushed  
28 them off the carriers to make room for the other ones to land. Just a mad dash for  
29 freedom by the Vietnamese, having to almost shoot them and kick them with the butts of  
30 their rifle to keep them from getting on board. I thought it was a terrible disgrace the way  
31 it was done. I mean it looked like after 10 years they would have had a better

1 contingency plan than that to get out there in case things went wrong. How could you not  
2 have a better plan than that? They were apparently caught totally flat-footed and didn't  
3 know it was coming on. It must have been a break down in Intel somewhere. It's just  
4 ridiculous. The Vietnamese Army collapsed in Pleiku and they never recovered. I mean  
5 they were gone. It seemed to happen when they lost the B-52 bombing strike, which  
6 partly Nixon's problem was Watergate then. He kind of lost interest I think in Vietnam.  
7 When stopped really giving them the air support, which was the lynch pin I think that  
8 kept the South Vietnamese Army going, they lost air support, that was pretty much it.  
9 They just couldn't stand up to the North Vietnamese.

10 RV: What kind of lessons can the United States learn from this? You mentioned  
11 some earlier when you were talking about fighting the war a different way.

12 DS: You can't fight a war half-assed. That's just not the way to do it. You don't  
13 do it that way if you were in a fight protecting your wife or your child, you wouldn't tie  
14 one hand behind your back. If you protect your country, why do that? I mean it's  
15 ridiculous the way it was carried out.

16 RV: Did the war change your perceptions of the United States government any?

17 DS: I guess I thought it wasn't a big Superman deal like when you're growing  
18 up. You think it's got the answers to every problem in the world. Obviously we're just  
19 as human and fallible as any other people. We have a rule of law though versus rule of  
20 people, which I've learned to respect a great deal and our uniqueness in that respect. I  
21 guess it made me more of a realist. It took off the rose colored glasses.

22 RV: Do you think Vietnam still haunts the government today? You hear this talk  
23 about the 'Vietnam Syndrome' and it's affecting our efforts today in this war on terrorism  
24 and our efforts in Afghanistan and now in Iraq. Do you think Vietnam's still with us?

25 DS: I guess it will always be with us somewhat. Just like the Civil War or World  
26 War II or anything else to some degree. I think the lessons are what we should  
27 remember. I think we do have a big problem now like taking casualties I think which is  
28 inevitable sometimes. I think presidents and the public, especially whoever is not in  
29 power tends to play this almost like a race card or something about the casualty spector.  
30 There's going to be casualties. Sometimes the war has to be fought. 9-11 taught us a lot  
31 of things I think, or hopefully it did. I think lots of us have forgotten it already. You just

1 can't cave in to evil. You just can't. What was that said long ago? 'For evil will  
2 overcome us when good men do nothing.' Unfortunately that's true. It's not a nice  
3 world we live in sometimes.

4 RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in America?

5 DS: Not really. There's some around everywhere, but I haven't really had any  
6 contact with them per se. Maybe in restaurants and things like that, I've seen some.  
7 None in particular.

8 RV: How do you feel about Vietnam today, the country?

9 DS: Obviously we have a better policy than we do with Cuba. Trading with  
10 Vietnam, it was remarkable after we fought a war with them like that. We're not trading  
11 with Cuba, which is a lot closer. I think we have a very realistic policy probably towards  
12 it. I think the Vietnamese people have probably forgotten the war more than we have. I  
13 understand the average age of there is like 2/3 of the country is under 40 or something  
14 like that.

15 RV: You're right, it's almost like 80% under the age of 30.

16 DS: It's not really even that Communistic anymore, if it wasn't for the old guard  
17 in charge, they probably would be a free democracy now. All they want to do is have  
18 fun. People in Saigon they were pretty westernized by us and the French before. I think  
19 that stays with them, especially that younger generation. They don't care as much about  
20 ideology as they do freedom. They want to have a good time listening to CDs and  
21 listening and riding their mopeds or whatever. I think humans are pretty much all alike  
22 anywhere. Once you're given the chance and have a rule of law that they're basically  
23 going to go about and do the same things we do.

24 RV: What do you think the attitude of the American public is now toward  
25 Vietnam? Especially the younger generations who really don't have a lot of idea about  
26 what happened?

27 DS: I've got a 15 year-old daughter, and we talk about it some, but of course  
28 she's not really quite old enough yet to even have some opinions I don't think about that.  
29 This year she's in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but most of them it's like World War II, it's the distant past.  
30 In fact, I'm amazed sometimes to think that I've been out of Vietnam longer than my  
31 father was out of World War II when I went to Vietnam. That's a big jump really in my

1 mind when I think about that. I also realized it reminds me of how old I am. I think it's  
2 just a distant memory for a lot of people, except those ones that are maybe 45 or above or  
3 40 above anyway.

4 RV: How do you feel about your service in Vietnam today?

5 DS: I'm real glad that I had joined and did what I did. I mean it's been, like you  
6 said a big experience, and it's been a shaping one, good and bad probably. I'm very glad  
7 that I went and did my part. I wasn't a hero, but I showed up. I think that was important.

8 RV: No regrets?

9 DS: No, no regrets.

10 RV: Let me ask you about the media coverage of the war. There had been a lot  
11 of controversy about that. What was your opinion on that?

12 DS: I think the media obviously had a bias. Had a hidden agenda somewhat. At  
13 least subconsciously, if not consciously. I think the longer it went on, I think the media  
14 pretty much, like politicians, had their finger in the air about which way things are going.  
15 They tend to support what seems popular. I think since the protests or that part of the war  
16 in the United States looked like it was a majority opinion, at least it was the loudest  
17 opinion. I don't know if it was the majority, but it was definitely loud. I think the media  
18 supported what they thought was what they wanted to see. I think they really kind of did  
19 a disservice by not being a little more unbiased.

20 RV: How about today, books on Vietnam? Have you come across any books or  
21 do you read about Vietnam? Do you try to read the history books about it?

22 DS: I read some of that. I've got some friends that give me books all the time on  
23 this. I've got a guy that gets free books. He reads for the local paper, and he gets these  
24 books all the time. I've had several of those. I prefer really to read about World War II  
25 or the Civil War though, because I was in Vietnam. It's not something that I need to  
26 know more about really. Especially moving around like I did. I got a much better view  
27 than the average soldier did over there. I don't like to watch it on TV that much really. I  
28 do sometimes, but I don't really like it as much. I'd rather watch about another war, if  
29 that makes any sense.

30 RV: Yes, it does. What about Vietnam m movies, like, *When We Were Soldiers*  
31 and *Platoon*?

1 DS: Well, that one's pretty good. Mel Gibson deal, I thought that was pretty  
2 good. Had a pretty poignant at the end when the North Vietnamese officer said, 'Now  
3 America will think they can win this.' All that's going to happen was killing on both  
4 sides. I thought it was pretty well done though. I think it really shows how the basic  
5 soldier did his job. And the politicians really didn't make the commitment, and therefore,  
6 we shouldn't have been there or we should have gone in and won it in a couple of years.

7 RV: Any other movies that you think are worthwhile for people to watch, to learn  
8 about Vietnam?

9 DS: Well, there's not very many of them. John Wayne's *Green Beret* is on there,  
10 which is something out like a World War II movie basically. It does show pretty well  
11 some of the aspects, like Puff the Magic Dragon that comes over and wipes and entire  
12 NVA unit, actually take your objective they all get killed. It shows the awesome  
13 firepower of it. The firepower of it was incredible. I mean incredible. I think those  
14 things are educational, as far as the wives and I don't think I get any of that out of that. I  
15 think all you rally get is what the average soldier went through, which is good, but it  
16 doesn't get the political reasons.

17 RV: How about movies like *Apocalypse Now*?

18 DS: I saw that and I couldn't believe it. That's the most unreal movie I've ever  
19 seen in my life. It doesn't respond to anything in Vietnam that I knew. I was moved  
20 around a lot. I was in a lot of different places. I had a top-secret clearance; I was privy to  
21 some things that average guys didn't see. I thought that was kind of a surreal movie  
22 really. I can't imagine anything like that ever being true. It could be though.

23 RV: What about *Platoon*, Oliver Stones?

24 DS: *Platoon* I thought was pretty good. That was again back to what the average  
25 grunt goes through except for the situation. That was *Steel Metal Jacket*. *Platoon* I  
26 thought was pretty good, especially since he'd been there. He had a perspective on that.  
27 I thought *Platoon* was pretty good. *Steel Metal Jacket* I thought the soldier getting killed  
28 during basic training was pretty unusual. Shooting the sergeant and blowing his own  
29 head off, I thought that was ridiculous, but it doesn't happen.

30 RV: Nothing like that.

1 DS: No, it's too strict and you're too scared and you're not that crazy. That guy  
2 was a mental case. You don't get that crazy.

3 RV: What about the second half of *Full Metal Jacket*, the Battle of Hue and all  
4 that?

5 DS: The Battle of Hue, I wasn't there. I knew some guys that were. That looked  
6 pretty real. I can imagine those guys thinking this was the way they always thought war  
7 was going to be. They're running at them and they're mowing them down, which is a  
8 nice place to be in a strong defensive position. That's the way you want to fight a war if  
9 you can. I can see that, that makes sense.

10 RV: How about music when you were there? Did that play a big role in your  
11 experience in Vietnam?

12 DS: Music?

13 RV: Yes, sir.

14 DS: We listened to music all the time. A lot of guys had these big real to real,  
15 which were popular in those days, recorders that they would get from the PacEc, The  
16 Pacific Exchange. We listened to music all the time. A lot of protest songs. We would  
17 drink beer, smoke doobies and listen to it all the time. It was a big part. Especially  
18 during that second tour when we had less to do, we'd sit around at night and listen to  
19 music a lot.

20 RV: Any songs remind you, any particular songs or musical groups that remind  
21 you of your time in Vietnam?

22 DS: I remember Santana a lot. He was real popular, real good. Still like Santana.  
23 The Vietnamese, I always remember they usually had Vietnamese groups that usually  
24 came around and played. Of course they tried to speak English, with an accent. I always  
25 remember 'Galveston, Galveston' (mimics Vietnamese accent). You were laughing at  
26 that (laughs). They didn't know where Galveston was, much less what was going on. I  
27 remember that. Every time I hear that song I smile a little bit. And of course all the  
28 protest songs of that era. 'What are we fighting for? Who gives a damn next stop is  
29 Vietnam?' Went through all the Woodstock type era. I remember Santana a lot though.  
30 We listened to Santana a lot.

1           RV: No particular song, like on the radio today that you think of Vietnam?  
2 Maybe like 'Oye Como Va' or something by Santana?

3           DS: Of course 'Galveston' I mentioned and what was that song? Ode to the  
4 devil, please to meet you if you guess my name?

5           RV: 'Sympathy for the Devil'?

6           DS: 'Ode to the Devil,' I think. It goes please to meet, hope you guess my name.

7           RV: 'Sympathy for the Devil' by the Rolling Stones.

8           DS: 'Sympathy for the Devil,' I remember hearing that a lot too. Which for  
9 home South seemed pretty poignant at the time. Some of the guys were into music more  
10 than I was. They were the ones who had the recorders and they had all kind of stuff and  
11 they could talk for hours about it. I would just listen to what they had on most of the  
12 time. There was a big deal with your soldiers in general. Music was a big stress releaser.

13          RV: Is there anything else that you want to add or would like to talk about  
14 regarding your time in Vietnam or your time after or anything today?

15          DS: Nothing I can probably think of off hand. It was a big deal, I remember it  
16 well. It seemed like it was a specter that haunts I guess everybody went to Vietnam  
17 because of the way it turned out and they way we were treated. Nothing in particular I  
18 can think of off hand. Probably when I hang the phone up I will, but right now I can't.

19          RV: You can always call us back. This will end our oral history interview with  
20 Douglas Shivers. Mr. Shivers, thank you very much for your participation. Thanks for  
21 answering all the questions and meeting up with us.

22          DS: I appreciate it.

23          RV: Yes, sir.

24          DS: This is Richard Verrone we're going to continue with one more session with  
25 Mr. Shiver. Mr. Shivers we were talking after we had paused the recording, and you  
26 were telling me about another incident that you wanted to get down. What was that?

27          DS: In regard to going downtown and going to Saigon and things like that, I  
28 remember that we were in a military intelligence unit, we had classified travel orders in  
29 many cases to go anywhere we wanted to. Right below combat essential, we were like  
30 number two on the list to get on a plane to whatever. A lot of times we would go to  
31 Saigon for illegal purposes somewhat. We had orders already typed up that showed we

1 could go anywhere we wanted to basically. Everything, it always made the MPs give  
2 your orders back and say, 'Go ahead.' But, and this is a true story.

3 RV: You guys would type up the false orders?

4 DS: We had the false orders typed up because we had the forms already there.  
5 We just changed the date on them occasionally. The signature block was what the key  
6 was on this. We had two of them, we had one of them signed by Captain Don E. Duck.  
7 True story. The other one was signed by Major Mike E. Mouse. I had been stopped  
8 many times in Saigon when I wasn't supposed to be there, and I presented these orders  
9 with a little smirk on my face. They would look at them and they never looked at the  
10 signature block. They never looked at the signature block. It would say combat essential  
11 or top-secret do not delay, classified all this language that was in there. It was signed by  
12 Captain Don E. Duck and Major Mike E. Mouse and it worked every blooming time  
13 (laughs).

14 RV: So you would use this basically to go to Saigon to spend a couple days?

15 DS: We'd go down there either to get some stuff to smoke or to get some girls.  
16 We had our own truck, so we basically had signed out to ourselves on a permanent basis  
17 so we had our own trucks. I had done that I drove all the time. It was a 1947, something  
18 or other, but it worked. It was like a personal vehicle. My personal vehicle.

19 RV: Anything else sir?

20 DS: That's all I can think of offhand here.

21 RV: Thank you very much.

22 DS: That was good.

23 RV: Thank you sir.