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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Alfred DeMailo
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
January 24, 27, 28, 2003
Transcribed by Shannon Geach**

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

1 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Alfred DeMailo
2 on the 24th of January 2003 at approximately 1:45 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr.
3 DeMailo is in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Sir, why don't we begin the interview with a brief discussion
4 of your early life? If you would please tell me when and where you born and where you grew up.

5 Alfred DeMailo: I was born on July 13, 1946 in Swickly, Pennsylvania. That's the closest
6 hospital. Grew up the first part of my life was in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, which is my address
7 now. But I actually live in a little place called Harmony Township. My parents moved to Baden,
8 which is the next town down, just a few miles away. That's where I spent my formidable years until
9 I joined the service. Baden was too small to have a high school. They were in the Ambridge
10 School District so I graduated from high school at the Ambridge area school district. Growing up
11 from there I was accepted at several colleges. Had enough of going to school, didn't feel like going
12 to college. My father said as long as I lived under his roof I had to take some type of classes. I
13 entered into a Penn State Branch Extension here at Quaker Valley and worked in the steel mill.
14 Carried about six credits but that wasn't enough to keep me out of the draft. If you want to go that
15 far at this time.

16 SM: If you want we can take a moment and look at a couple of other things about your
17 youth. Any particular subjects you enjoyed in school?

18 AD: History, science were my two favorites.

19 SM: How about sports, athletics?

20 AD: Yes, I didn't participate. Well, I was on the track team in high school. It really wasn't
21 big enough for the football team or quite good enough for baseball. The time I grew up on the

1 street in the fields around my neighborhood, somebody was always playing sports. It wasn't like it
2 is today. Whatever sport was appropriate is what we were doing after school and I did enjoy it. I
3 wasn't very active in high school as far as other clubs or anything. I mean I had friends. I really
4 wasn't a loner. But I didn't participate much in after school activities other than track.

5 SM: What about work? What kind of work did you do growing up?

6 AD: My father had a neighborhood store. He was a mechanical engineer, but we also had
7 a store right next to our house. I guess he had that for about five years. It took all you spare time
8 just about. You could sneak out, but you were going to get stuck in that store working quite a bit. I
9 hated it.

10 SM: Did you really?

11 AD: Yes, I couldn't stand it.

12 SM: What did you dislike about it?

13 AD: Everybody else is headed with their baseball bat or their football, they'd go play after
14 school and you had to go into the store. Some days I got to go and my brother had to work.
15 Instead of having the whole weekend off you were going to work in there one day during the
16 weekend. Friday night or Saturday. We were open seven days a week. That's what I didn't like
17 about it. I've never really been a people person. I don't like really that much contact with people.

18 SM: Did you get paid when you working your dad's store?

19 AD: No. There was no regular salary. If you were going out, had a date or whatever, my
20 father made sure that you had cash in your pocket. He wasn't tight that way. He was tight other
21 ways, but he understood that you worked and you should get something for it.

22 SM: You said that was only for five years? What other kind of work did he do?

23 AD: Right. Well, it was a neighborhood store. In this area, in this part of the country fresh
24 lunchmeat was very big because of the steel industry. Men work three shifts and they took
25 lunches. You'd cut lunchmeat. It had canned goods on the shelf, fresh bread. It was a small
26 supperette type of thing. It wasn't like your 7-11 or anything. Everything in it was fruits were fresh
27 and things like that. They had penny candy all for kids. Ice cream bars. If you were in there by
28 yourself you'd get quite busy at certain times of the day. It was even robbed one time. I wasn't in
29 there at that time. They did do a pretty good job on my grandmother who worked there; she was a
30 pretty young lady when she came to live with us when her husband passed away. It was basic
31 clerking in the store.

1 SM: Any other kind of employment for you as you got older as a teenager?
2 AD: When I graduated from high school I went into the steel mill. Even when I was
3 working in the store, I took side jobs in the summer cutting grass. In the winter, shoveling
4 sidewalks, anything to pick up a few extra bucks. When I graduated from high school I went right
5 into the steel mill within a few months. The jobs were plentiful at the time. And went to college on
6 the side.

7 SM: What kind of work did you do in the steel mill?

8 AD: I was in the inspection department. Once in a while I'd get a better job. Most of the
9 time I had a large hand-held grinder that took seams out of pipes when pipe came out. When it
10 was rolled sometimes it would leave a mark on it and that had to come down. Most of the pipes we
11 made were for oil well use. It was a big plant, which is now completely closed up and empty. It
12 was very dirty and hard and heavy work.

13 SM: I'm sorry, go ahead.

14 AD: I'm just saying I'm glad I didn't make a living or stay there the rest of my life.

15 SM: Had anybody in your family served in the military during World War II?

16 AD: Yes, I believe all of my father's brothers. He had four brothers and they all served. I
17 think two of my mother's brother's were old enough to go. They had a big influence on me about
18 the service. My father didn't go. He had one of those defense jobs where he was exempt. He
19 went as far as Cleveland to join up, but they just wouldn't take him if he didn't have a release.

20 SM: What kind of work did he do?

21 AD: Me?

22 SM: Did he do during the war?

23 AD: He's always been in engineering. They switched over his plant. At the time he was in
24 a place called National Electric. Whatever they did they switched it over to war, [defense
25 manufacturing] Europe for the war. They were making things, what I don't recall him telling me, but
26 they were making things for the war. He was considered essential in that job and was not
27 released.

28 SM: But he kept on traveling trying to get in?

29 AD: Yes, he did. I wasn't born yet and I don't think my older brother was born until 1942.

30 He was just exempt after that.

31 SM: Your uncles that did go, what branch of the service and what theater did they serve?

1 AD: My mother's two brothers, one was in, the day he got out of high school he went to
2 the Navy. He was on the destroyer escort in quite a few of the big battles in the Pacific. He has a
3 lot of stories about Okinawa and the kamikaze attacks. He has since passed on. He was my
4 godfather, a real likeable guy. Her other brother went to the Merchant Marine Academy. He was
5 an officer during the merchant Marines and ran the North Atlantic route, merchant ships. I believe
6 at some time, this is where I'm a little foggy from the years. I think at some time he switched over
7 and got a commission with the Navy. I know he did go to the Merchant Marine Academy. Dad's
8 brothers; one went to flight school and didn't make it through. Ended up in the Pacific in the Air
9 Force, doing what I don't know, but I know he was wounded. You know, a nighttime bombing
10 attack, shrapnel. Another one drove on that gasoline [tanker] or some type of truck that followed
11 Patton or the 3rd Army through Europe. Another one was with War Plans in England, bombing
12 raids. No, that was only three that went. I don't think his brother Dom went. Maybe three on my
13 dad's side. I know his older brother was too old to go. So, five out of the immediate family.

14 SM: In what year did you graduate from high school?

15 AD: 1964.

16 SM: When you graduated of course, it was just months later. You probably graduated in
17 the early summer?

18 AD: Yes.

19 SM: So just two or three months later the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. The President decides
20 to start sending troops into Vietnam. At that point you were working in a steel mill.

21 AD: Right.

22 SM: Do you remember much about that or were you pretty much focused and probably
23 exhausted and not paying very much attention to world events?

24 AD: I've always been a reader. When the Gulf of Tonkin Incident at first didn't grab much
25 attention from me. It wasn't long after when I started noticing things escalating that I started to
26 read everything I could about Vietnam. I'd try to stay up on the current events. Seeing some of the
27 guys that immediately went to one branch of the service or another after we got out of school,
28 some guys went within a week or two. It seems like when they were getting home from basic
29 training they were all told they were going to eventually end up in Vietnam. That kind of got my
30 attention. Whether all that was true or not, you know at basic training they always worst case your
31 scenario.

1 SM: Right.

2 AD: My best friend went to the Navy. He didn't end up in Vietnam, but off the coast in
3 some support role within months.

4 SM: When did you receive your notice that you were drafted?

5 AD: I went in, in '66. I received the draft notice in '65, but I can't give you the exact date.
6 No, you know what? Maybe I didn't get my draft notice until '66 and I was already signed up. I
7 can't be clear on that. It was either my draft notice said that I was supposed to leave the day that I
8 originally was sworn in, or that's the day my draft notice came in the mail. I can't remember which
9 one it was. Do you understand what I'm saying?

10 SM: Yes, sir. What drew you to the military then?

11 AD: I've always been attracted to the military. When I think back, World War II wasn't that
12 long ago. When I looked at the men that were in World War II in 1966 the war had only been over
13 like 21 years. Now that I am at this age, that's a drop in the bucket. It really wasn't that long. It
14 was fresh in their minds. I talked to my uncles and I read war stories, I say stories, but books
15 about the war. I kept up on it with *Time* and *Newsweek* or whatever. Information I could get, the
16 newspapers. I always bugged my uncles to tell me what they did. I do remember bits and pieces
17 about Korea even though I was young. So I'd always been interested in the military. I can't really
18 say one thing about it. There has always been something going on militarily-wise since I can
19 remember. World War II was still pretty fresh once I started remembering things. Guys talking
20 about it and Korea. Had some uncles that were in the military during Korea, but were never sent
21 over. Always interested; always interested in aviation.

22 SM: In terms of choosing the Army, what drew you to the Army as opposed to the other
23 branches?

24 AD: The whole story is, I was sitting in a doctor's office with a horrible sore throat. I
25 wanted some kind of adventure. For some reasons the Marines or Navy never appealed to me. I
26 wanted to go to the paratroopers. I went to the recruiter and I joined the paratroopers on a delayed
27 entry program so I could stay home for Christmas and New Year's. I was in the doctor's office with
28 a terrible sore throat. I picked up a *Time Magazine* that was right after the Battle of the Ia Drang
29 Valley. It said, 'The Army is crying for helicopter pilots. You don't need a college education.'
30 That's what I thought you'd have to have to fly. All you have to do is take an IQ test. I can't
31 remember the other test you have to take, but it's about flight. If you can adapt to flight training. If

1 you pass that, they'll give you a shot at flight school. If you flunk out, well you don't do any more
2 than the time than if you'd been drafted. You go two years from the day flunk out or something. I
3 said, 'Boy that doesn't sound bad. Basic training and flight school.' I went back to the recruiter
4 right from the doctors. He said, 'Gee, if I'd have known you wanted flight school I would have sent
5 you for the test. There's no problem.' He said, 'I'll send you for the test as soon as you feel better.
6 He sent me to Pittsburgh and went up and took the test. Pittsburgh is about 17 miles from here.
7 Within a day or two they had the results back, complete physical and everything, and a written test.
8 It said, 'Hey, we'll send you to flight school.' It said, 'You're going in the Army February 2nd.' That's
9 what drew me to the Army was to fly helicopters.

10 SM: Right. What did you do for entertainment as far as movies, television, that kind of
11 stuff? What programs did you watch very often? What kind of movies did you like to see as you
12 were growing up?

13 AD: Growing up, westerns. Even though today I'm not that enthralled with them, and I
14 can't stand country and western music. At that time television was big. I like *Have Gun Will
Travel*. I did enjoy sitting down and watching *Playhouse 90*. I don't know if you're old enough to
15 remember anything like that. They used to have some excellent entertainment. *Playhouse 90* was
16 live for 90 minutes on TV. Good stories, and some real classics. You know, variety shows. I loved
17 Jackie Gleason and Red Skelton's show. I wasn't really set on one thing so much. When I was
18 real young there was a guy, Soupy Sales, that was hilarious. I think he was the original pie in the
19 face guy. I tell you. There were a lot of westerns on at the time, *Gunsmoke*. I don't know if you
20 ever heard of the one I mentioned, *Have Gun Will Travel*?

22 SM: I sure have.

23 AD: Richard Boone in fact, he started out as a Shakespearean actor, and there he was on
24 a western doing quite well. That's about it for TV. Whatever was popular in the movies I usually
25 went to see. That was good for dates, drive-ins even better.

26 SM: War movies?

27 AD: Sure, absolutely. I'm sorry I left that out. Thanks for bringing that to attention. All the
28 war movies, I liked to see them.

29 SM: Any particular ones that were your favorites?

30 AD: I'm drawing kind of a blank here right now. I can't remember if *The Longest Day* was
31 out before I went to the service or after. Before I went to Vietnam or after I got back, I can't

1 remember the date of that. I thought that wasn't too bad for the time. There were quite a few good
2 movies I thought Gregory Peck, I think he was in *Porkchop Hill*. I can't think of anything else right
3 off hand.

4 SM: Any of the John Wayne World War II movies, the *Sands of Iwo Jima*, that kind of
5 stuff?

6 AD: I was never the biggest fan of John Wayne. *Sands of Iwo Jima* was alright. I
7 certainly sat and watched it and had no complaints. Maybe my judgment has been tainted over the
8 years. I can't give an honest answer about what happened before, if you know what I'm getting at.
9 John Wayne was ok. There were a lot of other actors I liked better.

10 SM: Who did you prefer? You mentioned Gregory Peck already.

11 AD: Yes, I liked Gregory Peck, Jimmy Stewart. I'll tell you the war movie, but I don't
12 remember. *12:00 High*. Just a phenomenal movie, I don't know if you've ever seen it. I get goose
13 bumps thinking about it, being in that situation. Another war movie that was absolutely excellent,
14 but I can't remember if I saw it after. I don't remember when it was written. I know when it was
15 written. It was written during the Korean War, but I don't know if the movie was. I guess I did. I
16 think I saw it before I went to Vietnam. It was written by James Michner, *Bridges at Toko Ri*, might
17 be the greatest flight movie ever. Have you seen it?

18 SM: Yes, sir.

19 AD: It's fantastic. That was what the heck was his name? They were all good-looking
20 guys. Grace Kelly was in it. William Holden was the guy. You struggle with yourself whether
21 you're going to fly again. The same thing has happened to me. There's been days when I said,
22 'I'm never going to get in that damn aircraft again.' You see everybody else in the morning getting
23 in, so you crawl in, too. The peer pressure kind of gets you.

24 SM: In terms of your understanding of Vietnam and what the United States was trying to
25 do Vietnam, before you left, what did you understand was going on?

26 AD: Very naïve. Thought it was good against bad. We were there to stop the red hordes
27 and Communism. Of course we had no plan as I found out later. That's what I thought. We were
28 there to do something good. My second two tours I found out that maybe it just wasn't that way.

29 SM: What did your family think when you told them that you were going to go ahead and
30 enlist in the Army and become a pilot?

1 AD: They were upset, but they knew they couldn't, because I turned 19 and because of
2 my age they didn't have to sign anything. My mind was pretty well made up. I'd been having some
3 problems at home with them. Because I had a car the old man wanted to know where were you at
4 until 4:00 in the morning? You know? Like he's never been out to 4:00 in the morning when he
5 was a kid. That kind of thing. I just got tired of living with his rules. I just said, 'I'm going.' There
6 was nothing they could do about it. They were upset when I told them what I was going to do.
7 They understood that this was the way it was, and I guess maybe it was because they knew that I
8 was going to get drafted anyway. The time was going to come. That was about it.

9 SM: What did you think of the draft and what did they think of the draft? Did they think it
10 was appropriate at the time?

11 AD: They didn't think it was fair, neither did I. I thought it was definitely appropriate, but I
12 didn't think there should have been [different rules for different folks]. This had nothing to do with
13 the way I joined. I probably would have joined irregardless of what I had done. But I don't think
14 there should have been, 'This guy is out [of the draft] because of this and that guy got it because of
15 that.' I know guys right here in my hometown. There was a doctor that would make the
16 appropriate entries on any physical for you, to get you out if you wanted to go that particular route.
17 Guys I used to be friends with that didn't go, that weaseled out of it in some particular way, I
18 certainly am not friends with them anymore. I thought and I still feel that the draft should be back
19 and everybody should serve some type of military duty to the country. I'm not a real hawk either. I
20 have a lot of questions about what's going on now, but I think everybody owes something.

21 SM: When you went into the service in February what was that transition like for you?
22 Where did you go to basic training? What do you remember most of your first impression?

23 AD: Total cultural shock. The day I left Pittsburgh it was very cold. I was going to Ft.
24 Polk, Louisiana. Cold, a lot of snow. It was so cold. I was just going to wear a light jacket. Of
25 course my mother, 'Wear a heavy jacket. Wear a heavy jacket. You can always send it home or
26 whatever.' I got down there and it was so damn cold in Louisiana. I'm glad I listened to her for one
27 time. We stood in this parking lot for about two days. They'd let you go to the restroom. You
28 never got a place to sleep other than they'd march you out of this parking lot, you'd take a test.
29 They'd march you back to your spot. The only thing we had to eat for a couple of days were
30 apples. That damp cold from like down south. You could see the gate. They brought us in on a
31 bus where we got off of some airplane that had brought us in. I kept looking at that gate. I kept

1 saying, 'If I could run home. Boy, did I screw up.' I said, if things could be any worse? It scared
2 the hell out of me, it really did. I was shocked beyond belief. There was an older guy who was
3 going to flight school who had done a hitch in the Marines and then one in the Army Airborne and
4 he was 10 years older than me. He and I got to be good friends, went through flight school. He
5 kind of calmed the young guys down. Did a real good job. He was quite intelligent. Bob Edwards
6 was his name. He has since passed away. He said, 'It's not going to be any picnic, but believe me
7 things are going to get better. They're going to get us uniforms and a barrack and you're going to
8 get some thing hot [to eat]. This will not last forever.' He was a steady influence on us. Do you
9 want to know more about basic training?

10 SM: Yes, by all means. What was your routine like, food? All that stuff.

11 AD: Food was fairly edible. But I found that when you're hungry you'll eat anything.
12 There were so many things that I'd stare at my plate and say, 'Oh I didn't like this when my mother
13 made it.' I didn't care for spinach or something. You know, wolf it down. I'd do anything for my
14 mother's spinach or fish because I didn't like fish. The barracks were the old World War II wooden
15 type that everyday the floor had to be buffed with this red dye that was in a granulated type form or
16 powder. It would get on everything. It was so cold in the barracks; I was there in the wintertime in
17 Ft. Polk. I can't remember how the barracks [were heated]. I guess they were heated by coal. We
18 had to keep the windows open six inches or something like that. There was a washer and dryer in
19 the latrine. It cost a dime to run the dryer. We'd put money in the dryer and go out and stand
20 outside and stand by the exhaust to warm up. That's how cold the barracks were, you know,
21 waiting to fall in for formation or something like that when you couldn't get under your blanket.
22 However, I thought that basic training did a pretty good job. I respected my drill sergeant and I
23 never thought that I was treated unfairly. We did have a couple of suicide attempts. I think one
24 was serious and I think the other one was half-hearted to get out. That wasn't in my platoon that
25 was in my company. In my platoon we had a couple of men that were McNamara's 100,000 I
26 believe, where they just, he said that no matter how many times you got to recycle these guys, [the
27 idea was] they'll eventually pick it up and they'll send them. They can go, if you know what I'm
28 talking about. Have you ever heard of that?

29 SM: Yes, sir.

1 AD: Ok. So there was a few guys like that in our platoon. The poor fellows could barely
2 write their name. It was a shame what they went through. It was pure torture for them because
3 they couldn't grasp what was going on. I really felt for them.

4 SM: What was the most challenging aspect of basic training for you?

5 AD: I'm short, and the long walk to the rifle range, or run. It got to be where you either you
6 ran to the rifle range and walked back or walked and ran back. It was like an accordion. It never
7 seemed to get everybody in the whole company going at the same speed. Being short it was hard
8 for me always to keep up. That was probably the worst part of basic training was rifle range. Even
9 though I scored expert with a rifle, I'm a very good shot, just getting there and coming back just
10 about killed me. I was promoted, there weren't very many guys out of basic at the time that were
11 promoted from E-1 to I don't know if it was E-2. Think it was like five of us got it. I was one of the
12 guys that got promoted up to E-2 or E-3 out of basic. So evidently I did all right. Most of the
13 guys that were going to flight school did well.

14 SM: What weapons were you firing then?

15 AD: M-14s. I think that because we weren't going to AIT, they didn't bother teaching us
16 anything else. I think we might have fired a pistol. We might have fired the .45. I know for sure we
17 fired the M-14.

18 SM: When did you first get your hands on an M-16? Was that in Vietnam?

19 AD: Vietnam.

20 SM: What was the ethnic makeup of your basic training group do you know, your platoon?
21 Do you remember?

22 AD: I'd say it was probably boy this is just a shot in the dark. Probably 1/3 Black and 2/3
23 Caucasian. Of the Caucasian, there might have been a couple Hispanics. That's pretty much
24 what I remember. Most of the drill sergeants were Black. Pretty sharp characters or they really
25 had their stuff memorized well. Couldn't trip them up when they started their spiel on whatever
26 they were instructing on. That was the ethnic background that I remember.

27 SM: Did any of your drill instructors; did they have combat experience in Vietnam?

28 AD: Yes, quite a few of them. I remember the ones with my platoon basically. I believe
29 two I remember. I believe they both had CIBs on. They could have got those; it wasn't that far
30 from Korea. You know there were guys even, and I doubt any World War II guys were still drill
31 instructors. Some of them were just E-5s and E-6s. Yes, there were quite a few of the DIs that

1 were walking around with a CIB, which I highly respect anybody that has earned a Combat
2 Infantryman's Badge. My hat's off. They've got the toughest job in the world as an infantryman.

3 SM: What did you do after basic training? Did you go straight over to flight school?

4 AD: I went home. They sent me home on leave for two weeks. Then I went to Ft.
5 Wolters, Texas, for flight school. There wasn't a flight class ready. So I did what they called
6 snowbird, which that means you just hang around. You're just a flunkie. Did that for about two
7 weeks or so or three weeks. The other guys in my basic training unit [going to flight school], they
8 did just the opposite. They kept them at Ft. Polk for two or three weeks and then they sent them
9 home on leave and then sent them to Ft. Wolters. We all met up again at Ft. Wolters and were all
10 in the same flight class. Just got there at different times. I think we started [flight school] in like
11 April, I think or something like that of '66. Maybe May. I remember it was really starting to get hot.
12 Miserable Gulch or Mineral Wells [the town closest to Ft. Wolters].

13 SM: How long did that training last at Ft. Wolters?

14 AD: I believe we graduated in October. And Ft. Rucker was too crowded to take our
15 class. It wasn't just our class. This was an on-going thing. They held everybody over for an extra
16 month. The holdovers were just what they called the super-senior candidates. We just were given
17 odd jobs for a month. Another class would graduate from Ft. Rucker, then we were shipped to Ft.
18 Rucker. I believe we were there from like May until October for training. Then another month and
19 November, we went to Rucker.

20 SM: This is primary flight?

21 AD: Yes, primary flight was at Wolters.

22 SM: What was covered in that instruction and what were the interesting aspects of that
23 training and challenges?

24 AD: Of course, you had the first month was pre-flight. It was all classroom work, kind of a
25 hell month. They had TAC officers that took care of the platoons. They tried to get you to quit.
26 Come in, mess your rooms up, scratch the floor up after you polished it. A lot of physical training in
27 classes. About eight hours a day, I'm guessing about eight hours a day. After that month you went
28 to learn to solo. You were assigned to an instructor who could have from two to three students
29 with him. His job was to get you soloed within I believe the time limit was 15 hours. If you didn't
30 solo in 15 hours, these hours might be off a little bit, not more than one or two. You were sent up
31 for an evaluation ride by another instructor to see if the instructor is missing something. It might

1 take somebody else to say, 'You're doing this wrong. Pick this up.' Most of the guys soloed. We
2 did lose people in pre-flight and we did lose guys that just could not solo. Some of them were
3 given the opportunity to go back a class and some of them were just shipped out, to who knows
4 where? But they were out of the flight program. Some of the guys quit. I found that there were
5 some older guys in the class that were already fixed-wing qualified. They were in their late 20s.
6 They were already, they were getting fed up with the b.s. They just said, 'We don't need this. We'll
7 go and do two years in the Army.' They didn't like the helicopters. I think we had one guy killed in
8 that particular time, right after we soloed.

9 SM: What happened?

10 AD: The guy had a lot of fixed wing flight time. He wasn't very old, but he could fly a fixed
11 wing. He may have been 25 or so. Your instructor pilot sat in one seat and you were assigned to
12 another unless you were flying an OH-23 then you sat in the middle seat, they were like three seats
13 across. You sat in the middle and the instructor sat on the left. He was flying a TH-55 that had a
14 left and right seat. They, being the Army's accident investigation board, surmised that after he
15 soloed that he had switched seats to try the instructor's seat to see what it would be like to fly from
16 the other side. Before he got back to the airfield he knew he had to get in the other seat. So,
17 instead of landing and changing seats he tried to do it in mid-air.

18 SM: He fell through?

19 AD: Pardon me?

20 SM: He fell through?

21 AD: Yes, this guy his name was Brown. These trainers were so small that you could lean
22 in them and make the thing turn. As soon as he stepped over from the left side to the right, the
23 aircraft tipped, he was not strapped in. He fell right through the rotor blades. Of course that
24 knocked the blades off the TH-55 and he went in. I think he was the only guy in my class, or my
25 section that was killed at Wolters that I can remember because we had some other guys killed at
26 Rucker, but that was months later.

27 SM: Did you ever have or know an instructor named Ben Van Etten?

28 AD: It doesn't ring a bell. In fact, I couldn't tell you the name of any of my instructors from
29 Wolters. You ask me some of the other aspects about Wolters, once you soloed, which was a
30 great day! They, being your other classmates, would take you to some stock tank, I'm sure you
31 know what they are, being in Texas. Maybe the pool at the Holiday Inn if you were lucky, and they

1 threw you in with all of your clothes on. You got to sew on your solo wings on your baseball cap,
2 which was the color of whatever WOC [Warrant Officer Candidate] class you belonged to. You
3 started, your instructor would say, 'Ok, you have an hour and a half by yourself today.' You'd go
4 out and do traffic pattern work, then you'd get signed off for confined areas, which meant you go
5 out and land in these [sites marked by] tires out in the middle of nowhere. It was just a progression
6 of different maneuvers until you graduated. Every so often you had to take a check ride with a
7 check pilot, who was not your instructor. You had to demonstrate to someone other than him. And
8 of course, keep your grades up too.

9 SM: What was the most challenging aspect of the training for you?

10 AD: Probably getting to solo. It didn't take me the 15 hours. I think I soloed in about 12
11 hours or 11 or 12. There was a point where I thought, 'I'll never be able to do it.' There was too
12 much going on in that little aircraft for me to grasp all at once. You know one day it all kind of came
13 together. When I soloed it gave me a lot of confidence. I think I was a little afraid of the aircraft to
14 tell the truth.

15 SM: You were training in?

16 AD: I trained in an OH-23, which was an older model than the TH-55. In fact, some of the
17 units still used them in Vietnam when I got over there the first time. They had a little more powerful
18 bird.

19 SM: In terms of flying the aircraft, was hovering the biggest challenge to master?

20 AD: I'd say so. Hovering was no picnic. As time went on, I loved it. I loved hovering.
21 Until the day I stopped flying I thought hovering was the greatest thing.

22 SM: Any other interesting events occur while you were there at Ft. Wolters? You
23 mentioned the accident already. I didn't know if there were any humorous stories to relate?

24 AD: I'm sure there were. You know there was always some type of prank going on. I
25 can't really recollect what they are. The group was close. One half of the alphabet flew in the
26 morning. The other half went to school. The next week it was vice versa. So, one side of the class
27 was always pulling a prank on the other side. The TAC officers, they were ingenious with some of
28 the way they came up with the things they did to us. The night before a big test, this might not be
29 humorous but. And of course it would be raining or something, they'd hit the fire alarm. You'd run
30 out in your skivvies, then they'd go in and tear your room apart. Then of course it had to be ready
31 for inspection at 0'dark 30 in the morning and plus you had a big test. They'd keep you up all night.

1 That's the kind of stuff that would make guys quit. There was a big rock in front of the first WOC. I
2 think it was red. Everybody out of class used to go over and paint it their class color. Our class
3 went over and painted it blue for 3rd WOC. I wasn't personally involved in it. There was always
4 some type of prank. You know if somebody owned a Volkswagen, you never know where it would
5 end up; anything that they could lift up. There was a lot of good joking and camaraderie.

6 SM: For that month that you were still stuck there, before you went onto Ft. Rucker, what
7 did you do? Do you remember?

8 AD: Yes, I remember that real well, because that was a good month. We were taken to
9 some briefing room. We were all assigned to a job. They said, 'You, DeMailo you report to Major
10 So-and-so at such-and-such a building.' So I went over there, and this major is all fight-
11 commander and he takes me out to the stage field. I'm supposed to just help them in the stage
12 tower, like keeping track of tail numbers and who's where and all that. But he had regular people
13 there for that. Actually these little stage-field towers were really small. This guy was a decent guy.
14 I wish I could remember his name. He looked at me after that day and said, 'Do you really think
15 that it's necessary to be here? Give me your honest opinion.' I said, 'No. We're a little crowded
16 up there. I just feel like I'm in the way.' He said, 'You're absolutely right.' He said, 'You go back to
17 those barracks wherever you're living, and do whatever you want for the rest of the month.' He
18 said, 'Anybody asks you what you're doing, you just tell them to come and see me.' I had the
19 month off.

20 SM: For crying out loud!

21 AD: Everybody was jealous. I think maybe two or three other guys maybe after a week or
22 two got off. I'd go get a six-pack of beer or something and go down to this Mineral Wells, I think it
23 was Mineral Wells Lake, right there. I bought a BB gun. Because I didn't have a car, I left my car
24 at home because the Army said, 'Don't bring your car it would be a hardship,' which was crap. It
25 was the best thing anybody could do was take a car to flight school because you could hide all
26 kinds of stuff in your trunk if you didn't want the TAC officers to see. I didn't have one, but I could
27 walk there from the barracks. I'd just plink, plink at the beer cans. I'm not a bird shooter. I don't
28 want to blow the wings off of bugs and stuff. Plink with the BB gun and drink a cold six pack and
29 that was about it. At the end of the day guys would start filtering back. Some of my buddies that
30 knew where I'd be, they'd come down in their car and pick me up and say, 'Let's go to the mess

1 hall and get some thing to eat.' Go to the drive-in or something like that. Play cards. So it was a
2 real good month.

3 SM: Sounds like it. You said that you could hide things in your trunk that you wouldn't
4 want your TAC officer to find. What kind of stuff do you mean?

5 AD: We had a locker in our room called a security locker. The only thing you were
6 allowed to keep locked. However, they could have a security locker inspection. There was only
7 supposed to be so much laundry in your laundry bag. You couldn't let it build up for a long time.
8 You're only supposed to have one extra set of boots, and were supposed to change your boots
9 every other day. You could buy more than one set and keep them polished. These boots were
10 numbered. They could look inside and see your name and a number to know that today, you
11 should have boot pair number one on. Tomorrow you better have two on. One better be shining
12 under the bed. You could keep two extra pair up in your locker and keep switching those. Just
13 keep wearing the ones that you'd have on. You'd shine them, but you'd just wear those every day
14 because it was easier to take care of one pair of boots. You could keep all that crap, put some
15 canned food or crackers or something, up in that security locker. If they had security locker
16 inspection and found all this contraband, you were in trouble. With those were demerits you're not
17 going to get a weekend pass. You could take it out to the trunk of your car and put it in there. For
18 some reason they never bothered your car. Just like the married guys, their wives did all the
19 ironing for their uniforms. Uniforms had to be perfect and everything. The single guys had to take
20 them to the laundry, which cost money, or iron it up yourself if you could iron. The security locker
21 came in handy until they had the surprise inspections. Just like your razor blade had to be
22 perfectly clean, to the point of it was ridiculous. You could take the razor that you used everyday
23 and put it up in your security locker and keep a perfectly new one on display. That type of stuff, or
24 put it in the trunk of your car or whatever.

25 SM: Ok, that makes sense. Shortcuts.

26 AD: What's that?

27 SM: Things that would allow you to make shortcuts, make your day easier. Not bad stuff,
28 just things that would make your life a little bit easier.

29 AD: I had this trick. These were old Air Force barracks. To the Army they were like
30 heaven. I didn't live in wooden barracks. When I went through there was four WOCs and there
31 were four concrete block barracks, with three floors on them. They had these built in wall lockers

1 that were made of wood. They had like an armoire, where you could hang your uniforms; a
2 security locker on the top and on the bottom there was about three or four drawers. There was a
3 WOC guide on how everything had to be put in those lockers. How everything had to be folded.
4 Your socks had to be rolled a certain way. Your underwear. This stuff was all supposed to be
5 used. There was paper down inside the locker, shelf paper. For inspection every morning, each
6 drawer had to be, the top drawer had to be out 3 inches. The next drawer five inches and so on
7 and so forth. I got the idea that I taped. I took real small pieces of tape. I taped everything into
8 position by making a loop of tape. Because the TACs would like to go by, the TAC officers and
9 slam these doors shut and then everything would move. It would take 20 minutes or so to get all
10 this rearranged. When I had everything taped, they could slam it shut. They never used to open it
11 up again and everything stayed in place. I got away with that for a couple of months. I never said
12 anything to anybody. That was another thing. We were a tight-knit group, but you know if you
13 found something pretty good, you'd better be real good friends with who you said something to.
14 Somebody might say something by accident just saying, 'I heard about this real good plan
15 DeMailo's doing.' The next thing you know, this guy's doing it. That guy's doing it. The TAC
16 officer finds out. I never said anything to anybody, but one day the TAC officer got mad that my
17 drawers were always perfect. He pulled the drawer all the way out and went to dump it out and
18 nothing fell out. It was all sort of taped into place. I don't think I got a pass for like two weeks over
19 that.

20 SM: For crying out loud.

21 AD: I always said if I flunked out, I could get a job at Bell Helicopter as a gardener. I
22 ended up cutting grass and hedges for two weeks on the weekend.

23 SM: When you left Ft. Wolters, is that when you received your chief warrant officer
24 ranking? When did you receive that?

25 AD: When we graduated from Ft. Rucker we graduated as warrant officer one. That's not
26 a chief. We got our rank in a ceremony, at the post theatre. You have to have rank of an officer to
27 get wings. We went outside and pinned our wings on. Went back into to our original seats. Not
28 pinned our wings on, pinned our bars on. Had another ceremony and went across the stage and
29 were issued our wings. Then went outside and pinned our wings on. That all happened at the
30 same time.

31 SM: You were trained on Hueys at Ft. Rucker?

1 AD: At Rucker, first we went into OH-13s. We were never checked out in them, but we
2 were given basic instruments in those aircraft, which is a very strange thing is not to be checked
3 out in an aircraft that you're flying IFR. If you know what that is, it's instrument flight rules in the
4 clouds. So the instructor pilot, because he's checked out in the aircraft, you don't have to be.
5 That's where our basic instruments are taken. Then we switched to the Hueys and went to
6 advanced instruments. We still weren't checked out in the Huey. Then we went from, when we got
7 instrument training out of the way. I guess they way they looked at it is they weren't going to spend
8 any money on transitioning us into a Huey if we couldn't fly instruments. Because instruments was
9 the most difficult part of the course, as far as I was concerned, as far as the overall course. Once
10 you got through instruments then we were checked out in the Huey. That was to me a lot of fun,
11 getting the Huey checked out. I lucked out and my IP had one student, it was me. A real nice
12 captain. We got to spend a little more time flying than the instructor pilot who might have had two
13 students or three students. I guess because of this guy's rank, he was assistant flight leader, he
14 only had to do one student. So if we flew say two hours, he might log one and a half. So I was
15 getting extra time even though it didn't show up on the books. It was a lot of fun though. We did a
16 lot of autorotations, engine off landings and stuff like that. Had a good time.

17 SM: What was the most challenging part of transitioning to Hueys?

18 AD: For me there wasn't anything challenging with the Huey. I think maybe just getting
19 used to the size as far as when you had a tight spot to put it in; because all of the other aircraft
20 were so small that we were flying. I really don't consider that so much the challenge as it was
21 using the right judgment. It was going from a model-T to a Cadillac. I mean they're very easy to fly
22 once you've had that much experience.

23 SM: What model Huey was it; do you recall?

24 AD: We were flying mostly A-models and a few B-models. I think when we got on the
25 gunnery range, a few of us got to go on a gunnery range I just think it was an arbitrary pick. I got to
26 go on a gunnery range for a day or two. There might have been a couple C-models on the
27 gunnery range. We didn't have any C-models with just our flight training.

28 SM: Was there a very high washout rate there at Ft. Rucker?

29 AD: You know, we'd lost most of the people already. The majority of the people we lost, I
30 know we started out with I think close to like 300 guys. I can't remember what we graduated with.
31 We lost most of them at Ft. Wolters. I'm not even sure about the 300. Ours was a large class at

1 the time. Most of the guys were lost that got out or didn't make it were at Wolters. We lost a few at
2 Rucker. Usually at Rucker they gave the guys an opportunity to be set back a class. Because
3 they had so much money invested in them.

4 SM: How would you evaluate overall the instructors? Just out of curiosity, before that
5 question, you had a military officer instructor there at Ft. Rucker. What about at Ft. Wolters? Did
6 you have a civilian instructor?

7 AD: I had two civilians for two different phases. The last phase at Wolters I had a captain.
8 At Rucker, in the primary instrument phase I had a civilian. The rest of the advanced phase
9 instruments and my Huey transition were both captains in the Army. It really was a hit or miss type
10 thing.

11 SM: How would you evaluate the instruction that you received to fly helicopters at both
12 locations?

13 AD: Are you saying the difference between the military and the civilian?

14 SM: No, just were the instructors good, bad?

15 AD: Overall I'd rate them good. I only had problems with one instructor. We always were
16 told that if you're not getting along with your instructor or you feel you need to change, there's a
17 personality clash, you can ask for a change instructor and it won't be held against you. They really
18 pounded that home. They said, 'Don't get washed out because you're having a personality
19 problem.' They told us that. 'You're not going to be in any way penalized.'

20 SM: Was that true?

21 AD: Yes. I had a problem with my instructor with advanced instruments. This guy just
22 was not getting through to me. I said, 'I'm not going to wash out because of him.' Plus he liked to
23 hit you on the helmet and scuff the back of your neck when you're trying to fly. I said, 'Hey, I don't
24 have to take this crap from anybody.' I went in and then I was falling behind. I got a couple pink
25 slips. You get three pink slips, and they put you up for. You get a slip everyday, like a report card
26 everyday you fly. You get three pink slips in a row and they put you up for an evaluation rode.
27 There's been guys like especially at Ft. Wolters, that were thrown out of the program after they had
28 three pink slips and then took an evaluation ride and flunked it, and they were gone. I said, 'I want
29 a change of instructor.' They gave me this guy. I remember his name, his name was Captain
30 Runk. He looked like the hardest, meanest guy on the face of the Earth. He always had a scowl
31 on his face. Got him in the cockpit, smooth low-talking guy. Everything under control. What a nice

1 guy! Had me over to his house a couple of times to study. I was hoping I could just pass check
2 ride with maybe a 70 or 72 or something like that. I think I got a 94 on my check ride. With the
3 change of instructor. He instilled a lot of confidence in me. That's the only time that I had problem.
4 Other guys did it too. It wasn't real common, but it wasn't uncommon at all.

5 SM: For the most part you feel like you had good instructors?

6 AD: Yes, I do. I think that most of the civilians were a lot older. They had done their 20 or
7 25 or 30 years in the Army. They were pretty much old school. I don't think they were as...I'm
8 looking for the right word. I think they looked at it more of an assembly line thing. Most of our
9 instructors had been to Vietnam in the early days flying. I think they had the feeling of what we
10 were getting into because the things were escalating. I think the military instructors were a little
11 easier on us, not to say that they were letting guys slide through that shouldn't. But had a little
12 better [teaching] technique at teaching us.

13 SM: Did you know where you were going upon graduation at Ft. Rucker?

14 AD: Yes, I was on orders to the 1st Air Cav Division. That's exactly where I went.
15 Everybody said, 'Look out,' if you're going to the cav. Supposedly, I'm sure that through your
16 interviews you've heard a lot about the 1st Cav.

17 SM: Yes, sir.

18 AD: I was glad to be going there. I wanted to go to a unit that had good reputation. I still
19 feel that 1st Cav is the ultimate. I have since have learned to have respect for everybody else that
20 served there, too. That we weren't the only people in the war. Everybody had their bad day at
21 Black Rock.

22 SM: During training at Ft. Rucker did you also get any kind of weapons training?

23 AD: Would you say that again?

24 SM: Did you get any kinds of weapons training?

25 AD: Are you talking personal or the aircraft?

26 SM: Aircraft weapons systems.

27 AD: I mentioned before I believe it was just a random choosing out of the class. They
28 didn't have time to send everybody through a weapons training program. Plus it was expensive to
29 shoot the ammunition up. They only had x-amount of gunships set up there at Rucker. I was
30 fortunate enough to get I think two days on a gunnery range. Like I said it was just a hit or miss
31 thing. I think they probably just took every tenth guy and said, 'You're going to weapons training.' I

1 wouldn't say it helped me one bit in Vietnam. All it did was familiarize me a little bit with the
2 weapons system and how it worked. Not so much on how to use it and become proficient with it.

3 SM: When did you graduate from Ft. Rucker?

4 AD: March 13th of 1967.

5 SM: When did you report into the 1st Cav?

6 AD: I got to Vietnam on April 3. I was in the Cav by the 5th of April I believe. We were
7 down at I believe it's the 40th Replacement Depot in Long Binh or something like that. It's where
8 we all came in to [country]. There was a lot of guys from my class. Some guys weren't on orders
9 for any unit. From there they were assigned to different units. The guys from the Cav were just
10 waiting for a ride north to get to An Khe, the base camp.

11 SM: In training did they go over any specific techniques or ways that you could fly to avoid
12 enemy contact? In training at Rucker were they gearing you towards combat in Vietnam and
13 things that you can do to increase your survivability?

14 AD: Yes, we spent the last several weeks in a tactical mode. We went to a place called
15 TAC-X. We lived out of tents. Two pilots were assigned an aircraft. You asked me before, what
16 models I flew. There might have been even some D-models out there. We had no instructors in
17 the aircraft with us. We were expected to perform simulated missions like we were in Vietnam.
18 We did everything ourselves. Our flight lead was picked arbitrarily. They'd say, 'Ok you're flight
19 lead today.' Some siren or something would go off and we'd run to our aircraft, crank them up.
20 Everybody would fall out [run out and] into take-off. How we'd take off and form up into formations
21 and do a simulated mission. Some places they had infantry waiting for us to pick up and drop and
22 take them to another place. Drop off. Sometimes we went up at altitude. Sometimes we
23 navigated low level. They did prepare us for that. Gave us a lot of classes on what altitudes to fly
24 to avoid certain type of enemy fire, small arms or .50 caliber. Those type of things. If you did get
25 into gunship they explained the trajectory of [weapons fired from an] aircraft. Especially when
26 you're firing in a turn. It affects your bullets or your rockets. So, yes, they did prepare us for that.
27 We also had a survival course that lasted several days, which cumulated in, they chased us around
28 the woods and swamps all night. Trying to avoid being captured, and had to live off the land.
29 That's another little trick I did was made sandwiches and stuck them down in my pants. Your pants
30 are boused at the bottom. I was able to get maybe six sandwiches down in there wrapped up real
good. So I wasn't hungry. They gave you like a live chicken or something to cook. I don't think I

1 missed anything by not eating the live chicken. Well, we were cooking it up and that's of course
2 when they attacked us.

3 SM: Did you share your sandwiches?

4 AD: Yes, I did as a matter of fact. I certainly did. I had two and I shared the other four.

5 SM: When you left Ft. Rucker and were on your way to Vietnam or were getting ready to
6 go to Vietnam, how confident did you feel? Did you feel like you were prepared, you were ready?

7 AD: Yes, I thought that overall flight school was good. I was confident. I knew I could fly
8 the aircraft. The Army said I could. I watched other guys fall by the wayside. Evidently they felt
9 that I had what it took to fly the aircraft. Now, I had to prove whether I could do it in combat. So
10 that was the only question I had was, 'What was combat going to be like?' You know, getting shot
11 at. I was confident that I could fly the aircraft. That was my main mission because they told us
12 they wouldn't put you there by yourself. Or with somebody that wasn't experienced. You'd get
13 there and you'd fly with an experienced guy for a while to teach you all the little tricks.

14 SM: How did you travel over to Vietnam?

15 AD: It was commercial. You know how the military rents [contracts civilian
16 transportation]?

17 SM: Yes, sir. They rent commercial aircraft?

18 AD: Yes, it was one of those Flying Tigers or something like that. Just off the wall, outfits
19 that transferred troops. They're probably using them today to get the guys over in the Gulf.

20 SM: If you would, why don't you go ahead and describe the trip over and what the
21 atmosphere was like on the aircraft. Then your first impressions upon landing in Vietnam?

22 AD: It was a little different I think than maybe some pilots that went over. I should put it.
23 I'm sure a lot of classes met up. Half of my class that graduated went to Vietnam. I believe the
24 other half, those are relative figures, was sent to Ft. Knox to form up one of the air cavalry
25 squadrons. So the half that went directly to Vietnam, we all had orders to get there the same day.
26 We showed up in San Francisco and then we were headed to Travis Air Force Base. We all got to
27 Travis around the same time. You had to take the bus up there. There was some problem either
28 with the aircraft or a storm in the Pacific. We did not take off on time. The airline put us up in
29 some hotel. The only problem is that there were so many of us. We had to get some fold out
30 beds, which was ok. And in this area was the wine country. We didn't have any transportation, so
31 we just went to these little wineries and walked the road. They had wine and cheese for you. As

1 soon as they saw we were going to Vietnam they said, 'Help yourselves.' We had free wine and
2 cheese for about a day and a half and everybody was pretty lit. Then the aircraft was finally
3 repaired, the storm was over and we headed for Vietnam. I believe we stopped in Hawaii for fuel.
4 We were allowed to get off the plane, but not go into the airport, because all they did was fuel the
5 aircraft and go. They didn't want anybody to wander off and miss the plane. I believe we stopped
6 in the Philippines. They told us the same thing. We're just going to refuel the plane and then go.
7 It was daylight then. The ride over was fairly uneventful. I'm sure there was some anxiety. Most
8 of the guys were pretty calm. I think the flight training had something to do with that, being through
9 what we had gone through in flight training. A couple of guys had some alcohol on board. Some
10 of them were drunk. Most of the guys weren't. There was no problem. Nobody caused a scene or
11 anything like that. I do remember we stopped in the Philippines and they did say, 'Don't wander
12 away.' Three guys grabbed a cab and took off for the officer's club. They were officers now and
13 they wanted to use their newfound power to get in an officer's club. The plane left without them.
14 When it was done we just took off and they were gone. Everybody thought well just like in flight
15 school, these guys are trouble. Heck, they caught up to us in Vietnam a day or two later. Nobody
16 even said a word to them. They just went to the replacement company. They got a couple of days
17 off in the Philippines. That was the flight over. Hanging around at reception station. One thing
18 that was odd, that kind of brought it home, when you open that door. And I've read a lot about this.
19 When they opened the door to the aircraft, I've heard a lot of guys say the same thing. That
20 country has its own smell to it. And the heat was just devastating. I believed we landed at Bien
21 Hoa or Tan Son Nhut, one of the two. It just hits you like a ton of bricks. We got on like a school
22 bus, but it had wire mesh along the windows so I guess they couldn't pitch a grenade in. Nobody
23 paid a lick of attention to us. We just drove through a third world country through the streets to get
24 to this replacement, the repo depot as we called it. It was very uneventful, just hot. I'm sure
25 everybody was hungry because they gave us some type of terrible boxed lunches on the plane.
26 We hung around there for maybe a day or two. I can't remember exactly. It wasn't real long, and it
27 was filthy. The latrines, you can't imagine the smell. Take a latrine smell and intensify it with heat.
28 I don't think you could get anything any worse. There was kind of gutter with, in this repo depot like
29 the wash water and stuff running through it, and it would sit in pools. The mud in Vietnam had its
30 own smell. They said, 'You're assigned to this building,' and you just picked out. They had a
31 mattress on a military bunk. The buildings were wood partially the way up, and then screen. So

1 red dust was on everything. I can't remember, I think they gave us a couple of sheets but they
2 were dirty too. Then at night we spent there you could hear artillery firing, a machine gun way off
3 in the distance. It kind of woke you up a little bit. I guess there is something going on, but you
4 come to learn later on that every place in Vietnam are artillery and machine guns at night for H&I
5 fire. Long Binh was one of the most secure places during the war. We later found out that it was
6 nothing. You could tell that it was way off, probably miles. But at the time you don't know any
7 better. You just kind of wonder what's going on. I found it difficult to sleep that night with the heat
8 and the dirt. There was an officer's club there. In the afternoon, the afternoon that we spent there
9 you could get a beer. All of a sudden somebody came around and said, 'Whoever's going to the
10 Cav get on the back of this truck. Get your duffle bag and let's go.' It was late in the day. They
11 took us to some airfield. I have no idea because it was dark when we got there. Got onto a C-130,
12 there were no seats. Just through your duffle bag down on the floor and flopped on top of it. We
13 were taught in flight school, there was a weight and balance that you have to do and everybody
14 had to be strapped in. There was none of that. Just get on and they went. Do you have anything
15 else you want to know about that particular part?

16 SM: When you got there you knew you were going to a specific unit?

17 AD: Yes, I told you I was on orders to the 1st Cav.

18 SM: 1st Cav, right. What about the subordinate unit within the 1st Air Cav, because you
19 were assigned to Delta 229th?

20 AD: 229.

21 SM: Right.

22 AD: Well, I wasn't assigned down that far. Everybody was just assigned to the 1st Cav.
23 Then it came later on where you were going. It was interesting we landed at Pleiku and got off if
24 that plane and got on a C-123, which was a smaller plane, and flew over. On a C-123 from Pleiku
25 to An Khe, it might have been a half hour flight. It was late at night. I have no idea. It was dark. It
26 could have been 10:00, it could have been 2:00 in the morning. I have no idea. But as we got off
27 of that plane, there wasn't a lot of light around. They were putting wounded on. You could see the
28 blood coming through the bandages [of the wounded, and there were] body bags. Everybody that I
29 talked to that I see at flight school reunions or Vietnam Helicopter Pilot Association Reunions or
30 whatever, we always kind of bring that up. Remember when we got off the plane how they were
31 putting those dead guys on? Then we were taken to a replacement depot within the Cav.

1 Assigned a cot and some dirty tents and then we were mortared. Not we, personally, but An Khe.
2 They mortared what they call the golf course, where they parked all the helicopters. We watched
3 gunships and flare ships, the flare ships of course are artillery flares. Some type of flare was going
4 off at night. The gunships shooting their mini-guns and rockets down in this suspected enemy
5 position. They weren't real far from where we were. Somebody came and got us and said, 'Get
6 out of the tent and go out and lay in these weeds and some slit trenches that were out there.' It
7 was kind of a wakeup of a night watching the bodies and the wounded and then the mortar attack.
8 I got up the next morning, I don't know if anybody slept after that. Then we were taken to a room, a
9 building not far from these tents. That's where we were assigned to the different units. I think they
10 asked who wanted to fly medevac. Some guys put up their hands. And they kind of gave you what
11 you wanted if they could, this major from personnel. They said if you really want a lot of action,
12 there's a good chance that you'll be wounded or killed, you want to go to the 1st Squadron, 9th
13 Cavalry. I put my hand up and this is the truth a friend of mine, Carl Crow who is a lawyer in
14 Houston now and another guy, one grabbed one arm and one grabbed the other arm and pulled
15 them down. Said, 'We've heard about the 1st of the 9th, you'll get killed over there.' So, I'm
16 struggling with them in this room. But a lot of guys had put their hands up and the names are just
17 counted out. Said, 'Ok, you guys are going to the 1st of the 9th.' Then they just said, 'Ok. You
18 guys are going to 227. You guys are going to the 229th.' I got stuck going to the 229th. Somebody
19 sent a truck over to pick us up. Then we went to another personnel office in the 229th in the
20 adjutant's office and just a clapboard building. The guy just lined us up and said you three are
21 going to A, you four are going to B. You two are going to C.' There was only two of us that were
22 going to D. I was kind of downtrodden because I thought flying in the 1st of the 9th I'd have a
23 chance to fly gunships, which I wanted to do. The guy who held my arm down, Carl Crow grabbed
24 my arm and he squeezed it real hard. He said, 'We've got guns.' I said, 'How do you know that?'
25 He said, 'I saw a sign as we were pulling in here that said Delta Company is a gun company.' So I
26 was pleased that I was going to fly gunships. That's how I ended up in the Delta 229th.

27 SM: When you got to the 1st Cav, what kind of briefings did you get?

28 AD: That major sent us, we had some paperwork to fill out. Like, if you're lightly wounded
29 do you want anybody at home to know? Most of the guys put 'No' for a light wound. Typical things
30 for pay and that. Then we had to go to what you call charm school. Everybody had to go. It didn't
31 matter if you were a pilot or an infantryman. It was anything but charm school. They wanted

1 everybody to be familiar with the weapon and how to throw a grenade and shoot a grenade
2 launcher. So, I think sometime that day they took us out to what they called the green line, which
3 was the perimeter. It was a big bunker right outside the green line at some position that had been
4 attacked the night before when that mortar attack was brought on. There was blood all over the
5 place. That thing had been blown to shit. It was still smoking, and we're looking around like, they
6 have us out here and we're all green troops. We shot weapons and threw some grenades and
7 shot M-79s. Familiarized with the M-16 which most of us never fired before. The next day we
8 were supposed to go out again, and all the pilots just said, 'Hell on it, we're not going.' They made
9 sure that the infantry went. Then we caught a ride out to the Bong Son plain to LZ English with a
10 maintenance aircraft from a Delta 229th. It was about a 45-minute flight out to English. That's
11 really where we basically operated out of. An Khe was just a base camp.

12 SM: Why don't you go ahead if you would describe the morale of the unit? Did you get
13 into a gunship right when you go there, that kind of stuff?

14 AD: Yes. As soon as I got there, I couldn't really gauge the morale because I didn't have
15 the chance to talk to anybody. We moved from...An Khe sat up on a high plateau maybe 1,500
16 feet above sea level. Yes, maybe 1,200 to 1,500 feet above sea level. It was much cooler up
17 there. This is cool, in terms of Vietnam. It was still hot. When we got down to English, it was sea
18 level. It was really hot. My buddy and I, this guy Crow, because we had gone through flight school
19 together from day one. We could barely catch our breath. They said, 'Hey go sit in this tent.' We
20 did what anybody told us to do. We just went and sat in this tent. Somebody from operations
21 came over with two cold Coca-Colas. I don't know where he got them. They were like lifesavers.
22 So, we're drinking the Coke. This tall, thin Texan, I knew he was a Texan because when he
23 started to talk the drawl and that. He was a captain. He came over to the tent and he peeked in and
24 said, 'Which one is,' everyone says De mile-o. I said, 'Me.' He laid out some big expletive. '[Shit], I
25 got the short one.' He said, 'Let's go. Get your helmet.' I'd been there long enough to drink a
26 Coke. Didn't fill out any paperwork, nothing like that. He said, 'We're going flying.' This guy was
27 my platoon leader. His name was Edwin Richter, living in San Antonio now. He's a retired
28 lieutenant colonel. One of the finest men I ever met in my life. He took me out in a loaded
29 gunship. We were by ourselves. He was also the unit instructor pilot. He wanted to see if I could
30 fly or what my capabilities were. We did touch down autorotations. Those were engine off
31 landings right to the ground, right to the dry rice paddy. Slope landings, every maneuver that's in

1 the book for a check ride. This is with a loaded ship. I've never done this with a loaded aircraft.
2 Everything had to be a little more fine tuned than anything we did at flight school. I did that and he
3 was pleased with what I did. Then he took me up into a free-fire zone and we started to. He
4 picked out this hooch that was laid back in this clearing in the jungle near the An Lo Valley. We
5 started shooting at it. I could barely hit the ground with the rockets. The door gunners were having
6 a good time because they could twist their door guns and they could put hot brass right down your
7 neck. He was chuckling. He said, 'You'll learn to fly with your collar up and buttoned in a gunship.'
8 They [the door gunners] had free guns on a gunship. They didn't have them on a pole, which we
9 called a pussy pole like the Slicks did. That's because they [the Slicks] had to throw things out,
10 help troops in and out where we didn't have to do that. They could tilt that gun and make the hot
11 brass go anywhere. That was my first day. I flew with him every day for a month after that. If he
12 had a night mission, which my company did. We had a night mission every night we had a patrol.
13 Where the 1st of the 9th left off in the daytime on recon, my unit picked up at night. We patrolled the
14 rivers around that area and certain hot spots that the division decided this is where they wanted us
15 to look. I flew with him because he wanted me to pick up his habits. He felt that his habits were
16 the best, and I believe that's what kept me alive to this day was that flying with him for a month.
17 We got a lot of hours. He showed me every trick in the book. In that time I felt that the morale in
18 that unit was excellent. Our commander Ira Jones was a good man, was a major. The morale was
19 just I think was as good as I'd ever seen it for the rest of the year.

20 SM: When you first went out that first time, you didn't encounter any enemy?

21 AD: No, but that doesn't mean that we couldn't have been shot at anytime.

22 SM: No, absolutely.

23 AD: No we didn't encounter anything. It was just a free ride. It was a lesson. If we would
24 have seen some I'm sure that he would have taken controls or gun. Whatever he wanted to fire,
25 rockets or the mini-gun, and he would have done something about it.

26 SM: During those flights in that first month when you were flying with him, do you
27 remember any particular lesson that he invoked, told you about? Things that would help you stay
28 alive as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam? Anything in particular coming to mind?

29 AD: The first time I got shot at was at night. We were going. [Dogs barking] excuse me,
30 Boys! They like to play at this time of the day, but it's so cold outside they came in to play. My
31 dogs.

1 SM: Right, right.

2 AD: So, they're having their little tussle. We were out on the Bong Son Plain. We were
3 cutting across into the ARVN area of operation. The 40th ARVN was east of Highway 1. We
4 started taking .50-caliber fire. You could tell it's .50 because the tracers are so big and they're
5 reaching up to the altitude we were at because we were going to let down over the coast and work
6 the mouth of the Bong Son River and get right down on the deck. So as we were moving from one
7 area over to the other, we started taking fire. I could see the tracers coming up by the ship, they
8 weren't hitting us but it certainly scared me. I started to pull more power to try to climb away from
9 them. I start sucking off rotor RPM and engine RPM, almost to where we got the low audio
10 warning. Captain Richter didn't holler at me or anything. He just said, 'Hey Al,' he tapped over and
11 I could see the light of the cockpit. He tapped at the RPM and we were down at 6,000 where we
12 usually run at 6,600. He said, 'Just put it back to where it's supposed to go. It'll climb without us
13 sucking all the RPM off of it.' It caught me when you get in a tight situation, which that wasn't even
14 tight compared to some things that happened later on. You've got to keep your wits about you.
15 You still have to fly the aircraft. No matter what's going on you have to fly that aircraft. As you get
16 more experienced it becomes second nature as you've heard guys say I'm sure, that you strap it
17 on and it becomes part of you. I learned to fly the aircraft, watch what you're doing, don't kill
18 yourself in an accident. Once he and I got in the clouds there was a big assault. The Cav was
19 crazy. They assaulted constantly, putting troops in. Day, night, it didn't matter when. We put a big
20 assault in on the Bong Son plain [at night]. The weather was just horrendous. We popped into the
21 clouds at about 1,000 feet en route to where this assault was going to take place that we were
22 going to cover. We were popping in and out, in and out. You could see the ground for a while,
23 couldn't see the ground. Then we started taking machine gun fire from several locations. Because
24 our ship was on the outside of the formation covering the slicks, it was the closest one to the
25 enemy fire. They were directing their fire at us. It was another time where I didn't know what to do.
26 I didn't know whether to continue on covering the slicks or to dive down and attack the gun. I was
27 stymied. He was mad then. He swore at me and he took the aircraft. He said, 'We're here to
28 protect those slicks.' We dove down through the clouds because we could see in and out. It
29 wasn't solid clouds, but it wasn't by any means [good weather]. It got my heart rate up and we
30 attacked, or he attacked the guns. He said, 'Just don't sit there, do something.' The decision was
31 not to fly the aircraft, but crap or get off the pot. Do something about it. He got mad about that.

1 We'd already been flying together for a couple of weeks when that happened, but we hadn't been
2 in any bad weather. I learned something there.

3 SM: When you were flying at night like that, this was a night mission. When you were
4 flying at night, did you have any kind of lights on whatsoever or were you completely blacked out?

5 AD: On that particular mission we had our lights on because [of so many aircraft and] if
6 the enemy wanted to shoot at any[body], we had the doctrine that we'd rather have the enemy
7 shoot at the gunship than the lesser-armed slicks. The slicks had a machine gun on each side and
8 their job was to get their troops on the ground. Plus they have troops on board. Also the weather
9 was so bad at that particular time. There were so many aircraft in the air. I think we had 24 slicks.
10 I think six or eight gunships with them. Plus ARA birds, Aerial Rocket Artillery. We had to be able
11 to try to see one another. There were too many aircraft going on, flying around that nobody could
12 be blacked out. We ran missions by ourself with just two birds and a flare ship, we'd have the lead
13 bird complete lights on and the trail bird completely blacked out. Yes, our lights were on, on that
14 mission. It depended on what kind of mission and on the number of aircraft.

15 SM: This was a mission into the Bong Son Plain. Was this the first major combat assault
16 you participated in?

17 AD: No.

18 SM: Why don't you go ahead and describer your first major combat mission?

19 AD: There could have been others, but when you say major I'm going to say. A regular
20 one usually involved six slicks, two gunships and two aerial rocket artillery birds. That was your
21 normal, everyday run of the mill moving troops around. Once you started getting up around 12
22 aircraft or 24 aircraft, they became pretty big. They're usually, they, the higher ups decided to do
23 that, they usually expected trouble or there was some type of large enemy force. I remember
24 going into the An Lo Valley, which was just a mountain range, over the mountains to the west of
25 Bong Son. It was a real bad place when we first got there, when I first got there. It was even
26 worse before I got there. Obviously. We flew I think 24 slicks into there, maybe more. A minimum
27 of 24. I know that just about the whole battalion took part because I think we had a maximum effort
28 to try to get all 12 of our gunships up. Our battalion commander, lieutenant colonel was leading the
29 flight. When you usually had the battalion CO leading a flight it's pretty big operation mainly
30 because if there's medals going to be given out, they'll get one. This guy wasn't a bad guy though;
31 he led a lot of flights. It was in the An Lo. By this time, Captain Richter was letting me fire the

1 rockets and he used the mini-guns in the left seat. I was punching off the rockets and we were
2 down real low, right skimming the trees and shooting them kind of line drive along the side of the
3 slicks. There were still buildings left in the An Lo. When we left there the place looked like it was
4 nuked. It was completely defoliated. All the buildings had been bulldozed. There was nothing left.
5 There was still a village in there, or town. He said, 'You're getting kind of close to that lead ship.
6 You ought to shut it off.' I punched one more. I did hit the hooch, but it was just luck. When it
7 blew up, it blew up right next to the battalion commander's aircraft. Then Richter said, 'Ow cripes!
8 You did it now; you got the colonel. You had to blow the colonel out of the air as he's touching
9 down!' Well, when all the dust settled and we came buzzing by because we were at a distance
10 behind them, the colonel's aircraft was still intact and he came out. That evening, later on that
11 evening after the operations were done, Richter says, 'You've got to go up to battalion
12 headquarters, the colonel wants to see you.' They had set me up. It was like I was going to get a
13 big ass chewing, it was just all in good fun. They just had me sweating it out. Actually it turned out
14 to be an excellent rocket shot, but it was just real lucky. That was the first real big assault that I
15 was on. You had to be careful with those gunships. Richter was so good, he picked up somebody
16 gave him the nickname the 'Baby Jesus'. If you mention that to any of the guys from Delta 229th
17 they know exactly who you're talking about.

18 SM: How did he earn that nickname, do you know?

19 AD: Because he was so good. He was the best gun pilot in Delta 229th. What's better
20 than a baby Jesus?

21 SM: Yes.

22 AD: That's who he was, a baby Jesus.

23 SM: I didn't know if perhaps he survived some kind of horrendous situation, like a miracle.
24 That way a miracle was involved.

25 AD: I'm sure he survived some hairy times. He was a great pilot, great instructor and a
26 great guy. We're still, I'm still in touch with him.

27 SM: That area in which you were operating, what was your primary responsibility? The
28 unit's primary responsibility? What were you guys trying to accomplish there? This was all in II
29 Corps, correct?

30 AD: Yes, this was in II Corps. This was in northern II Corps. The 1st Cav was working
31 from. We always had somebody around the base camp at An Khe. Then we started at a place

1 somewhere around Phu Cat, which was an Air Force Base just above Qui Nhon and worked all the
2 way to the I Corps border, which was up around Duc Pho and then west some distance. About to
3 a place called Song Re Valley. Our job was to find the enemy and kill them. We basically fought
4 an outfit called the 22nd NVA regiment that moved around that area quite a bit. That's usually who
5 we fought. Now this area, Bong Son, was the largest rice producer in II Corps. So the enemy got
6 a lot of its supplies out of this Bong Son Plain. Some part of the coast in that country, the
7 mountains come right down to the water, where this had a beautiful open plain. If you ever wanted
8 to set a resort up, the Bong Son Plain was absolutely beautiful. Nice and flat and all kind of rice
9 growing there. Our responsibility was to find the enemy and kill them. Usually the 1st of the 9th
10 were the people that found them and then would, we, the rest of the division, would pile on with
11 regular infantry. The 229th would bring that infantry and assault them right on top of the enemy.
12 Then my job was to stay there and help the infantry, protect the slicks. Any logistical support that
13 we'd call log birds to go in, cover that, cover medevacs. Then my unit at night patrolled the
14 waterways and whatever hot spots the division felt that needed patrolled. We ran these patrols all
15 night. You could sometimes get five, six hours of night flying. When I first got there, you were
16 usually off the next day. As time went on and the replacements weren't coming in as fast, you
17 might get to sleep until 10:00 the next day, and then you'd be back at it again. Somebody was up
18 all the time. The weather, we called it firefly. A lot of people called it lightening bug. There were
19 so many different names for it. In the whole year I was there I think maybe I've seen it cancelled
20 five times. One time an aircraft crashed going over the POL to refuel, it was raining so hard. We
21 were begging not to send us out because nobody could see. You can't see your hand in front of
22 your face. When the aircraft crashed it hit its tail rotor on a revetment, they called it off. Another
23 time from my unit, [in terrible weather] they didn't call it off, this was up at Evans during TET [a ship
24 from D/229th]. He went up into the clouds, went inverted immediately and came out upside down
25 and crashed and burned. Lieutenant Gary Shy. They [the higher ups] were hell bent for leather to
26 fly at night.

27 SM: Was the unit full strength?

28 AD: When I got there it was. Then after that as time went on, I don't think it ever was. It
29 was pretty close. There was only maybe once or twice that we were really hurting. I'd say most of
30 the time we were just maybe running at 85% to 90%.

1 SM: What do you remember about the operational level of your aircraft fleet? Were all
2 your aircraft functional? Did you guys have a certain number that were consistently down?

3 AD: It was very hard to keep helicopters [flying]. We had 12 in our company. The slick
4 companies A, B, and C had 20 a piece. Let me digress here for a second, which I had been on two
5 assaults. You asked me where my first big assault was and that was in the An Lo. Two assaults,
6 and I was still flying with Richter. We had 100 slicks, so we had supporting gunships, for every
7 sixth slick there were two gunships, two ARA birds. We had the guns-a-go-go, which were the
8 armed Chinooks. At those particular assaults we had Naval gun support. We had all these
9 interlocking firebases firing. But 100 slicks in the air, you should have heard the radios. You
10 couldn't think straight. One landed out on Bong Son Plain and one was at LZ Glenn, was up at the
11 Fishhook in the An Lo Valley. Those were the biggest assaults I was ever on. Never saw anything
12 like that again after that particular time. The maintenance on a helicopter, you fly for one hour,
13 you've got two or three hours of maintenance on it. Every 25 hours they had intermediate
14 inspection, which could be done in maybe four or five hours. Then every 100 hours of flight time it
15 had a periodic inspection and they took the whole aircraft apart. If the aircraft didn't have a lot of
16 damage to it or they didn't find a lot wrong with it, our maintenance people working around the
17 clock in teams could pull it in 24 hours. Most of the time, if it was in what we called PE, that aircraft
18 would be at least three days. Sometimes you'd get a hanger queen it might be in three weeks. So
19 out of those 12 aircraft, we were lucky, I'd say to keep eight all the time flying. Something always
20 went wrong with something or bullet damage or whatever. I felt that the maintenance was pretty
21 good. I flew civilian for a while, civilian medevac after I got out of the service. The civilians can't
22 hold a candle to the military's maintenance.

23 SM: The aircraft that you had down, were they principally down for maintenance issues or
24 because they had been damaged in flight?

25 AD: I'm sorry I didn't catch your last question.

26 SM: Were they damaged in flight, whether it be combat damage?

27 AD: I'd say principally for maintenance. We were pretty lucky in Delta 229th about bullet
28 damage. It's not that we didn't get it. When I was there we were pretty good about where we took
29 the hits. It always seemed to be pretty lucky on where we took them that they didn't really tear the
30 aircraft up. We had a couple that were totally destroyed from combat damage. I'd say most of the
31 time the aircraft were down because of maintenance, the majority of them. Just like half of the

1 aircraft in Vietnam that were lost, were lost due to accidents. I mean of helicopters, I can't speak
2 for the fixed wings.

3 SM: In the area in which you operated, during the briefings, the pre-mission briefings
4 you'd receive, were the enemy units in the area principally Viet Cong, NVA or a combination?

5 AD: I'd say a combination and our briefings weren't [dog bark], they weren't very. When I
6 first got there I didn't hanging around operations, look at the situation board and all that. After a
7 while they just say, 'You've got to go.' [dog barks] Excuse me, my wife just got home.

8 SM: Go ahead.

9 AD: In the mornings sometimes if you were going to do the fixed ship assaults, you'd get a
10 briefing sheet. You knew where you were going, what unit you were picking up and where you
11 were going to take them. Now that could be diverted any time. Say another unit got in trouble, you
12 could take the people that you were going on a search and destroy mission and put them in over
13 here [where help was needed usually]. It turned out to be a hot LZ. Most of the time, if you were
14 on that, that was your first reaction force. Then you were on second reaction force. You were
15 pretty much a stand-by for whatever came up unexpectedly. You'd end up flying all day. Then
16 your third reaction force was usually the guys that flew the night missions. They'd end up going out
17 during the day, most of the time too. The briefings most of the time you got on the radio. You're
18 taking off and they're saying head over into the An Lo, here's the grid coordinantes. This is what's
19 going on or there'll be somebody there. Contact Killer Spade yellow one on their UHF frequency
20 and they'll brief you. Everything was kind of by the seat of your pants.

21 SM: Could you get information or intelligence? Say you had to go from Point A to Point B,
22 and it was imperative that you got to Point B intact, whether to provide support for slick insertion.
23 Would you be able to get intelligence on what enemy units were in between Point A and Point B so
24 you could avoid contact, avoid getting in too much trouble?

25 AD: There was a situation board in operations that was updated as they got information
26 from battalion, and battalion got it from division. You could look at your route and see what was in
27 between. There was usually always a lot of small arms fire marks, which you didn't worry about.
28 What you worried about was the anti-aircraft, the .50 calibers is what you worried about because
29 they could reach you, if you were low level [at 1500 ft. away from hot spots]. You know they have
30 a range of a mile. That's what you could stay that way. Usually the gunships, we used to skim the
31 trees wherever we went because we were always looking for trouble. Even if we were en route to

1 escort somebody. Usually if we were going to make an insertion, the slicks and the gunships took
2 off together because we all lived in the same area. We'd all leave at the same time. If we just
3 went out to help somebody in trouble, like during the TET Offensive there were times I'd get shot at
4 and I couldn't stop to shoot back because it was imperative that I got to the people in trouble.
5 During TET it was always life and death that you go to where somebody needed you the most.

6 SM: Along those lines, life and death situations, did you engage in very much impromptu
7 medevac, where you were the closest aircraft to the situation? They needed a medevac as soon
8 as possible so you guys went in?

9 AD: I personally didn't do it in Delta 229th and subsequent tours of the 1st if the 9th I did.
10 But not in Delta 229th. I never had to make a medevac in a gunship. It's very hard to do because
11 of the weight. Even if you expended all your ammo you still had the weight of the guns and the
12 ammo trays and what not. All this extra stuff that you carried on board. Plus the aircraft wasn't
13 really designed for that. Then I'd have to get into aerodynamics and things for you. It was different
14 model, most of them were Charlie models.

15 SM: The Charlie models had decent power, is that correct?

16 AD: No, I'd say they were under powered.

17 SM: They were underpowered?

18 AD: Yes, they had this big blade on them. They had the same weight and mass gross
19 weight as an H-model, but they had a different rotor system. The rotor system was built for speed
20 and maneuverability, to turn tighter. But it wasn't good for lifting. Where the H-model was built for
21 lifting. You'd get the same amount of weight off with a different rotor system, in the same engine.
22 It made it difficult. There were times when your door gunner and crew chief had to run along side
23 you as you hopped down the runway or road or something to get off the ground. Then they jumped
24 in once you started to fly a little bit. Or you'd have to cut back on your fuel. We had one ship, a
25 Charlie model, holds I think 1,650 gallons of fuel, that's pounds. Excuse me, pounds of fuel. We
26 had one ship you could only get off the ground on a real hot day with 600 pounds on it. Every 10
27 minutes you're burning 100 pounds. So you can't stay up very long. If you had a long mission that
28 ship was not the one to take. But they gave it to you and somebody had to fly.

29 SM: So you rotated aircraft, you didn't always fly on the same one?

30 AD: No, you tried to. We had three platoons. I was in the second platoon and my favorite
31 ship was the 053. It had a .40mm on it. It was a rebuilt B model. It was able to pick up a lot of

1 weight because it had the same rotor system as the H-model on it. But it wasn't very fast or
2 maneuverable, but it could pick up what it was supposed to. I was given that aircraft. When it
3 came in, I was a senior aircraft commander in the 2nd Platoon. Captain Richter had already gone
4 home. My new platoon leader Mel Utley said, 'This ship's yours. How do you want it armed? You
5 could have mini-guns or .40mm.' I said, 'I want a .40mm.' So that's what they put on it for me.
6 When that ship was flyable I flew it. When it wasn't, it was potluck.

7 SM: Why did you choose the .40mm over the other weapons systems?

8 AD: I thought really it was a much more versatile weapon, where your mini-gun didn't
9 have much penetration power in the bunkers. They jammed quite a bit. They were good for troops
10 in the open or lightly covered, say like hooches and things like that where the regular round could
11 go right through it. They were good against boats and sampans, which we did a lot of work at night
12 on. But .40mm could get into a bunker. You could pound a bunker with it and blow a hole in it. If
13 you got a round in the door of the bunker, the shrapnel is going to spread through it, where a mini-
14 gun is probably just going to dig in the dirt, not hurt anybody. Trench lines it was good. It just
15 started pumping it right down the trench line. Guys would just come flying out like you couldn't
16 believe. That's why I liked it. It was much easier to reload also. Much faster to reload. A crew
17 chief and I got some extra cans from guns-a-go go, armed Chinooks. We were putting 850 rounds
18 on that, which normally they only carry 300. So we wouldn't have to expend this long shoot that
19 ran from the back to the front unless it was life or death. We could turn that aircraft around real
20 fast. Because reloading, the .40mm rounds came in 50 round cases. Rockets are easy to load. It
21 was a good aircraft, it was just slow.

22 SM: I guess for you personally, as a pilot, you would prefer an aircraft that had the higher
23 lift capability with that rotor system as oppose d to the more maneuverable and faster rotor
24 system?

25 AD: Absolutely. I have guys that will argue with me. When I go to the VHPA reunion this
26 year in Orlando, we'll sit down and there'll be that same argument. We have it every year, Charlie
27 model versus the B model. It's all personal preference.

28 SM: Why did you prefer that? Was there anything in particular?

29 AD: I like the idea that that aircraft could get off the ground wherever they put it. We
30 worked from sea level, up in the mountains. We had landing zones and places we got fuel that
31 were 2,500 feet. I don't know if you know much about density, altitude.

1 SM: A little bit.

2 AD: At density, altitude, thinner air. I've been stuck up on one of those places that was
3 refueled and I couldn't get out of the refueling area because it was covered with barbed wire or
4 surrounded by barbed wire. I couldn't get that thing to hover high enough to go over three or four
5 feet of barbed wire. I remember the flight leader who was a major or something of the slicks was
6 on me pretty good about getting stuck in there. That kind of taught me a lesson. I thought I could
7 get an aircraft off of anything. In fact, the gunships used to go to the edge of that place, it was LZ
8 Sandra and there was a cliff right on the edge. They used to actually jump off of that cliff to get the
9 thing to fly. That is the truth. Where that B model would pick up to hover and you'd go, no matter
10 where you were at. Another draw back to it though, it only carried I think it was 1,150 or 1,200
11 pounds of fuel but that was usually enough. That's all you could get in it. That had something to
12 do with it, too.

13 SM: That's a lot of flying isn't it?

14 AD: You mean time wise?

15 SM: Yes.

16 AD: That'll give you about an hour and 45 minutes before you go into your 20 minute fuel
17 light. We used to regularly do that. When the light came on, we used to punch our stopwatch and
18 start it again. Supposedly you had 20 minutes but nobody knows for sure if that thing was going to
19 quit flying, engine start running at 18 minutes or it's going to fly for 22. There was kind of a fine line
20 there. All the time we flew into the light. You knew where you were at and how long it took to get
21 home. Nothing odd about flying 10 minutes into the light. That was commonplace. You started
22 going 15 minutes into the light, you started stretching it a little bit. I think the longest I ever went
23 into the light was about 18 minutes and I was sweating it.

24 SM: I would imagine. Did anybody ever run out of fuel?

25 AD: I'm sure they did, but nobody in my unit. I heard stories of guys in other units that did.
26 Nobody in my unit ever ran out of fuel because of that.

27 SM: How about any accidents in your unit?

28 AD: I was never, knock on wood even though I'm not flying. I was never involved in an
29 accident. However, my first tour I mentioned we had an assault at a place called Landing Zone
30 Glenn. Well, we made it the day we put those 100 ships in there. [A month or so later], we were
31 taking off [from Glenn with] two gunships. I was the trail gunship. I hadn't made fire team leader

1 yet. There were six slicks, so I was the tail end Charlie. We took off to go pick up some troops.
2 As soon as we took off, the mission was cancelled or put on hold. The flight lead said, 'Just come
3 back here and land here at [LZ] Glenn. We'll just shut down and wait for the word to go.' Well, the
4 slicks were all empty and the gunships were full of ammo. We had as much fuel as we could carry.
5 The slicks had as much fuel as they could carry, but no troops. They didn't have any problem with
6 landing [and came in] down wind. The gunships were fully loaded. We just followed the slicks in,
7 not thinking about it being down wind. The ship in front of me picked up the tail wind and couldn't
8 slow that aircraft down and rolled it up [in a ball when it hit the ground]. All I did was pull in power
9 and I made a go around. Then I came in from the other direction and landed. They totally
10 destroyed the aircraft and all four of the crewmembers got out with just cuts and bruises, stuff that
11 just needed stitched. I don't know how they lived through it, because I know one of the blades
12 when it hit the ground came up and just missed my aircraft. We had one when we moved north
13 right after TET. In fact one of my best friends was flying the aircraft and he had brought it up from
14 [heavy] maintenance at Da Nang [15th T.C.]. He had it loaded with beer and had an engine failure
15 as he was going into the POL, refueling at about 15 feet. He just spread the skids on it. The
16 aircraft wasn't destroyed but there was a lot of damage. The colonel wanted to know if he was
17 loaded with beer because there shouldn't have been that much damage from 15 feet, and it was
18 kind of muddy. So he knew it was loaded with something. Of course the first thing we did was get
19 a truck down there and get the beer unloaded.

20 SM: So you had your priorities, correct?

21 AD: Of course.

22 SM: How available was beer and alcohol?

23 AD: We weren't allowed to have beer my first tour on the firebases. I mean liquor. You
24 could drink it back at An Khe but you weren't allowed to have it at the firebases. Somebody would
25 manage to have a bottle once in a while. We could get beer at the firebases. In fact, at the
26 company, I don't know after the evening meal, the supply shed would open up and they'd sell beer
27 for 10 cents a can. If you weren't flying tomorrow or the next day or something, nobody gave a
28 darn if you drank too much. It got to be where everybody drank pretty much whether they were
29 flying the next day or not. As long as you could get to the aircraft and weren't dangerous, nobody
30 said anything. And got to bed at a decent time. Usually it didn't take much because you were so
31 tired. You'd have three or four beers and it was like drinking two six packs now. You asked me

1 about other missions, we also had the whole 229th and there was a sister battalion the 227th we put
2 in long-range reconnaissance patrols [LRRPs]. We usually did that at last light, and that was
3 always a hairy thing because you drop off these five man teams in the middle of nowhere. We'd go
4 out places that we'd ever been before and drop these guys off. Then we'd circle [a few klicks
5 away] and wait for them to make radio contact where their base was. I'd say only half the time
6 they'd stay in. We might fly back to LZ English. By that time, they're calling that they want out and
7 then you have a night rescue. Those were always big shoot-em-ups. We did that a lot. Or
8 somebody would get hurt going in, because of the crazy places we dropped them off on the side of
9 these mountains. Guy breaking legs and stuff. One time we put them into a mountain just
10 overlooking English. We put them right in on top of some enemy troops, right amongst them. I
11 wasn't flying the slick, but as soon as the slick touched down and dropped them off and was pulling
12 out they started taking fire. They were surrounded.

13 SM: Were those NVA or VC?

14 AD: I can't really tell because I never talked to the LRRPs [afterwards]. As long as they
15 had guns and were shooting [they were bad]. At Bong Son we fought a combination of both VC
16 and NVA. I'd say we probably killed more NVA at Bong Son than Viet Cong. There was still a lot
17 of Cong there.

18 SM: As a gunship pilot, were you responsible for providing a report after each action and
19 giving an estimate of how many enemy were killed and that kind of stuff?

20 AD: Yes, but it was never written. I'd just go into operations and do it verbally. The only
21 time I ever was actually sat down and grilled about something was once a ship I was in, or a fire
22 team I was in was accused of firing on some friendlies and it wasn't us. We were grilled a lot [one
23 afternoon] about that. The other times were about actions where awards were going to be given.
24 They wanted to make sure everybody's stories jived. They had somebody taking down dictation.
25 Most of the time you just went in and said, 'I was here.' Point on the map, gave the grid
26 coordinates. 'Took fire, killed three enemy. Saw two weapons.' Sometimes you'd pick the
27 weapons up if you thought it was safe, some times you didn't. Most of the time you didn't. At one
28 time we thought we were accused of shooting on some friendlies, we were following a flight back
29 toward English but we were way out away from it. I think some gunships from the 227th fired on
30 some. As we moved by this spot where these other gunships had fired on some LRRPs, they were
31 cutting an LZ to get pulled out. Obviously they weren't in any trouble if they were cutting trees. I

1 remember seeing them as we went over them. In fact, they waved. We moved up maybe another
2 two or three miles. We caught some NVA on a ridge line in tall grass. They were just hunkered
3 down in this elephant grass. We happened to be the only ship that flew right over them. The six
4 slicks were off to our left or right, I can't remember. The other gunship was I think off to the right.
5 The slicks would be off to our right also. We just happened to go over this spot and they just were
6 hunkered down there in the grass. We went over them maybe by 200 feet. We could see by their
7 uniforms that they were definitely bad guys, you know pith helmets and AKs and stuff. I wasn't an
8 aircraft commander yet. This guy Bill Ruby was the aircraft commander. He said, 'Let's just keep
9 going like we didn't see them.' We went up another half a mile and then we turned around and we
10 just made a run on them. The ones we didn't kill on the first pass jumped right off the side of this
11 cliff. It wasn't a cliff, the mountain was just real steep. A couple fell to their death, a couple got
12 some branches and hung on before they fell all the way down the mountain. As they were hanging
13 there we came around and we killed them. I guess we killed about 15 guys. We got blamed for
14 shooting at the LRRP team. The LRRP team finally when they got in, we got grilled real good.
15 When the LRRP team finally was picked up and brought back, they said that the gunships that
16 killed the guys over on--They said they could see that hill a couple miles away where, we were
17 engaging something over there [that were shooting up a mountain several clicks away]. We're not
18 the same aircraft that shot at them. It was just one door gunner that shot. He didn't hit any of
19 them. That was one of the times I really had to give a big report. Most of the times it was pretty
20 nonchalant.

21 SM: Let's see you got there in April. So, the first eight months that you were there, from
22 April until December of '67. Would you say that the tempo of operations increased, decreased or
23 stayed the same?

24 AD: I don't know what I have in the paper there. I'd say it increased.

25 SM: There was more enemy activity, more operational activity on both sides?

26 AD: Yes, because we didn't know it, but the enemy started gearing up for TET. There
27 was more enemy activity, and the 2nd Platoon in Delta 229th, and B Company 229th were part of a
28 ready reaction force for the Central Highlands. Also the 2nd of the 12th Infantry of the 1st Air Cav, I
29 don't know what brigade they were in, was part of that reaction force. So wherever there was
30 trouble they sent us. We were sent to Tuy Hoa once to help out. We were sent to the Kontum,
31 Doc To area for the big battle up there all of November. I don't know when we exactly got there,

1 but it was either the end of October, the end of November. Because I know that we were there for
2 Thanksgiving and we were involved. Very few people know that, but we were right in the thick of
3 the battle at Doc To. I'm sure you heard of that battle of Doc To in '67.

4 SM: Yes, sir. What was your role there?

5 AD: Chasing the bad guys and doing reconnaissance for the battalion commander for the
6 2nd of the 12th. So the gunships would go out because we didn't have any scout aircraft with us.
7 We'd go out and look for the bad guys and supported the airstrip at Doc To. Air assaulted the 2nd
8 of the 12th wherever they wanted to be, worked with the 4th Infantry Division in the 173rd Airborne. I
9 can remember being there one day with two C-130s burning right on the apron where they
10 unloaded on the runway, right off the runway. Getting mortared while I was refueling there. Up
11 there at night flew up there one night. We had a downed Chinook. I could get detailed, but the
12 ammo dump had been blowing up all day. All the C-4 went up at one time when we were about two
13 miles off of the [active runway]. It was just myself and another gunship off the perimeter of Doc To.
14 It looked like a nuclear explosion. A fireball went about 800 feet. We read later in the *Stars and*
15 *Stripes* that up until that point, it was the largest explosion that had ever gone off in Vietnam. I
16 could feel the shock when it hit the aircraft. You could feel the aircraft jump from that. They used
17 those, I don't know if they weighed 10,000 pounds or 15,000 pounds. I don't know that they
18 weighed. They were called the commando falls. They were instant LZ.

19 SM: Daisy cutters?

20 AD: Yes, something like that. When they went off, you could like put 24 ships or 12 ships
21 or something [into the space created by that bomb] in there after that. We used those up there. I
22 never saw trees any bigger in my life than I did up around Doc To and Kontum. We worked from
23 the border all the way to Doc To. I think Doc Pec Special Forces camp. When we left there out of
24 the four gunships that we took up, only three were flyable when we were finally sent back to An
25 Khe to stand down for maintenance. Three of them had to be slung back. One flew, so the other
26 pilots grabbed rides on the slicks. They brought the infantry up on C-130s.

27 SM: Did you lose many personnel?

28 AD: Delta 229th did not, very fortunate. Had a lot of aircraft battle damage. We didn't lose
29 anybody but the Bravo 229th slick company did. I don't remember how many, but I remember them
30 losing quite a few people.

31 SM: This will end interview number one with Al DeMailo.

