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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Theodore Acheson
Conducted by Richard Verrone
April 28 and 29, 2003
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre**

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 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone; I'm conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. Theodore Acheson. Today is April 28, 2003, it's approximately 8:34
3 AM Central Standard Time, I am in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library
4 interview room and Mr. Acheson you are in Bloomfield, Missouri, is that correct?

5 Ted Acheson: No, no Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

6 RV: Oh, in Michigan, okay my fault. Okay, good, sir. Let's start with some basic
7 biographical information, could you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit
8 about where you grew up and your childhood.

9 TA: I was born 11/15 1945 in Flint, Michigan, grew up basically in that area.
10 Went to grade school and high school in that area, I think I attended six or seven different
11 schools and I have no siblings. I grew up in a blue-collar family and Flint was pretty
12 much a blue-collar type of town. I left Flint in 1964 when I graduated from high school
13 and went to college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and I was majoring in art at the time and
14 we had all of our academic classes were at Marquette University and the art classes were
15 at Layton School of Art and I started taking a couple of photography classes also while I
16 was there.

17 RV: Was that part of your required curriculum or was that something that you
18 decided to do?

1 TA: No, no actually I think after I figured out what was the area I wanted to go in,
2 we had a speaker who had graduated from Layton School of Art who was a film producer
3 and he brought some of the commercials that he had worked on and produced and I
4 thought that was kind of neat. At the time I never knew I was going to get into
5 cinematography, I'm trying to think what else about that school. Another one of our
6 DASPO guys, Bob Smith, also attended that school but I never knew him then.

7 RV: But he was there when you were there?

8 TA: Yes, we were both there together and we never knew each other. He was in
9 photography and I was just taking a couple of, I mean most of my classes were on the art
10 side.

11 RV: Right. Before we get into that, let me talk a little bit about growing up in
12 Flint, kind of your background, what did your parents do for a living?

13 TA: Well, let's see my father managed a beer and wine distributor in Flint for
14 many, many years. Then he and another fellow bought a bar and restaurant and operated
15 that for a while.

16 RV: Okay, what kind of restaurant was it?

17 TA: It was a pizza restaurant but he was only in that for a couple of years and I
18 was mainly in, no let's see I was in, I guess middle school when he had that and then my
19 father went on to manage a welding supply distributorship in Saginaw, Michigan. My
20 mother worked for the Flint Journal for many years and off and on during the, while I
21 was growing up. She worked on, I guess, I'm trying to think what you would probably
22 call that, I guess back then they called it the society page.

23 RV: Kind of the community living type?

24 TA: Right, exactly.

25 RV: And so you were an only child?

26 TA: Yes.

27 RV: And did you guys grow up in Flint, I'm familiar a little bit with Flint, did you
28 grow up in the suburbs or was it more an urban upbringing?

29 TA: Both, had both experiences. And I went to school, played sports.

30 RV: What sports did you enjoy?

31 TA: Which sports?

1 RV: Yes, sir.

2 TA: Let's see, I ran cross-country, played football, ran track and I guess I Liked
3 all three of those very well, I liked them equally. I enjoyed doing that and I also worked
4 at a grocery store in Flint, started out as a, just a bagger and then you worked your way
5 up to cashier.

6 RV: How old were you when you started that job?

7 TA: Oh, I think I was, yes I think I was, had to be sixteen and that's how I saved
8 up for college. My parents could not afford to send me away to school so I worked
9 summers and when I did go away to college I had to work every summer.

10 RV: What kind of student were you in high school?

11 TA: Oh, I was a terrible student in high school?

12 RV: Really?

13 TA: Yes.

14 RV: Why?

15 TA: Oh, I don't know. I guess I was looking forward to high school when I was in
16 the ninth grade. I was very lucky to find college that would even take a risk on me.

17 RV: What were your favorite subjects, or did you have any?

18 TA: Favorite subjects?

19 RV: Yes, sir.

20 TA: Oh, history, English. I did well in the ones I liked, history, literature, art; I
21 think those were probably my three favorite subjects in school. So, but I did make up for
22 those grades when I got into college and then to graduate school. But I was probably not
23 one of the poster boys for good grade point average for high school, what to do.

24 RV: Now did your parents kind of expect you to go on and go to college or is this
25 something that you had planned for yourself?

26 TA: Oh, I think my parents expected me to go on to college. They were very,
27 very, how would I say it, they really didn't take a real lead in looking at my grades and
28 you know having any access to the high school. They were, like I say Flint was a
29 different type of community and people really didn't, oh, they didn't belong to the Parent
30 Teachers' Conferences, that type of thing. So, but they did expect me to go on to college.

31 RV: Okay, besides sports what other hobbies did you have growing up?

1 TA: Well, let's see. I raised fish and sold them to the fish stores.

2 RV: You raised them in your own tanks at home?

3 TA: Yes, yes. Basically Siamese fighting fish and they were easy to breed and
4 sell. I enjoyed reading a lot, all that, found that just fulfilling. I liked hanging out with
5 my buddies and going up north during the summer, water skiing that type of thing.

6 RV: Okay, so tell me about going to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, what was college
7 like for you?

8 TA: Oh, it was great. I tell you the day I graduated from high school my father
9 was quite surprised, he said, "Well, what are you going to do with your life?" and I told
10 him "I'd already been accepted at this school and I'm leaving tomorrow on a train."

11 RV: Oh, wow so he didn't even know?

12 TA: No.

13 RV: Why did you keep it secret from him?

14 TA: I didn't. He just didn't ask.

15 RV: Oh really, how about your mother?

16 TA: I think she knew but to them it wasn't a big deal. I was going for orientation.
17 When I got to Milwaukee I thought, oh what a neat town, green and really a nice, nice
18 community. I remember seeing the art center and just looking at the architecture and
19 where it was on the lake, I thought it was the most beautiful, I mean that was my first
20 impression. And I enjoyed school there a great deal. I made a lot of friends and I liked
21 Milwaukee. I liked the Arts and they were very much into that, arts and community.

22 RV: How did you get attuned to liking the arts, do you remember that process?

23 TA: I always liked to draw, even when I was a child. I used to submit things to the
24 newspaper to see if I could get them in. I wasn't the greatest artist in the world, I had a lot
25 of good ideas but the execution sometimes wasn't the greatest.

26 RV: So, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin you did the basic curriculum but then you said
27 you got turned on to, you wanted to take these cameral photography classes.

28 TA: Yes, my, your first, your freshman and sophomore years, just like with any
29 school that you go into basically you have some core curriculum classes you have to take
30 and the same if you were going to be a sculptor or if you were going to be an oil painter,
31 if you were going to go into graphics, the first two years was basically everyone had to

1 have those same type of classes and the same with the academics at Marquette. And my
2 junior year we were able to start to branch out and do some other things and that's when I
3 started getting interested in photography.

4 RV: You were there, what years were you there at Milwaukee, Wisconsin?

5 TA: 1964 through 1966. In 1966 the government came out with this idea that you
6 had to be in the upper third of your class or you could take this test so you could maintain
7 your 2S status. Well I had a 3.2 grade average and as some dumb young kid would do, I
8 didn't check to see if I was in the upper third of my class. I was working construction that
9 summer between my sophomore and junior year and my classification, geez I think it got
10 changed two or three times. Anyway, it was changed back to 2S and I went back to
11 school. And somewhere in that semester I got a greetings and salutations letter asking
12 that I return and get a physical back here in Michigan, which I did. And at that time they
13 were telling us that if you took an extra year you'd have a choice of schools you could
14 attend. So I put down on my choices Army Illustrator, Army Still Photographer, Army
15 Cinematographer and I don't remember then, I don't think any of those choices were set
16 in cement then. I went back to, they let me finish my first semester of my junior year and
17 I went into the service, it was January 2, 1967.

18 RV: Okay. Before we get to that point, tell me about photography, your initial
19 exposure to it there at Marquette and what it was like for you and then when you do get
20 to the military part you immediately sign up for this, tell me why your interest was there
21 initially.

22 TA: Oh, I just found it fascinating to look at images and look at things in a
23 different way than most people looked at them and to show simple scenes that most
24 people would walk by everyday and didn't realize it was even there, or even to look at
25 something that was an everyday scene but shoot it in a different light, like early light or
26 late light, or a real dramatic gloomy day and get an impression of what that's like and
27 share that with people and have them look at it. I really enjoyed starting in photography, I
28 can't remember, it seems to me that we didn't even, at that point in time it was such a, I
29 mean it was only a couple of classes, I was still taking some other art classes but I don't
30 even think we were trained in the darkroom at that point in time.

1 RV: Okay, and so you carried this through to your Army career obviously and
2 they Army, was the Army cooperative about you pursuing or did they want to kind of
3 take you and put you somewhere else?

4 TA: Actually I believe after, the area that I was put into, I wasn't even aware of it
5 until after basic training, that's when I was told where I was going to go and what I was
6 going to go into I believe, because they had to guarantee that. As a matter of fact you
7 know I think it actually was guaranteed, I think I got Army Cinematography school right
8 before I even went into basic training, they told me I had it.

9 RV: So you signed up for it, or the put you in it?

10 TA: No, I had picked those three schools and that's what they, you had a choice
11 of those three and that's what they selected from.

12 RV: Okay, okay. Well describe to me January '67, you're sworn into the Army
13 and you start off to St. Louis, what was that experience like?

14 TA: Well, it was very interesting and then we got sworn in and the next thing you
15 know we were taken to the train station in Detroit and put on trains to St. Louis and I was
16 really surprised, I don't know how it happened but I ended up with my own sleeper car, I
17 thought that was pretty, I said well maybe this is a good omen. Anyway, other got to St.
18 Louis, got off the train and then we found out what the military was kind of about from
19 that point on. We were herded onto buses and yelled at a lot and basic training started at
20 Ford Leonard Wood, that's where the buses had taken us.

21 RV: What did your parents think about you being in the military, going in?

22 TA: Well, I has, let's see, I had a great-great grandfather that was in the Civil
23 War, had another grandfather that was in World War I and he saw a lot of action in
24 France and my father was in the last, he was in the last, I think six months, I don't even,
25 he didn't get to see, fortunately for him, any action overseas. My parents were concerned
26 about me going into the Army but I think they thought I was probably doing my duty to
27 my country.

28 RV: What did you know at this point about what the United States was doing in
29 Southeast Asia?

30 TA: Well, that's a great question. I remember sitting in my dorm when the Gulf of
31 Tonkin incident happened and I thought what are these people doing to us. I hadn't, I

1 really hadn't studied anything about Southeast, really other than in high school we heard
2 about the, I guess it was, what did they call the Army guys that were sent.

3 RV: The advisors?

4 TA: The advisors, we heard about advisors in Vietnam, that was basically about
5 it. Then in college the Gulf of Tonkin incident happened and then Johnson started
6 ramping up, sending people over there. At that time I thought for sure that we were
7 doing the right thing and you know it was amazing after my, after that incident, yes there
8 were articles in the paper but boy, I'll tell you I really lost track of what was going on in
9 Southeast Asia until I was drafted. Then I really started taking a much keener view of
10 what was going on over there.

11 RV: I can imagine. What was your understanding of why we were there?

12 TA: Oh, well we were there for the domino theory, to stop communism from
13 overtaking all of Southeast Asia and we were there to help the South Vietnamese rule
14 their own country, become a democracy, have freedom and that's basically what my
15 thoughts were at that time.

16 RV: Did you buy into that, did you believe in that?

17 TA: Oh, I did at that time, yes, when we get into Vietnam I'll tell you how that
18 changed a lot.

19 RV: Okay, so describe basic training for me, what was that like?

20 TA: Well, I'll tell you what. I thought basic training was pretty much; I was in
21 very, very good physical condition at that point in time. I got through everything very
22 well in basic training, all of the physical activity was great, I got along good with the drill
23 instructors, they even took very good care of me and I just kind of stayed out of harm's
24 way in basic training and almost failed basic training from the point of firing a weapon.

25 RV: Really?

26 TA: Yes, I think I had a, well what happened on the final, range, the final day you
27 have to qualify, you spend all your time with your own rifle zeroing it in and I never
28 really liked guns that much to begin with but I thought it was fun to shoot these things,
29 but anyway.

30 RV: Was this the M-1 or was it the M-16?

1 TA: Oh, this was just the M-1; they didn't train us on the M-16. And I think it was
2 an M-14 is what it was. It was, the rack, the sighting was real, you always were adjusting
3 that. Well the day that we did our qualification; somehow my sight had gotten hit by
4 something and was so far off it wasn't funny. Well here I am trying to hit a target, I
5 mean I don't know, you're supposed to get twenty out of hundred or something like that,
6 I think the guy he said, later he said, "I took pity on you because I didn't want to see you
7 do basic training again" and he gave me twenty.

8 RV: Wow, how many did you actually hit, do you remember?

9 TA: Oh, I think maybe fourteen or fifteen.

10 RV: Oh, wow.

11 TA: Yes, it was not good but everything else in basic training went very well. I
12 look back at the days of getting up at 3:30 in the morning and peeling potatoes, they don't
13 even have to do that now.

14 RV: Why were you doing that?

15 TA: Oh, they just took turns and put guys over there to, they didn't have the help
16 that they've got in basic training now, back then that was part of basic training, you had
17 to perform what they called KP, kitchen police and you did everything from cleaning
18 table to mopping floors and peeling potatoes at 3:30 in the morning to cleaning the grease
19 trap at eight o'clock at night and those were some real crazy days of doing that. I didn't
20 particularly, those were long days but now they have civilian help that does that from my
21 understanding.

22 RV: So the physical part of it was not that challenging for you?

23 TA: No, I mean I think I ran the miles with my boots on under six minutes so and
24 I hadn't run a mile, you know other than what we had done in basic training, but I think
25 that was my qualification for the standard physical fitness test at the end of, you know
26 that you had to pass and I'm pretty sure I did it just under six minutes at the time with my
27 boots on in the middle of winter. The only other thing I was going to tell you about, Fort
28 Leonard Wood was really a strange place for climate because we would be up at 5:30 in
29 the morning, in formation with long underwear on and fatigues and then winter clothing
30 over the top of that, because it would be, it could be zero or five below zero in the
31 morning. Then around eleven o'clock you started peeling these things off and then you

1 had to come in and have lunch, to throw those in your barracks and you come out in just
2 your fatigues, by four o'clock in the afternoon you were freezing again. The weather
3 there was very unpredictable, huge snow storms to just, it would warm up to some days
4 sixty degrees, then freeze, then you'd have to run through that sand and stuff, it was not
5 much fun.

6 RV: What was the most challenging thing to you about basic, was it adapting to
7 the military lifestyle, the regimen of the military?

8 TA: I think that was a real, just understanding what the ranking order was and
9 what you could do and what you couldn't do in the military and that started giving you
10 some pretty good ideas of what could be done and what couldn't be done and you had to
11 work within those confines. I sure felt after being in college and then going into the
12 military, they were right, my life wasn't my own.

13 RV: So tell me what you think about the instruction you received, what were
14 your?

15 TA: At basic training?

16 RV: Yes, sir your drill instructors, what were they like?

17 TA: Oh, I think we had pretty good drill instructors. A couple of them had been
18 in Vietnam and I mean they were pumping at that time, they were really pumping people
19 through, getting a lot of cannon fodder ready for Vietnam in my opinion, I mean they
20 were just pushing you through at that time. I had a couple of pretty good drill instructors
21 that really cared I thought that what we were going to do and what we could learn could
22 help us, you know survive.

23 RV: What did they tell you about Vietnam, did they talk about their experiences
24 there?

25 TA: They didn't really talk about their experiences, they just, they talked about it
26 in terms of either you're going to learn this or it's going to kill you if you don't, I mean
27 that was basically it. They just said, "This is from our experience, they didn't go into any
28 detail. I actually thought basic training was, I mean it was a lot easier than I anticipated it,
29 it really was. I think it was, I don't know, now I hear its even easier but I mean I thought
30 at that point in time that it was fairly easy from a physical standpoint to get through.

1 RV: Okay, and when you finished basic, this is when you found out you'd be
2 going through the specialty school?

3 TA: Yes, I found out I had order for Fort Monmouth, New Jersey and I remember
4 catching a plane from St. Louis off to, I can't remember I think it was Newark or
5 something into Fort Monmouth.

6 RV: What was Fort Monmouth like when you first arrived?

7 TA: Oh, Fort Monmouth was like almost going back to college, it was great. I
8 mean I can't tell you what a wonderful experience that was. I mean it was nice area, it
9 was the spring, after leaving Fort Leonard Wood had another fellow from our company
10 that was going to still photography school there, I think his name was Cal Crane. The
11 barracks, it was the old World War II or Korean War barracks that we stayed in, two-
12 story wooden barracks and we had minimal, I think I only had to pull KP once the entire
13 fourteen or sixteen weeks I was there. We were treated with a lot of respect because they
14 knew we were interested in learning something. I think our first six weeks we had an E-5
15 sergeant that marched us to class in the morning and that stopped even after that but we
16 could leave the base anytime we wanted to and come back. We were responsible for our
17 own learning and if you didn't take advantage of that, you probably were going to end up
18 in the infantry. It was great, it was a great school. They taught classes in a way that was
19 easy for people to learn and absorb what you needed to have to become a
20 cinematographer. We had a, for example, we had one fellow that was in World War II
21 and the Korean War, he had been wounded in his hand, I think his name was Patterson,
22 he was a sergeant and he was our main instructor and it was excellent. Even the learning
23 materials that the Army had I thought were outstanding and I ended up teaching at
24 University of Wisconsin later on and I used some of those materials, I kept them. They
25 were very good; whoever wrote those materials had done a very, very good job for the
26 Army.

27 RV: So they were teaching, was it motion picture cinematography or?

28 TA: Motion picture cinematography, yes, yes and we started at the basics and
29 went all the way through from learning what focus is to learning the speed of which the
30 film went through the camera, the different shutter speeds. They taught us, they showed
31 us different cameras. We actually went up to Army pictorial agency in New York and

1 they showed us how the studio cameras worked and we actually got to use one of those.
2 We were also shown how to shoot out of a helicopter; we were taken up to Fort Dix I
3 believe, New Jersey and shown how to shoot out of a helicopter. We did a lot of things
4 off base so that we'd learn how to do stories. I remember a circus coming to the area
5 somewhere near Fort Monmouth, circus train and the elephants, put up the tents and we
6 had to go do a story on that just to learn how to put a story together and how to shoot
7 something like that correctly. I think, I think they did a real outstanding job in teaching
8 us how to become, start the thought process of teaching us how to become
9 cinematographers.

10 RV: Right, right. How big was your class?

11 TA: I think it was maybe about fourteen people in it.

12 RV: Oh, okay not big at all.

13 TA: No, it wasn't very large, it was a small class. We had a couple of, two or
14 three Marines in the class that were going through because they did some kind of a joint
15 deal with the Marines and three of us out of our class ended up going to the DASPO unit.
16 We had, it was just a real good class and I think we had a great instructor and I enjoyed
17 fort Monmouth a great deal. We still had to put up with some of the Army type of thing
18 but we were more on our own, we didn't have daily inspections, I don't even know if we
19 had, other than an inspection for our latrine and our floor which we had regular, oh I
20 think there was probably on the floor maybe, I'm going to guess thirty people and it was,
21 you know you just had assignments for different people the clean the latrines and that did
22 get inspected but other than that, just kind of a cursory overlook of the barracks to make
23 sure it was clean and that was it, It was like the typical Army type of thing and training
24 and going through you know, people looking in your locker and making sure all your
25 uniforms are exact and that type of stuff, we were pretty much let alone.

26 RV: How long was the session itself?

27 TA: I'm guessing it was like, I think it was three months.

28 RV: Do you think that was an adequate amount of time for you to learn?

29 TA: Well for what they could do for us there I think that was the best amount of
30 time that they could spend really getting people started on that career. There was still an
31 awful lot to learn after that but I found out about later.

1 RV: So how was it for you personally, you moved from drawing to, as a child
2 and a young man to still photography in college and now you're in motion picture
3 photography?

4 TA: Oh, I really enjoyed that. That was, I found it really self-fulfilling. I enjoyed
5 the composition of images in the frame, I enjoyed not only that but cinematography you
6 have to tell a story and you have to be able to fluidly move and I enjoyed thinking
7 through those stories and how I was going to show that image and show that story to
8 someone and I, conceptually I think being in art school and having that as a background
9 really helped, especially from a composition standpoint and the others was more of a
10 technical type of thing, learning how to do, how to build the story and then you could
11 even become creative from that too. So I enjoyed it a lot, I just, I found it, I found a
12 whole new world there that I never was exposed to and said boy this is great.

13 RV: What was your mission exactly, what were they describing to you that you
14 would be doing for the Army?

15 TA: At that point in time they really said we could be over doing anything from
16 public information which I call handshake photography to combat and training. They said
17 anything in between those types of things would happen. You could be sent to Germany
18 and just reporting back on what the equipment is doing or what people are doing there,
19 you could be you know showing the cocktail parties, I guess and they did go do that. I'm
20 glad we didn't have to; I didn't have to get involved in anything like that. But we, I think
21 we were thoroughly trained to do combat or do some kind of training, information film if
22 we had to. Does that answer your question?

23 RV: Yes, sir. Absolutely. What was your personal preference?

24 TA: For me?

25 RV: Yes, sir.

26 TA: Boy, I certainly was not, I was hoping I was going to be sent to someplace
27 other than Southeast Asia at that time, I didn't particularly, as I said, I started taking a
28 keener interest in what was going on in Vietnam and of course in the paper everyday
29 something was about it, happening in it, talking about the deaths of Americans and it was
30 not a great place to have to be sent to. So I was very concerned about where I was going
31 to be sent after I completed my training at Fort Monmouth.

1 RV: Did you have any say so in the matter?

2 TA: None, but it was very interesting. When I did get my orders this Sergeant
3 Patterson said he couldn't believe it. He said, "You know, you're going to DASPO" and
4 "Oh, that's great Sergeant Patterson, what's DASPO?" He said, literally he said, "In my
5 opinion, he said I didn't, I wasn't even able to get into DASPO" he said, "It's the best
6 unit in the whole military." He said, "the best cinematographers, the best still
7 photographers," he said "the best people for that type of work, you can't get anything
8 better, you get the best equipment" he said, "you just can't believe what a great place
9 you're going to." But he said, and he said, "Besides that, you're going to Hawaii." Little
10 did I know that also Hawaii was home, but it was not where we were going to end up?

11 RV: Now how did you feel about DASPO, once you found about it, I mean did
12 you see like okay, I am the best in my class, so I should get this or was this a complete
13 surprise to you?

14 TA: Well, I felt that there was about, there were several of us I think were
15 rewarded for our work but we also happened to be awfully lucky at the same time going
16 to DASPO. There was other units in the military in Vietnam that covered the war but
17 they also had to cover what I call that public relations type of photography, you know
18 showing how great this unit is and the commanding officer of that unit, that type of thing
19 rather than documenting what was going on. But again I had no idea what DASPO, okay
20 I'm going to DASPO in Hawaii, well that's great. I went home for a four or five day
21 leave and got on a United Airlines plane and, oh I had to go to Fort, I think it was in San
22 Francisco, oh boy, I can't, Fort Ord? Fort Ord? It may have been Fort Ord in San
23 Francisco, that's where everybody for Vietnam had to go through and you had to wait
24 there for your orders to be finalized. So lots of guys were there, going to Vietnam, going
25 to different places, Korea, etc. and they really believed happy hands were, or busy hands
26 were happy hands so I mean they had people painting rocks white and you know doing a
27 lot of KP and that type of thing, all these, and you had to wait there until these orders
28 came through and you could be three, four, five days, I heard of people waiting there for
29 two weeks before they'd gotten their orders to head out. And I remember, I think it was
30 my second day there I was doing KP again and they, the head cook at this place, this was
31 a place where the Vietnam veterans came back through after spending their time in

1 Vietnam and they were given a, when they got there they had an all-you-could-eat steak
2 and egg and potatoes, that type of breakfast, huge breakfast, welcome back breakfast was
3 given to them. And this, I didn't understand to me, he said, "You cook?" and I guess he
4 was asking if my MOS was cooking MOS, I said, "Yes, I can cook" so.

5 RV: You were drafted.

6 TA: Yes, I was making steaks and flipping eggs and he said, "Oh, great now this
7 afternoon you're going to go over to, they've got a good-bye party for one of the officers
8 at the Officer's Club and there's going to be 250 people there and you're going to be in
9 charge of salad." But they did have workers that were civilian there, they helped me out
10 of that jam and he saw me later that afternoon and he gave me a pass, I didn't have to do
11 anything else while I was waiting for my orders. Then off to Hawaii, took a United
12 Airlines jet into Hawaii and was picked up and taken to the barracks at Fort Shafter,
13 that's where our headquarters were, it was a, I remember landing there, it was just a
14 beautiful day and they had these fountains of pineapple juice that you could drink, I think
15 I drank so much of it I got sick. Then I was taken to our barracks, it was a three-story
16 brick building and we had our own little wing there and got to, came in and met
17 everybody and then we were trained on the new equipment. I mean what we were trained
18 on before we still used, we were still going to use it but there were a lot of other cameras
19 that we needed to learn about.

20 RV: How did the DASPO guys accept you when you first arrived?

21 TA: Well, it was, you know everybody there was, it was interesting, you either
22 had graduated from college or had several years of college in or you were, a lot of guys,
23 we had several guys that were working for *National Geographic* when they got drafted,
24 we had a very unusual group of men in DASPO and I think the education level was
25 probably twenty times the norm of any regular Army unit if not more. And everybody
26 was there because they wanted to be doing something, whether it be still photography,
27 cinematography or sound. This was something that most of them had wanted to do; I
28 don't think that we had one guy there that wasn't qualified in this position. We may have
29 had some NCOs that got into the unit somehow or a couple of the officers that just
30 happened to be in the Signal Corps and got into it, but most even the officers had
31 something of a desire to be in the photographic area.

1 RV: So were you welcomed?

2 TA: Oh, yes, yes very much so. The first sergeant made us, I remember I got in, I
3 can't remember if there was another guy on that plane with me or not, I think I was just
4 by myself and you know it was just, it was a great welcome and you know glad to have
5 you aboard type of thing. We were rookies and they knew that and they knew that we
6 were, needed some training and they did that. We, I think one of the first things we saw
7 was film that came back from, oh probably more so Vietnam and Thailand and critiquing
8 it, looking at it and again like I said learning the new equipment and actually how to use
9 the procedures of what DASPO had in mind, like we had to learn how to do captions and
10 make sure everything was slated. We actually were, if we didn't type fast we were sent to
11 a typing school.

12 RV: Did you go?

13 TA: Yes, I did and oh gosh let's see we were issued diplomatic passports while
14 we were there. That was quite a, kind of an interesting thing. I donated mine to Texas
15 Tech, it was a diplomatic passport and all it said on the inside is a picture of you "On
16 official U.S. government business." I assumed that everybody in the Army had one of
17 those, little did I know that even if you were sent to Korea or Vietnam or these other
18 countries, you were never given a passport and again it was a diplomatic passport which
19 allowed us to go to just about anyplace we needed to go. And again we learned a little bit
20 about our chain of command and at that point in time it didn't really dawn on me until
21 years later what that chain of command was, I mean it was our Vietnam Group Hawaii,
22 that detachment and our headquarters group CONUS and there was a colonel there and he
23 reported to the General of the Army.

24 RV: Wow, very short actually.

25 TA: Yes, very, very short. We were on a, we had a great chain of command and
26 that's what they wanted, that's what they wanted to have us report to, basically it was
27 General of the Army and Congress. So again getting back to the welcome and we were
28 trained and then we were sent on our first mission.

29 RV: Now did you have any idea that you were going to Southeast Asia at this
30 point, when you first arrived?

31 TA: In Hawaii?

1 RV: Yes, sir.

2 TA: Oh, yes, yes. Well, at that point.

3 RV: So you know that was a jumping off point.

4 TA: It didn't take long, when they explained where we filmed, that's when I was
5 told it was Vietnam and let's see, we had a team in Thailand at that time and that was the
6 only two teams, sometimes they had a roving team that went into other countries and
7 that's all I knew.

8 RV: How did you feel knowing that you were going to be filming and working in
9 a war zone?

10 TA: Apprehensive to say the least. Some of the new guys that go tin and trained,
11 they were sent there right away. My first assignment was going to Thailand, but I was
12 very apprehensive about that and again I started reading more and more.

13 RV: About?

14 TA: Vietnam.

15 RV: About the war itself?

16 TA: Yes.

17 RV: Had your views changed at all or were they still pretty much the same?

18 TA: Nope, they were pretty much the same. I thought we should be there and
19 despite going there I still thought we should be there and I was more aware of the
20 criticism of the war as well, that happening and the demonstrations that were happening.
21 There wasn't very many in Hawaii at that point in time yet.

22 RV: This is still 1967, is that right?

23 TA: Yes, yes. But, do you want me to go on about what my next assignment
24 was?

25 RV: Before we do that, yes sir, why don't you go ahead and describe if you can
26 the equipment, the new equipment you were trained on and tell us exactly what you were
27 had in your hands, what you were using?

28 TA: Well, what we used in Fort Monmouth was a Bell and Howell Gilm film; it
29 was a sixteen-millimeter camera, that was our main camera that we used. It still was the
30 main camera that was going to be used in combat, it was a camera that was very durable,
31 that wouldn't break down, had three lenses on it and one wind would give you, one good

1 wind would give you about a minute, it was a hundred foot roll and you could get three
2 minutes out of it. That was the main camera and now when we get to this, got to DASPO
3 in Hawaii, they had a lot of other equipment there, some of the newest equipment that
4 you could possibly get and still to this day Aeroflex is still the, for cinematographers,
5 that's still one of the best cameras and we were trained on two different types of
6 Aeroflexes, there was one called a sixteen which was a Blimped model that you could
7 shoot and it was very quiet. You could shoot sync sound with camera because it was so
8 quiet and the BL stands for the Blimp. It was a large camera with a four hundred foot roll
9 on it, it was a 12-120 zoom. Then there was another camera called the Aeroflex F and
10 you could use that at hundred foot loads and both of these are electric cameras or they
11 were battery operated. So a hundred-foot load I wouldn't have to stop and rewind on the
12 Aeroflex 16f if I took it out to combat. And I believe that we had two hundred foot rolls
13 for that as well. But anyway, also they had a four hundred foot magazine and you could
14 use it with the magazine or without and with it it just got heavier and the battery belt
15 made it even heavier. It had a large zoom lens and again we had not shot anything with a
16 zoom lens or if we had it was maybe a day or something on it when we were at Fort
17 Monmouth and we had to learn how to use this equipment especially charge it, had to
18 learn how to charge the batteries, make sure they were charged for the night and how to
19 use the Aeroflex BL with sync sound, I think we had one day of training with sync sound
20 when we were at Fort Monmouth. Well, we were going to be doing a lot of sync sounds
21 which means the lips are synced up right to camera through the recorder and the recorder
22 had an umbilical cords that went to the camera so we had to learn how to work with the
23 sound net and how to slate these things and make sure the sound could be synced up and
24 that type of thing.

25 RV: How many people would you actually be working with, was it you and a
26 soundman or a third or was it just yourself?

27 TA: Well, generally speaking, what in the training?

28 RV" Yes, well no actually when you would arrive to actually do your job in the
29 field?

30 TA: Oh, when we were in the field. It was usually a two or three man crew.
31 Generally you always have two people with you, I mean there was always two of you and

1 that was probably more likely to happen then to have three man crews, the third, and
2 sometimes you had a four-man crew. We had one officer that always came out with us
3 whenever he got a chance and that was not the norm but he liked to go out with us.
4 Again it was two or three men was the norm.

5 RV: Okay, and so one would operate the camera; one would do the sound I
6 presume?

7 TA: Yes, and there'd be another guy doing stills, that was the team. And
8 sometimes if we had a multiple shoot we'd have more than two cameraman, so we'd have
9 four men and then maybe one of the officers acted as a director then.

10 RV: How much training did you all receive about Southeast Asian culture before
11 you actually shipped off?

12 TA: Zero.

13 RV: Really?

14 TA: None, nothing.

15 RV: Looking back do you think that was a problem?

16 TA: It wasn't a problem but it certainly would have been helpful. I had a good
17 friend of mine who had killed, that was in our unit, Rick Ryan, he had grown up in
18 Okinawa and, well I said grown up, he probably went through high school there and a
19 couple years of college and he was pretty astute with Southeast Asia, he was the only one
20 probably in our whole unit that had any flavor. But I went to Thailand on my first mission
21 and not knowing anything about their culture or what to expect.

22 RV: Now describe, when you say you went on a first mission, was this like a
23 temporary duty assignment?

24 TA: Okay, everything we did was temporary duty assignment. We would be out
25 anywhere, generally it was ninety days, sometimes we ended up 120 days but it was
26 generally a ninety day assignment out of Hawaii and then we would be back, oh
27 sometimes as short as thirty days but generally no longer than sixty days, then we would
28 go out on another temporary duty assignment.

29 RV: How did that work for you, was that a good rotation?

30 TA: I thought it was a good rotation and I liked it because we were rotating within
31 our groups, we got to know other people and made a lot of nice relationships at that time.

1 Also I think it helped having, going out, and not going in specific teams at that point in
2 time because there was no weak links at that point, everybody had to take what they got
3 and do the best with it in terms of personnel.

4 RV: So you rotated personnel, you did not work with the same people every
5 single?

6 TA: No, no, I'd come in and somebody else would be shipped back to Hawaii, I'd
7 replace somebody. Our first, my first TDY orders like I said was to Thailand and it was a
8 tradition in DASPO, we always got fifty percent of our TDY pay up front and we'd go
9 out to the airport and wait for the plane. Well, we waited at the bar for the plane and
10 whoever else wanted to join us, it was our duty to pay for their drinks that evening.

11 RV: Of the DASPO guys?

12 TA: Yes.

13 RV: Okay.

14 TA: Of course I was making \$120 a month but the TDY pay was great, it was \$18
15 a day but after we bought drinks for everybody and we got on the plane and it was a
16 commercial flight to Thailand, old Boeing 707. But I know on our, my way to Thailand
17 we ran into a typhoon over the Philippines and we circled and circled and circled, finally
18 we had, we had a little fuel problem, we ended up landing on some naval base not far
19 from Manila and all I remember is that we got off the plane, we headed off to a Quonset
20 hut, one of those metal Quonset hut where they used it for their personnel that was
21 transient, moving in and moving out of the area and here are all these civilians, men,
22 women, children, running to this huge, I mean it was a gigantic Quonset hut and the rain
23 just coming in sheets and the wind. Well, anyway I think we sat there for about twelve
24 hours while this storm passed and they refueled the plane with just enough fuel to get us
25 off the runway into I believe it was Manila to refuel for our next portion of the trip which
26 was into Thailand. And we were a day late getting into Don Long airport in Thailand and
27 I just remember I thought Hawaii was hot until I spent some time in the Philippines and
28 then got off in Thailand. Of course I've been wearing the same clothes for, oh boy I'm
29 going to guess, probably almost forty-eight hours and boy, Rick and I needed a bath.

30 RV: How many people were with you?

1 TA: Just Rick and I. Just the two of us were heading over for this one, we were
2 replacing a couple of guys, I don't even recall who we replaced. We were picked up at
3 the airport by a lieutenant, his name was Frank Dro and one the way in he explained that
4 we were going to be staying at the Fortuna Hotel, it would cost us ten dollars a day and
5 that included our laundry service.

6 RV: How about meals?

7 TA: The other eight dollars had to cover our meals.

8 RV: Was that enough?

9 TA: Oh, yes back then it was plenty. It was, Thailand was a very economical
10 place to be. That seemed to, there the eight dollars was enough to carry us. I think you
11 could get a hamburger for fifty cents at the hotel. The hotel was an interesting hotel, it
12 house the military police for Thailand.

13 RV: Was this in Bangkok?

14 TA: This was in Bangkok and also it would be home for the missing POW
15 families that were trying to find out what happened to their family, their children that
16 were missing in Vietnam.

17 RV: And you all shared the same hotel?

18 TA: Yes, yes an.

19 RV: Was this in downtown Bangkok?

20 TA: It was, well not, it was in sight of downtown, yes. It was a great area, it was
21 a nice area we were in, at that time was a brand new hotel and gosh for a guy from Flint,
22 Michigan going to halfway around the world and being put up in a hotel having clean
23 sheets everyday, thought boy, this isn't bad.

24 RV: What were your first impressions of Southeast Asian culture and Thai
25 culture?

26 TA: Well, all I can tell you is that I remember Rick and I eating Thai breakfast
27 every morning which was really fried rice and I can remember coming out the front door
28 of our hotel and getting hit with all of these senses and aromas and visual delights. We
29 walked out, we had a couple of Indian snake charmers sitting there in their white turban
30 and bare-chested and cross legged playing the flute and cobras dancing.

31 RV: Right outside your hotel?

1 TA: Right outside our hotel. And the odors that they were always cooking
2 something along the street, I mean continually twenty-four hours a day there was
3 something being cooked there. But also there was a lot of garbage and a lot of other
4 sensual smells that were in the air. It was great. The people of Thailand were just so nice
5 to us, it was just a whole different, these people were just sincere and very, very nice
6 people. That's my first impression. After being there for a while I found out how
7 wonderful the country really was.

8 RV: So it only got better?

9 TA: Yes, yes and I really enjoyed seeing everything in Thailand I could possibly
10 see. I'll go into some of that later but we traveled all over Thailand, from one end of it to
11 the other.

12 RV: On assignment?

13 TA: On assignment and you either, we'd go out to Don Mong and get a military
14 flight somewhere and then sometimes have to take, people pick us up in some kind of
15 transport or you have to take a helicopter into other places. We covered basically it was,
16 our job there was to document Thai-U.S. activities that supported the Vietnam War.

17 RV: Did they tell you specifically what to shoot or was that up to you?

18 TA: Well they were assignments coming out of, out of Washington DC most of
19 them, the other ones were things that we picked up on while we were there. The officer in
20 charge would go to certain briefings and find out what was happening, like my first
21 assignment was to go up to southern Thailand, a village near called Don Renu, which was
22 up along the Mekong River and I believe it was right near to Laotian border and I'm
23 telling it was an old village, it was, they were still built on sticks and they had a perimeter
24 around the village made out of bamboo and it was an interesting place. And we were
25 going to be covering how the Special Forces were training these people to have some
26 self-defense if the Laotian communists came across. I think the first time that I, it was
27 like around the 8th of September, 1967 we were at the village and it was a Thai holiday
28 there and the villagers were roasting a pig that hadn't even had the insides taken out of, it
29 was pretty bloated. I remember the Special Forces; the big thing was to drink the warm
30 blood. I tell you, I about lost it watching these guys do this. Of course they wanted, you

1 know the first thing they want to do it put you on guard, hey, have a little drink you
2 know, I mean I was about ready to lose it just watching them, let along drinking it.

3 RV: Did you drink?

4 TA: No, I didn't, I didn't.

5 RV: Did Rick?

6 TA: No, Rick wasn't with me on that assignment. I believe it was a Sergeant
7 Massey that went up there with me, I'm pretty sure it was Sergeant Massey, I'm not
8 positive but I think it was him. And he stayed back at the Special Forces base while I
9 went in, he's been to Vietnam, he's been to South Asia a lot of times and he'd seen and
10 done just about everything so going in and being part of this ceremony and seeing it was
11 no big deal to him. But it ran into the evening and all of a sudden gunfire on the other end
12 of the village just erupted and a firefight somewhat ensued and the Special Forces guy
13 that had been assigned to me came running back and said, "Get in a Jeep" off we went.
14 He handed me his M-16 and asked me if I even know how to use it. I said, "Well< I know
15 how to use it, but I don't know how to chamber a round or even where to witch the safety
16 because I trained on the M-14."

17 RV: This was your first experience with the M-16?

18 TA: Yes.

19 RV: Wow.

20 TA: So we got back to the military compound and I'm going, wow, I didn't know
21 there was, I really didn't think about it too much, about being insurgents like this coming
22 into Thailand. I mean even though we were up there to train these people, I thought they
23 were maybe going over to the other country but I didn't really, just being a rookie and not
24 understanding what really was going on up in the border with Laos and Cambodia, I had
25 no idea there was these insurgencies that were happening, trying to get the Thais to
26 become communist and help their cause. Well anyway, that turned out to be an
27 uneventful shoot because the Special Forces said, "You're on a plane, you're out of
28 here."

29 RV: Because of the gunfire?

30 TA: Well yes and they wanted, they were off to find out, get these guys that had
31 assassinated the village chief.

1 RV: Okay, so they had killed the village chief that night?

2 TA: Yes, that night. We didn't know about it until the next morning that he was
3 killed.

4 RV: And you could not, basically they were saying you can't go out with us, you
5 can't film this.

6 TA: Yes.

7 RV: Okay, did they explain to you what they would do, what they were going to
8 do?

9 TA: No, but we, I knew what they were going to do.

10 RV: Go after these guys.

11 TA: Yes, and I don't think the border made any difference.

12 RV: Right. Let me ask you a question, you said for this TDY to Bangkok and
13 around Thailand you were recording American-Thai cooperation and etc, and the orders
14 would come from Washington, what were the specific orders, just that and then when you
15 get to assignment or did they tell you were to go and then when you got there how did
16 you decide what to shoot?

17 TA: Well, here would be an example. One of the things that in Thailand they
18 wanted to learn more about was how, I'm trying to think what they were called, they
19 were microwave sites were set up for listening posts, that type of thing.

20 RV: Who was they, who wanted to know?

21 TA: This would have been somebody in the Department of the Army wanted us to
22 document them being set up and how they were being utilized. So that could come from
23 DC. One of the other things could be something as simple as us giving the Thai military
24 some paints and filming the handover of that, that's more in tat public information area I
25 was telling you about. Another one would be the Special Forces actually training Thais
26 on military tactics. Another one, another story we did was there was a place in northern
27 Thailand that I'll get into that they had a, it was a site for test equipment that we went up
28 and did. Let's see. I think that gives you some idea.

29 RV: So it was up to you once you got on location to kind of put the story together
30 and shoot what you needed to?

1 TA: Well, they would say in Bangkok okay, we need this story about this place up
2 in northern Thailand how they test this equipment and so that's how they, we would go
3 up and so that story then. Let's see, this Lieutenant Drow we had back in Bangkok, he
4 was the guy that got the assignments out of Hawaii, that had come from DC or he would
5 like I say find other work for us to do if we didn't have an assignment from DC but he
6 never went out on a job with us at all that I can think of, unless it was a real, I mean
7 something that had to be very local. He stayed back and he really didn't associate with
8 any of us, he was an officer and we were enlisted and I don't think he had any
9 photographic experience, he just came out of the signal school and he was an officer. We
10 had only a couple of the officers, there was another officer, Peter K. Friend, he never
11 associated really with us at all. Most of the time the officers, the team, we went out and
12 had dinner together and a lot of them went out on the jobs with us as well. What was so
13 funny, it was in Thailand, the word sir means stupid and this guy liked to be called sir a
14 lot but he didn't know what the definition, I mean most of us enlisted guys learned a lot of
15 Thai and he had no idea that sir meant stupid.

16 RV: And nobody turned him on to this?

17 TA: No, of course not.

18 RV: So you got a good laugh out of that.

19 TA: So we always, and he, if he did know he couldn't say. One of the other
20 things we did a lot of, Rick Ryan and I and another fellow by the name of Tom Mentus,
21 he happens to be the bureau chief for Thailand right now for CNN, who would have ever
22 thought that, I mean back in 1967. We would go out and we'd rent motorcycles and we
23 had a doorman at the time, his name was Bones, we called him Bones because he was
24 about as skinny a kid as you could get, he was our age and he spoke English very well.
25 So we used to take him out with us on our outings and on our travels, he was our
26 interpreter if you will.

27 RV: On your official outings?

28 TA: Well, no these were unofficial outings, where we'd go out and meet people
29 and see how people lived. And we, Tom and Rick and I and I think there was a couple of
30 others that really enjoyed that part of our, of being in Thailand. If we didn't have a job to

1 do we always went out and tried to do something and meet people and see different
2 things in this culture.

3 RV: What kind of things would you do?

4 TA: Well, for example we would get our motorcycles and we would just ride and
5 then we'd turn down this road and we'd go down this road and pretty soon it was a path
6 and we'd go across a bridge that was just slightly bigger than the motorcycle tires and
7 pull into villages. Now these people had never seen a Caucasian before and the kids
8 would just dive through the openings in their schoolhouse just to come out and touch us.
9 It was delightful and we would eat in the villages and just experience the Thai culture and
10 see what was, how people lived.

11 RV: That's incredible. So you guys did this on your own. Just?

12 TA: We did that on our own, yes.

13 RV: Your own initiative.

14 TA: Yes, and we'd do that probably once every couple of weeks, maybe more
15 frequently than that.

16 RV: Did you shoot this with a camera or did you have your own?

17 TA: Oh stills, lots of stills. I think you've got some of those of mine in the
18 Archives.

19 RV: Yes, sir we do.

20 TA: And I know there's other guys that have sent theirs in, the same type of thing.
21 A lot of the guys in our unit just did that, I mean guys I didn't even know I found out
22 later gosh, that guys got the same pictures we got. It wasn't the same village but it was
23 the same ambience. Now this Bones, very interesting, Tom took over I think in 1992 as
24 the bureau chief in Bangkok and he was on a Thai radio show with call-ins and the guy
25 Bones happened to be listening to that show, we'd lost all touch with him and he got a
26 hold of Tom and come to find out in 1994 when I started doing a lot of work over there,
27 first time I met up with Bones, I hadn't seen him since 1967 and now I see him, I work a
28 there a lot, not a lot, three or four times a year, I see him every time I'm there but he has a
29 son that went through the Thai Air Force Academy who is a military officer and he has a
30 daughter who has her Masters Degree and may be working on her PhD. But what was
31 very interesting is that his brother, Bones' brother got a scholarship to go to the

1 University of Chicago to get his PhD and Bones came over and visited him and came to
2 Michigan to visit with my wife and I.

3 RV: Oh, wow how was that?

4 TA: That was just, you know I said Bones, I mean we both had tears in our eyes, I
5 said, "who would have ever thought something like this with some kid that was a, wasn't
6 even a college student" oh, he may have been taking a couple of classes but I said, "you
7 know who ever could have envisioned this" and to have on my own house. He got to
8 meet my mother and his family; his brother's family was along with him. It was great,
9 just a great experience.

10 RV: That's a great story.

11 TA: Yes, it was. But I still see Bones and we keep email once in a while. He
12 ended up being an administrator for a school system in Chon Berry.

13 RV: Do you still call him Bones?

14 TA: I still call him Bones and Bones and I look like the Buddha book ends now.
15 We both were two young skinny kids but life has probably been too good to us.

16 RV: Well tell me a little bit about any of the interesting, the more interesting
17 assignments you had there in Thailand during this first TDY.

18 TA: Okay. Well, let' see what were some of the things we had done. We, one of
19 the places that we went was Kohrat a lot, Kohrat was a huge American base that
20 supported efforts in Vietnam. I remember going up there and filming the Special Forces
21 training these Thai soldiers and one of the things they did was this camaraderie thing at
22 the end of the day. So they get in a circle of about fourteen guys and one guy brings in
23 what they call, well this one happened to be called a golden cobra and they put the cobra
24 in the middle of them and the idea is to keep the cobra in the middle, not let them go out.
25 Well, as you know cobra is one of the deadliest snakes in the world. So, we're filming
26 this and they're taunting the cobra but after a while we find out what they're doing is they
27 hold these handkerchiefs and they let the cobra strike at it and after awhile the cobra's
28 ability to raise up and strike is, all of its muscles are so tired that they just go over and
29 grab it, no big deal but I was hoping they didn't see us shooting this and let the thing just
30 give us a nice scare. Of course the Special Forces, they'd never do anything like that.
31 Another one was the rainforest where we went up and filmed the, how they were testing

1 the various equipment, backpacks, weapons, other things, just leaving out to rot in this
2 huge environment that could almost take your breath away it was so much humidity and
3 heat and I remember them walking around and scouting this area all day long and then
4 after dinner the project manager said make sure we didn't go out at night because this has
5 the highest concentration of kind cobras in Thailand. And he wasn't kidding either, we
6 didn't see any but we found out later that that was a, that was really, really true. So the
7 next day we were very cautious when we started filming. I was just trying to think of
8 anything else about the area. In Thailand we didn't have, other than my first, that first
9 assignment was probably the scariest thing I did in Thailand. I remember going down in
10 southern Thailand and filming Special Forces down there training the southern Thais,
11 they were mostly Muslim down in that area, not Buddhist. One of the other interesting
12 things was I think I mentioned to you that these MPs were in our building, our hotel and
13 we were not supposed to be driving motorcycles in Thailand and the MPs, the captain,
14 the head guy for the MPs came out of his Jeep or his car one day as we were pulling in
15 and he just, was going to throw us in the brig or do whatever he wanted to with us. Rick
16 remembered, our orders were the greatest orders in the world. We could draw money
17 from any Army installation, we could go on any transportation, be a ship, a boat, a plane
18 whatever and we also could, we also were civilian status which meant we could wear
19 civilian clothes and we could rent cars or whatever else we wanted to and motorcycles
20 fell under that category. So this guy gets through just screaming his head off at us, Rick
21 told him, he said, "Well, sir we have authorization we can, you know take any
22 transportation we want" and of course, "Well, I'm going to talk to your commander
23 officer." He found out we did and was he ticked off. Of course our CO said, "Okay, guys
24 limit the amount of using the motorcycles" and the other thing was again, it was still
25 training over there on using the new equipment, that was something we still had to learn
26 how to do. I mean it was just special things with how to use the zoom lens, how to lock
27 off the camera, just little things on using this equipment and getting familiar with it. And
28 I remember one other assignment we were, the U.S. Army had given some of these tanks
29 to the Thai military and after we were done filming it we were invited to come over to
30 this guy's house who was a general. Well he ended up being the prime minister of
31 Thailand in the early '90s. One of the other interesting things we did is we met a guy our

1 age, his name was Robert Ellis and he was a free lance photographer, he was covering the
2 war in Vietnam and he was just taking some time off, he'd been in Khe Sanh and he'd
3 been really doing some great photography and he was staying at the hotel. I think he saw
4 us bring our equipment in one day, unloading from a job and he started talking to us.
5 Well we ended up going out with him for a few days and we even got out taxicab driver
6 at night to, we'd go from one joint to the next and we ended up driving the taxicab and
7 we got pulled over by the Thai police and Thai military at one of the checkpoints and
8 god, they took a look at us and they just shook their heads and what's a four on driving,
9 they didn't even want to go there, get out of here. Well Bob Ellis, he won a Pulitzer Prize
10 for photography at Khe Sanh but six weeks after he went back he was filming, I think
11 he'd just finished filming that ammo dump blowing up there and he was off doing
12 something else and one of the C-130s that ad taken off and got hit and he went down and
13 he was killed. I did enjoy Thailand a lot thought. I mean, speaking, I learned how to
14 speak enough Thai to get around in and I was pretty much immersed myself in that
15 culture. One of the other interesting stories before I get back, go back to our next
16 assignment was a guy named Steve Paquette in our unit, we had a swimming pool in the
17 middle of our hotel, Steve would have a few drinks and he would jump off the third floor
18 balcony into that hotel pool.

19 RV: Did you do anything like that?

20 TA: Did I?

21 RV: Yes, sir.

22 TA: Oh, no I didn't. We swear Steve missed the pool a few times too. Well the
23 other thing was you know Bangkok was the R & R center for a lot of GIs and there was
24 this place called Petberry road where there must have been a hundred bars and each one
25 of the bars had a significant rock and roll that would mimic like, one would mimic the
26 Beatles, another one do the Rolling Stones and somebody else would do, each one of
27 these bars had that special sound. I remember us going to those places, but boy at
28 nighttime it was just packed with GIs from all over. I left Thailand and went to Okinawa,
29 spent a week there with Rick Ryan and his family; his dad was in charge of enlarging the
30 runway at Cadena for B-52s.

31 RV: Is this kind of like an R & R for you?

1 TA: It was, yes I took leave, yes. And it was interesting to see, we traveled all
2 over Okinawa and Rick showed me the remains from World War II and some of the
3 caves and gun emplacement and that type of thing. But it was, I mean our unit was a
4 crazy unit. I mean it was, I mean DASPO operated loosely along military procedure and
5 we had some true military types in our units that had a real hard time adjusting to the rest
6 of us, I mean we had a commingling of officers and enlisted men in a very creative
7 environment and that drove some of the guys that had just been strictly military, crazy.
8 They were just trying to have; they were the ones that were having a hard time how to fit
9 into this dysfunctional unit, who was very functional by the way actually.

10 RV: Was there any tension between the enlistees and the officers?

11 TA: Only a few, only a few, just a few. I remember Dick Richards, he was a
12 captain in the unit, he and his wife used to have a number of us enlisted guys over to their
13 house at holidays and whenever he was back he would have us over there. Lots of times
14 during the week once we learned our equipment and that type of thing and we were
15 finished either us training or training others, we had some down time so he'd have us
16 over to his house at lunch and then we'd go out and play some tennis. Another officer,
17 John Gilroy who ended up actually working for me on some jobs, he'd have us over to
18 his apartment so we could swim in his swimming pool. I mean it was, we would also go
19 to the beach together as a group. We had a great unit and there was a couple of officers
20 that just thought that was awful, the commingling of the men and officers but they got
21 over it and there really wasn't much they ever did about it.

22 RV: That seemed to work for you guys.

23 TA: Yes, for us, yes. You know again like I said when we were TDY in any of
24 these countries we always had these assignments that were put together by Washington or
25 by our local guys and when we did our assignments we always got critiques back from
26 Washington and Hawaii of these assignments. I don't know if I mentioned that earlier.

27 RV: No, you did no.

28 TA: And so we learned also from getting these critiques and "the camera was
29 shaky," "Focus was bad," "You didn't do your captions correctly," etc., etc.

30 RV: This is when you would return to Hawaii, you'd go over these things?

1 TA: Well, also sometimes we would get them while we were in the field as well.
2 In Thailand we didn't have a way, we would get our footage and look at it and compare
3 them to the notes but in Thailand I don't believe we had a projector that we did that with.
4 Vietnam we did, I don't think we did in Korea either. I remember on February 23rd, I'd
5 come back from that TDY assignment and then on February 23rd, 1968 which was shortly
6 after the Tet Offensive, I think the Tet Offensive started on February 12th, '68 we started
7 seeing film come back from, on February 23rd I was supposed to go out. Before that
8 happened we were looking at film that our guys had shot over there and boy, we kind of
9 knew what we were going to be getting into and it was scary to see the film that our guys
10 had shot at the U.S. Embassy and the 43rd Field Hospital, it was real graphic. And so
11 there were three of us going over, Bryan Grigsby, another guy names Craig Farrell and
12 we left that day.

13 RV: This is you second TDY.

14 TA: That's my second TDY and it was interesting flying into Vietnam. We
15 always had to change planes, Manila may have been again the spot where you finally
16 changed and I think we were on a Pan Am and Bryan Grigsby realized just after, shortly
17 after we took off that he had dated one of those flight attendants when he was at the
18 University of Florida, so she moved, there was no one up in first class so she moved
19 Brian and I up there, Craig didn't want to go up because he thought he'd get in trouble
20 with the officers on the plane, but Brian and I went up there, figured what they could do.
21 They could yell at us and tell us to go sit down somewhere else I guess. Again we were,
22 at that time I think we were wearing our military uniform but we went up there and we
23 thought that was great just being able to sit around up there but when we landed at Tan
24 Son Nhut that was a real thrill too because I didn't know a military plane, or not a military
25 a commercial airliner could land like it did. We went down at such an angle, it was just
26 incredible, I mean it looked like it was almost a controlled crash because of the remaining
27 VC and NVA that they hadn't captured or shot, they were still shooting at anything
28 coming in and out. Once we got into the terminal there was a huge hole in the roof and
29 debris all over the place. A few hours earlier a VC rocket had landed in the building.

30 RV: Wow. Welcome to Vietnam.

1 TA: Yes, welcome to Vietnam. And then Rick picked us up in some kind of a
2 Navy vehicle and took us to the villa.

3 RV: Now where was, is this on Tan Son Nhut or is this in Saigon?

4 TA: The villa was probably two thirds of the way from Tan Son Nhut into
5 downtown Saigon. We were probably closer to downtown than we were to Tan Son
6 Nhut.

7 RV: Okay. How long was this assignment going to be?

8 TA: It was a three-month, three to four month, three month; I think it ended up
9 being almost four months I was there. I know when I, we had our reunion in Vietnam my
10 wife, I took her to the villa and she said, "How did you ever call this place the villa, how
11 did you ever get that name?" I said, "to us it could have been a castle" because I mean it
12 was a place that we could actually go to and sleep in some air conditioning once in a
13 while and not be like some of these guys out in the boonies for six weeks at a time.

14 RV: Now was it just the three of you on this assignment?

15 TA: No, well we joined fourteen other people, there was fourteen of us total I
16 should say. We replaced three people; it was their turn to rotate out. There was fourteen
17 of us in the villa.

18 RV: What was your specific assignment for this TDY?

19 TA: Oh, there never was specific assignments.

20 RV: The same kind of thing like in Thailand, same kind of thing I mean, like at
21 the villa for example, let me tell you a little bit about the villa and then go on.

22 RV: Sure, please.

23 TA: We got in there, we were shown our rooms and rooms had either three men
24 to the room, there were foot lockers and chest of drawers, that type of thing in each of the
25 room and the three of us would share a shower. Each room was set up a little differently
26 but everybody had a shower that we could use and it was, the water, the hot water was
27 heated by the sun's rays and we were always trying to get in the afternoon to take a
28 shower because it was nice and warm by that time. We had to pay our rent in piasters
29 which was the, I believe it was piasters, I think that's what the local economy was and
30 when we arrived we were supposed to change our money into military payment
31 certificates so we weren't taking anything over to the black market but we were always

1 told by the guys that came before us, stick a few hundred bucks in your shoes and you got
2 a fantastic rate help pay for our time at the villa. I think we had to pay, I think our TDY
3 was \$26 a day and I think our, we had to pay \$16 a day of our money, of our TDY to pay
4 for the rental and the food that we got at the villa. When we got there it was interesting
5 because of the Tet Offensive I mean it was still a lot of fighting going on around Saigon
6 and we had to take turns pulling guard duty, nobody had ever done that before, before the
7 Tet Offensive, you just locked the gates and that was it, with barbed wire around this
8 place. It was a, the building itself was kind of a strange looking building, it looked like it
9 was made out of building blocks but all we had, we did have an assortment of weapons
10 then. We had our .45s that were issued to us and we had M-16s and grenade launchers
11 but before the Tet Offensive all the guys had in the villa were .45s and the story goes that
12 they were, that somebody, the Seabees were down the block kind of kitty corner from us
13 and I guess they took cases of thirty-five millimeter still film down there and traded them
14 for some weapons. We very seldom ever carried a weapon in the field with us and that
15 was kind of an individual choice.

16 RV: Did you carry a weapon into the field?

17 TA: A couple of times I did but I never, after awhile I stopped carrying it because
18 it got in the way with a .45 and finally just, if we needed one there was always one there
19 that we could have picked up off the ground.

20 RV: Did you ever have to fire your weapon?

21 TA: No, no.

22 RV: Tell me about the guard duty, what, how was that done?

23 TA: Oh, that was interesting because, I mean it was a laser light show around the
24 perimeter of the city, I mean they would send up these C-130s with flares that they'd
25 have to push out the back, they were huge, huge flares and they were very high up and it
26 lit up the perimeter of Tan Son Nhut airport. Then they also shot off you know flares
27 with a mortar round and also you'd see tracers going off in the distance and then you
28 could, sometimes they called in the gun ship Puff which had the Gatling guns on it and it
29 looked like garden hoses of light being put down on earth, it was unbelievable. I was told
30 in one second they fired enough rounds to cover a football field in every square foot.

31 RV: Wow.

1 TA: You could, I mean it was incredible to watch that from the top of our villa.
2 And then occasionally a rocket would be fired into the city indiscriminately. They had,
3 they couldn't aim these things very well and it was, it was kind of scary though at night,
4 you'd be up there and it would be really quiet, because there was a curfew and the South
5 Vietnamese and U.S. Army patrolled the streets but it was very, very quiet other than
6 what was going off in the distance. My first assignment over there was with probably one
7 of the best shooters in DASPO, his name was Harry Breedlove. I really didn't even know
8 what to pick in my backpack, carry out, because we were going to be gone for anywhere
9 from four days to a week.

10 RV: Going out into the field?

11 TA: Into the field and we knew we were going to be covering some combat. It
12 was a search and destroy mission that we were going to be covering. So I had asked
13 Harry, what do I pack. C-rations, those C-rations by the way were wonderful, they were
14 left over from the Korean War.

15 RV: Now are you being sarcastic or were they really good?

16 TA: No, they were awful.

17 RV: Okay, that's what I thought; I'd never heard them described in a good way.

18 [Laughing]

19 TA: Yes, we had to take Tabasco sauce, everything I did I took Tabasco sauce.
20 But I mean I carried, let's see I always carried, say carry kaopectate because the last thing
21 you want to do is have the runs, dysentery up in that area and clean underwear, socks and
22 lots of film. And I ended up using that first camera I was telling you about, the wind-up
23 one, it was sixteen-millimeter Bellenhola film. It took about oh, twenty rolls of film with
24 me. Otherwise we, hello, I think this phone is going to go dead here in a minute.

25 RV: Okay, let me pause this just for a second then.

26 RV: Tell me what else you would put in your pack, you would have your
27 kaopectate, your, lots of film you said, your equipment.

28 TA: We carried about twenty pounds of film with us when we would go out. Now
29 that's in addition to anything else, you know the food and that type of thing we had to
30 carry. The other thing we, and I always tried to carry a still camera on a lot of times I
31 went out so that was always thrown in there.

1 RV: Was that for your personal use or was that also Army?

2 TA: That was personal and generally I didn't use enough but if we had to take out
3 the larger camera equipment we were really weighed down because that camera could
4 weigh forty-five to fifty pounds and then we also needed a tripod and then sometimes
5 even a lighting kit. So you got to imagine carrying this stuff around in Vietnam, I mean it
6 was a real, if we didn't have two or three guys; it was really a lot to lug. We also had a
7 sound guy who would carry out his nagra but he'd always help carry our equipment as
8 well too. There wasn't any room for us to pick up too many souvenirs, I'll tell you that.
9 Sometimes we even, you know again, we never carried a flak vest with us but generally if
10 we needed one, unfortunately there usually was one laying on the ground somewhere.
11 When you consider carrying a load of this into combat with a camera operated camera
12 wearing a flak vest you can't believe just how dehydrated you can get too. I mean you are
13 just, I mean it is a lot of equipment. I don't care how good of shape you're in, it's just
14 heavy.

15 RV: How much water did you carry?

16 TA: A canteen, that was it. And I'll get into a story of losing my canteen in a
17 firefight. Anyway, that first assignment, I think I mentioned that Harry Breedlove was the
18 guy that was going to lead me on my very first assignment in Vietnam, oh one other thing
19 that was interesting I happened to think of too was when I got there I didn't have any
20 jungle fatigues, I had to get those issued and again it took awhile before we got the black
21 nametag and we had a patch that said DASPO on it and we had no rank, that was it and it
22 had bow chi, which means the press written on the other side but it took a while before
23 we could get those and get them stitched on our fatigues. And then the other thing I was
24 thinking about, where did I get my backpack from, something silly as that but I believe
25 we got those, the first one I think it was issued in Hawaii and it was shipped over with
26 some of the camera gear, it probably got there before me, I don't know. I do remember, I
27 think that's how we got that but we had to scrounge for everything we had over there in
28 Vietnam.

29 RV: Really, so you never really had enough supplies or?

30 TA: Well, we did. We had enough to eat and enough but we had to go get this
31 type of stuff and the flak vest again, we had to trade stuff to get the flak vest or go over

1 and make a request and wait three weeks. We were not attached to anyone in Vietnam
2 also, that was another interesting situation and we were supposed to be like that so we
3 were not biased by anybody there.

4 RV: Did that cause problems, not having rank and then also not being attached to
5 any particular unit?

6 TA: Actually it didn't. When they saw our orders, things, we told them who we
7 were working for. There were some officers that said, "Well we work for the Department
8 of Defense too" and I said, "Yes, you all do" but I said, "we repot directly to the General
9 of the Army" and I don't know who that was, if it was Decker at the time, I can't
10 remember. And usually that was the end of it.

11 RV: I'm sorry in general how receptive were the commanders in the field to
12 having DASPO units attached to them for their maneuvers?

13 TA: It was different; I mean it depended on what you were doing. If we came in
14 on a Medevac right in the middle of a fire fight the guy was probably ticked that there
15 wasn't a couple of extra troops coming in, just what I need is two cameramen here to be,
16 I'm right in the middle of something, you know so it varied. It was interesting, I think
17 most people were happy to have us with them, I think they liked showing what they could
18 do. We generally got a very warm welcome. Well my first assignment there was going
19 out to Pleiku in I Corps, we choppered out to a place called Chu Lai, which was a fire
20 support base and then we went out to another area which was a search and destroy
21 mission. A village had been searched and it was found to be a site for VC supporters and
22 101st Airborne was going in and rounding up villagers and that's what we were filming
23 and parts of the village was set on fire and that was my first time of really photographing,
24 it wasn't combat but it was, you know what we were doing in Vietnam. And it was, and
25 at this point in time I still felt that we should have been there, you have to understand
26 that, I mean that was still probably rather a hawk that a dove.

27 RV: I was going to ask you that, did you slowly feel yourself changing while you
28 were there or did this change happen after?

29 TA: No, it was happening while I was there, I thought oh my god you're going to
30 burn down this whole village but I guess I understand it. They were getting fire from
31 there and they had been in there before and so this is it. I remember walking, doing a

1 great deal of walking that day and asking you know Harry for some help, what I should
2 shoot and that type of thing. I remember later that evening we were trying to get back out
3 of there, get back to the fire base at Chu Lai and we were waiting for some Hueys, supply
4 ships to come in and as we were waiting that's the first time I ever came under fire, they
5 started walking mortars right into the camp, so they had a spotter somewhere and they
6 just kept moving them up and it was getting dark and Harry said, "It's time to head for
7 the sandbags" and we did and we just waited there until the firing stopped and the
8 choppers came in. But he was great, this guy really had an eye and he always, just a lot of
9 little nuances caught his eye, I mean he'd film guys eating these hot meals that were
10 flowing in and GIs cleaning the equipment with like a shaving brush and guys that were
11 using their helmets for wash basins and things of that nature, I mean he always, say a lot
12 of minutia, but the minutia was, you know when you put it together it was great because
13 it showed what guys went through out in the field.

14 RV: How did you feel when you first came under fire for the very first time?

15 TA: [Laughs]. Wow, I was scared. I mean, I was really scared and there was not
16 much I could do. I mean it wasn't like somebody shooting at us where we could shoot
17 back or anything, I mean it was just, it was out of, I don't know, you feel that you're
18 completely, something's out of your control and that was definitely the feeling I had. I
19 had no control over this other than try to get down as low as I could and stay in a bunker
20 and these bunkers were just shallow little bunkers with maybe four or five sandbags piled
21 up. Yes, I was scared to death.

22 RV: Did that change the more you came under fire later?

23 TA: No, it never changed, never at all, never, that feeling, never, never changed, I
24 mean sometimes it got worse. I think, I spent probably that first TDY probably about
25 ninety percent of my time up in I Corps.

26 RV: Really?

27 TA: Yes.

28 RV: There was a lot of activity at that time in I Corps.

29 TA: There was, there was a great deal. And I'd come back, I'd have to come back
30 like the night job and get back to the villa, clean up, type the captions, get the film ready
31 and make a run, or somebody would make a run up to Tan Son Nhut to get it on a

1 commercial jet back to, they were going back to Army Pictorial Center then in New York
2 City. Let's see my next job was to drive up to Long Binh which wasn't that far from
3 Saigon and we had to, I can't remember why we were there, I don't even know if we
4 were filming anything. We went to ammo, we went not an ammo, we went to a dump
5 where anything that couldn't be fixed or the military didn't want was put and I'm telling
6 you I have never seen anything as vast as this. It was like, and just about in any direction
7 you could look, as far as you could see was equipment and a tangle of just used junk,
8 Howitzers, tanks, Jeeps, shell casings, type writers, parts of mobile homes were in there.
9 It was all thrown in there and then there were truckloads of scrap, Vietnamese scrap guys
10 in there, I don't know how they got in, they had to pay some money I do know to get the
11 scrap out and I always wondered, I mean it was huge trucks they were coming in and
12 taking the stuff out with and I always wondered what they were doing with this stuff. But
13 I had never seen anything as big as this and on the way to it and on the way back we had
14 to drive through parts of this area where general officers lived and they had, they were
15 living in huge air-conditioned trailers with little lawns in front of their places and all
16 tidied up and I said, "My god, here's people living out in the fields and here these guys,"
17 I mean they had their barbecues out there and I'm going you go to be kidding me and I
18 couldn't believe the waste just of equipment that was just, I think, I don't know if they
19 had things like this during World War II, but it seemed to me that you know they fixed
20 everything they could possibly fix instead of just throwing it somewhere.

21 RV: Let me ask you your impression, you just mentioned the generals and you've
22 just been out in the field with grunts, tell me what your impressions were of the fighting
23 men when you first came in contact with them, the Americans?

24 TA: Oh, our guys that were out there were very brave, I mean they were, I just
25 thought that these guys were really professionals, the way that they went at going into the
26 village for example and the contact of the guys that were out on point and how
27 everything, how it all worked. And the officers were really; really cared about their men,
28 the ones I worked with anyway. And this particular group I think had worked together
29 for quite some time and there was a good camaraderie there and it was very professional.
30 I didn't see the, I mean I started towards the end of my time in DASPO, prior to 1970 I
31 did see a change somewhat of some of that professionalism, a lot more, I think there was

1 a lot more drug use and a lot of other things that happened later but at that time these
2 guys really were watching out for one another and they really were up to the task of
3 doing what they had to do.

4 RV: So you would gauge their morale relatively high?

5 TA: Yes, yes at that point. This is 1968, right after the Tet Offensive.

6 RV: Right, what about the morale of your unit, how would you measure that?

7 TA: Oh, our unit was great. We had a great, and again that may have changed a
8 little bit later on too but our guys, most of them were, I mean there was some guys that
9 just couldn't wait to get out of course and get back into commercial photography, I
10 couldn't wait to get out to get back to college. I figured out real quickly I could get killed
11 doing this job. But I just, I just think that after seeing how these generals lived and a lot
12 of them never went out with their men and we had the same thing with our group too, we
13 had a lot of officers that never left Saigon and we had some, what we called the NCO-
14 ICs, the guys that kind of were the administrators of the villa when we were out, the guys
15 that made sure the maids were there, made sure we had food and paid the bills and that
16 type of thing, these guys never went out. Now they may have paid their price because a
17 lot of them had been Korean vets and may have also been in Vietnam before they even
18 went with DASPO but the officers generally they were just officers right out of school,
19 could have been to signal school of some kind or they transferred in from something else
20 into the signal corps and they were sent to our unit, but again it's just like those generals
21 sitting back there in their camps and never, ever really got out to see what was going on.
22 I did, it was very interesting, my next assignment was covering the relief of Khe Sanh
23 and I had to fly into Khe Sanh a few times just to get background of what was going on
24 there before the First Cav relieved them. And what a rat infested, dirty, ugly, dusty place
25 it was.

26 RV: Tell me about going there, what was it like.

27 TA: Well the most interesting, first time I went there was with a guy named
28 Creighton Abrams.

29 RV: Okay, how did you get that assignment?

30 TA: Well, he had to be flying in, he was there and happened to jump on his
31 chopper and he kicked the copilot out of his seat and he jumped in there and he actually

1 flew the chopper. He had no, he had never been, what do you call it licensed I guess to fly
2 one, but he sure knew how to fly it and he loved doing it, a very affable guy, very, very
3 affable man. We jumped in this chopper and this guy, he's a madman behind the controls
4 and we were going down a riverbed, just a, it looked like Shangri-la or something, I mean
5 it was great and we were just heading down this deck as fast as we could and I don't
6 think we were more than ten feet up from the ground and he was having a great time.

7 RV: Were you by yourself as just one chopper?

8 TA: There were some other choppers behind us, he was in the lead and I think the
9 commercial press was in the other choppers. I'm trying to remember, oh I guess we had
10 a guy, had a sergeant, a sergeant first class with me, his name was DeCaro, he was a lifer
11 and he wasn't in our unit very long, he was a still guy, no he was a motion guy as well, I
12 don't even, I can't, I don't even think, for some reason we didn't have any stills of this
13 going on and I can't for the life of me remember but I was shooting, he had the film, the
14 little wind up one and I had the more sophisticated camera and this was like, you have to
15 understand this is like my third assignment and this guy, I mean I'd been getting some
16 really good critiques and I was showing this guy what to so. But as we were in this
17 chopper going down this riverbed, we came across this beautiful waterfall coming down
18 the side of this crust and just gorgeous and I thought man this is, this a great country,
19 people are going to love coming here someday and he pulled up on the stick and we ruse
20 up and I couldn't believe it, I just couldn't believe it. It looked like we were on the moon;
21 it was a crater filled landscape with no foliage as far as you could see. I mean it looked
22 like, I mean it was just nothing there.

23 RV: It had been B-52ed and defoliated.

24 TA: Both, both and of course all the rounds going out and all the rounds coming
25 in, that was just, there was nothing left and this was just, this was, as far as you could see
26 almost, it was incredible. So we landed and I just went around shooting different scenes
27 of guys doing work there and of course the abandoned aircraft that had been shot down
28 on a runway.

29 RV: This was at Khe Sanh?

30 TA: This was at Khe Sanh and then came in another day to do some more of that
31 and I think we spent one night there and we never had any really that huge intense

1 shelling, but I mean a few, they fired a few shells off at us but they were, I think the
2 North Vietnamese were already pulling back at this time. Then I went to the First Cav
3 and filmed them and actually got to probably, I guess they got back to Khe Sanh just a
4 little bit before Khe Sanh and actually filmed them coming in through the bunkers and et
5 cetera to relieve the Marines. And as soon as I finished that job I went over to the First
6 Cav other are that they were covering which happened to be the Ashau Valley. And I
7 went to the northern end of the Ashau with the First Cav and spent a few nights there.
8 There wasn't an awful lot of action, I can remember walking through it and I couldn't
9 believe how anybody could maneuver anything through the bomb craters. They were
10 partially filled with water, just like you've seen pictures of and one right on top of the
11 other and it was just, I mean it was soggy and crappy and just walking in this and not
12 falling into a crater was just a challenge, let alone these guys bringing bicycles and all
13 kinds of other things in through there. And I covered that for a couple of days, just all it
14 was was the troops moving and had no contact and one of the things the Pentagon wanted
15 at that time was contact, a lot of, try to get as much combat footage as we could. I think
16 they saw that first stuff come in from Tet and they wanted more and more and more. Well
17 I knew the 101st was coming in at the southern end and so decided to fly out and go
18 down, get back down to that end of it.

19 RV: Now was that your call to do that?

20 TA: Yes.

21 RV: You could just kind of pick and choose where you thought you could get the
22 best footage?

23 TA: Right, right. So I had a, at that point I think it was, I think DeCaro went back
24 and a guy named Ken Powell came up and he went into the 101st area with me and I
25 know when I was leaving the Ashau we took, we were starting to get mortars coming in
26 as we left there on the Chinooks but I couldn't even get my camera out to get the
27 incoming. And they hit the LZ right where we had just come out. But ended up going
28 into the Ashau again from the other end and basically we didn't get any combat footage
29 there and I said to Powell, I said, "You know one of the things that they're really on us
30 about is getting this combat footage, not coming back without this stuff but you know,
31 you just sit around waiting for a lift to a firebase or back to Saigon and just waiting,

1 there's a lot of downtime and you just didn't want to miss that plane back or out and the
2 pressure was to get as much combat footage as we could.

3 RV: What would your officers say when you came back and did not have it?

4 TA: Well, I mean they just said, "You know you're going to have to go out and
5 get some again." I mean I can remember, the other thing, you know you asked me about
6 the odors and things of Thailand, I remember the odors and things of Vietnam, the smells,
7 the acid smell of the runways with the Phantoms roaring up and down and oh, just the
8 heat there waiting for a flight either out to some fire base or back to Saigon, it was awful.
9 And just that down time, I hated it. And one of the things I finally figured out, if I wanted
10 to get some combat footage, I'd go to the Medevac hospital and ride out to the hot LZ
11 where they were bringing in wounded from and I said, well that's the only I know we can
12 get it. And I knew by doing that I was really putting myself in harm's way and anybody
13 that went with me.

14 RV: Was that your choice to do that?

15 TA: That was my choice, yes. So that's basically what I did and I remember the
16 very first time we came under fire I was with Ken Powell and we were at the Michelin
17 rubber plantation and we were sitting around waiting with a Medevac group and a call
18 came in, Get wounded, and so we jumped on, on the chopper and I couldn't believe this
19 guy landed it where he landed it, I mean to get these wounded guys out, I just couldn't
20 believe.

21 RV: This is a dustoff chopper?

22 TA: Yes, yes and we landed with the 25th Infantry Division and we landed with
23 one squad of armor, which was a couple of tanks and a few APCs and about twenty
24 infantry guys. And when we got there, they were in one of the roads going into the, they
25 were deep in the plantation, but they were in one of the roads that was, that had heavy
26 foliage on both sides of it and when we got there they were taking fire in three different
27 direction and like the first thing we filmed was them putting the wounded on, than we ran
28 to the commander's APC and took cover and he, this guy had been through the, the
29 commander of the group was a captain, been through Tet and he was pretty savvy guy
30 and gosh, we were there, for awhile. The fighting died down and then it just blew up
31 again right in front of us and they took out two of the tanks.

1 RV: Are you getting all this on film?

2 TA: I got the, the tanks were too far up to get on film but what I got on film was
3 the incoming fire coming right at us with tree limbs being shot apart and our guys firing
4 into the bush and what's funny is that later on I had a, had to make a presentation and I
5 needed to get some stills off of the sixteen millimeter footage that we shot and I had
6 footage of this actual battle and when they enhanced it you could actually see the VC
7 shapes running around behind, in this foliage shooting at us and us shooting back at them.
8 We, it was, I mean it, that was the first time and I mean, you know you talk about being
9 scared before, I mean this one was, I had no flak jacket, nothing other than my helmet
10 and I did have a thing of water with me, but I mean you talk about stress and just the
11 fatigue of battle, it was just amazing. I mean it was like, probably playing a football game
12 on the hottest day you could possibly play it on and somebody's shooting at you at the
13 same time.

14 RV: How did you unwind or how did you kind of tone down after such an event?

15 TA: Oh, I, maybe three o'clock in the morning you'd finally tone down if you
16 could get out it, I mean each situation was different. This one was an interesting situation
17 because both tanks were taken out by RPGs and then we were being flanked. We had no
18 idea what, the captain had no idea what we ran into okay, but he was told by this general,
19 stay there and he was ordered to stay there and engage the enemy all night if that's what
20 it took and he would bring in other troops. Well a decision was being considered by him,
21 we only had a half hour of daylight left, the captain said he didn't get the, he couldn't
22 really understand what the general was saying and he made a decision to leave.

23 RV: But he really could understand what the general was saying.

24 TA: Oh, absolutely and it was a good thing because we were just about totally
25 surrounded and I mean the battle of this thing with all of these weapons going off and the
26 fifty calibers and the, it was just, I mean for me that was just unbelievable and I mean the
27 wounded and getting these people out of there. We just backed out and got out and we
28 met up with the rest of the company which was I think two or three other squads, we
29 literally circled this one area, it was like a little island of trees and that's where we spent
30 the night. But all night the area that we were in was pounded by artillery, aircraft, I mean
31 it just was blasted all night long and again you know you asked me how did you unwind

1 on something like this, well we got back there and it was probably you know threw my
2 poncho on the ground and had a can of C-rations and something to drink and just tried to
3 get some sleep. But all night long it was just taking one heck of a, I mean the ground
4 would move from underneath you. You know I think I finally fell asleep about three in
5 the morning to wake up about five when dawn was coming and they landed two
6 companies of infantry and we went back in there. And there was some snipers holding
7 up the advance but basically they were just covering to get these people out and it was a
8 real surprise what we found. This small squad of Cav ran right into the middle of a NVA
9 division-training center, I mean it was incredible. We had no idea and they got out as fast
10 as they could during the night and they didn't take any, I mean they just didn't take much
11 with them. A lot of material for Army intelligence was found in the bunkers and the
12 tunnels, I mean it was, they found tiger cages, they had evidence that they had been
13 keeping our POWs there with them. They also had booby-trapped a lot of stuff, a lot of
14 things were blowing up, guys were touching stuff.

15 RV: Did you see this happening?

16 TA: I didn't see it, no but I know it was happening, I mean it happened a hundred
17 yards away from us but I didn't actually see the aftermath or anything.

18 RV: Let me ask you a question, can you, I'm trying to get a feel of exactly during
19 these firefights and kind of when you're with the platoon and company, could you kind of
20 range around where you wanted to go or did the commander say, "Hey, you guys stick
21 right here beside me or you stick over there with that lieutenant and that's it"?

22 TA: I asked them in this particular instance where the safest place was to be and
23 he said in his command APC. But we did, I did when I first got there, I mean I was
24 outside the APC shooting, you know filming before I could even climb in it and we got in
25 it and I didn't know if it was better to stay in it or not because I mean we had RPGs being
26 shot at us as well and you kind of wonder are you better off outside it or not but I mean
27 once they got around to the other side of us you know and you hear the rounds clinking
28 off the thing you know, pan, you knew where you wanted to be. Again when we got into
29 this, this, I mean there was bunkers everywhere, equipment laying everywhere, okay, I
30 mean it was incredible, I mean it was just, you could just see that they got the heck out of
31 there in a hurry but the thing that I always wondered about was, you know I looked up

1 into the trees and I'm not kidding, I'm not exaggerating, there were fifty, sixty, one
2 hundred cluster bombs still sticking in the trees, you know come down because this was
3 such a heavy treed area that they were in and I was just wondering if a good breeze came
4 along what would happen. I mean would they, I don't know if they would go off if they
5 fell, I mean I still don't know the answer to that.

6 RV: I imagine they would.

7 TA: I just don't know but I mean, I'll tell you what, I was sure glad we didn't stay
8 there and engage those guys all night long, it wouldn't have been long before we would
9 have been overrun. So that was really my first baptism under fire and we go that footage
10 back, I did the captions, got the film out to the States and got re-supplied, it was nice to
11 get a shower after something like that, and a home cooked meal, we had our maids Sam,
12 Mama-san and Baby-san, but I'll tell you what it was sure nice to get a good night's sleep.

13 RV: Tell me what you mean when you say you did captions?

14 TA: Captions are where we were, who we were with, if I shot a close up of
15 somebody, I always got his name, his rank and where he was from, his unit, you know
16 and what the scene represented. And so we could take that and that would go back with
17 that, with that film for example, that made, oh I have to look back but that was on NBC
18 and ABC I believe, it ran on the nightly news. So we had a lot of our stuff hit networks, a
19 lot of the guys got their stuff on network news and the nice thing about it was network
20 news didn't have to pay for it either, they got it free. So it was, I'll tell you that was,
21 getting out of there and getting out of there alive was, I was very, very pleased with that
22 officer's decision not to stay there and engage.

23 RV: Now when you got back to the villa, you said you showered and you ate and
24 tell me about the guys, what did they said, tell me what happened, where were you, did
25 you get some more footage?

26 TA: Yes, we talked about the job, talked about what we did. Oh wow, sounds like
27 you, there was a lot of guys that was in DASPO that never saw one iota of combat.

28 RV: And that was just by chance.

29 TA: That they didn't you mean?

30 RV: That they did not, yes right they just didn't have contact.

1 TA: Yes, they did not and especially after 1970, you know after the war wound
2 down there was very little combat that was covered. I think the last big combat that
3 DASPO covered in '70 was the Cambodian incursion and it was rare to get combat after
4 that. But I mean what we were doing at the time was try to get as much as we could but
5 after this Tet and the second Tet Offensive of the same year, it pretty much cooled down,
6 even for our guys but a lot us saw an intense amount of it in a very short period of time.
7 So, I'm just saying that guys could rotate through and maybe never got into a firefight.
8 Ironically, as far as firefights is going, I only really saw two and I'll get into that other
9 one later. But I just, I thought, you know on these jobs that you're out with and you're
10 sitting around on the tarmac waiting to get a ride back you make friends with people and
11 I thought I'd tell you a little side story that was kind of interesting.

12 RV: Please do.

13 TA: I think it's interesting because this guy was a Korean-American and he
14 worked for UPI, he was a cameraman, a still guy. He was also featured in a men's
15 magazine called *True*, at the time this was a big men's magazine back then and it was
16 kind of a macho magazine. I can't remember his name and I wished I could because he
17 was really an interesting individual. He was adopted during the Korean War by an
18 American Air Force colonel. He was educated, he went to college in the U.S., became a
19 journalist, his first assignment was the Belgian Congo and the civil war that happened in
20 the late '50s or early '60s and he tells the story that he was captured while filming there
21 by the communist element and they didn't know what to do with him. He told them he
22 was Korean and these guys thought, oh well if he's Korean we better let him go because
23 as far as these communists knew that Korea won the war, the Korean War so they let him
24 go. And he was featured in this magazine later as a bullfighter in Spain and he'd lost a
25 leg somewhere after his time in the Congo okay so he was a one legged bullfighter in
26 Korea.

27 RV: Working for UPI.

28 TA: And working for UPI, all right.

29 RV: Where did you meet his, was he on the tarmac waiting?

30 TA: He was one of the flights and we'd go down, I'd go down to his office at UPI
31 and he'd come up and have some beers and maybe dinner with us at night and we just

1 became friends and we'd go to lunch over at that, what's that, the Continental Hotel now
2 and then. He was right downtown and just a great guy, really an interesting person; I
3 always wondered what happened to him. And another guy I ran into occasionally was
4 Sean Flynn, he was Earl Flynn's son and I don't know if you know, are you familiar with
5 Earl Flynn?

6 RV: Oh, yes sir.

7 TA: Okay, well you know about Sean Flynn, right. Well whenever we got to, he
8 was just a nice guy all right. I didn't even know who he was at first and he introduced
9 himself to me. We were always talking about camera gear and how we filmed this and
10 how we filmed that, I mean I was just, I mean he was really dedicated to really getting the
11 best story and filming the best story he could get, I mean he was a very, very dedicated
12 cameraman. I mean he was a hell raiser too but he was a very dedicated cameraman to
13 getting the best story he could get and I was just devastated to hear that he was missing in
14 action in '70. I mean a lot of these guys like Larry Burrows and et cetera I mean they all;
15 we were in a lot of places together at the same time. Another place I hated to go was a
16 place called Vinh Moi and it was an island off the coast of Hue and this was the 101st
17 Airborne's area of operation and I got to tell you it was the VC and NVA who really ran
18 that area. We'd go out there and I'd cover a patrol there and sometimes I'd go to a place
19 called, again these were just covering guys out on, you know search and destroy, whether
20 it was to blow up bunkers, burn down a village, try to catch VC you know, look for
21 ammunition, et cetera, Duc Pho, Dong Tam, Pleiku, Ju Lin, Dong Ha, Phu Bai, I was in
22 and out of Phu Bai all the time, of course Nha Trang and what was the, I'm trying, I just
23 lost the name of the other base but.

24 RV: Da Nang?

25 TA: Da Nang, yes and I was in and out of Phu Bai six or seven times, just
26 jumping transports to fire support bases and I remember going into Camp Carroll which
27 was the 101st Airborne's divisional camp. One night I went to the enlisted men's club and
28 there were some grunts that just gotten back from six or seven weeks out in the field and
29 a couple of them, they would have these races and they'd bet money and who could open
30 up a beer can the fastest and we had these things called PTs, I think they were called PTs,
31 it was a little can opener that you would wear around your neck and it was just a little

1 thing that would fold, you know you could put that on with your dog tags so you had
2 something to open up your C-rations with. And supposedly this guy was the fastest guy
3 with this in the camp and they'd all been drinking and having a few beers and the other
4 guy was going to open it with his mouth, with his teeth. I couldn't believe it, this guy puts
5 his, like a fang or something and he just stuck that in that can and just turned the can and
6 just cut the can open with his tooth and I bet it was done in five second, the guy was just,
7 I mean I couldn't believe it, the can was like, just jagged, you know the cover of it. I said,
8 gaw, I couldn't believe he could have cut up his gums, that was some of the crazy kind of
9 stuff that you know you'd see once in a while.

10 RV: How much did you interact with the troops when you were on assignment,
11 out in the field?

12 TA: Well, I mean we talked to them a lot, found out where they were from,
13 always wanted to know that. I mean we talked to these guys a lot and as we would be
14 moving from one place to another and if you had a chance to talk a lot of times you were
15 just moving along in there, you know in a file and then when we'd get a break we'd sit
16 down and talk to them. I remember another odor that, Camp Carrol is an example, the
17 latrines, they used to burn, they'd use this phoo gas and throw it in, half napalm, and half
18 fuel for something and they would put that in and they'd burn it, god, you could smell
19 that for miles away. And the other was Nuoc-man, I don't know if you've ever, anybody
20 ever told you about Nuoc-man before.

21 RV: I've had it many times.

22 TA: Okay, well the Nuoc-man was, you know it was fish, it was left out to dry
23 and pounded with the beetle nuts and some fish oil and I mean we could smell that
24 probably a mile before we'd get to a village so we knew when we were coming up to a
25 village because you could smell the Nuoc-man, making the Nuoc-man, oh man. And of
26 course I liked the taste of Nuoc-man but the odor of it when they were making it in such a
27 large batches, it was, to say pungent would be probably kind.

28 RV: Tell me about your experience with the Vietnamese civilians and the
29 villagers that you would come in contact with.

30 TA: Well unfortunately I didn't have much interaction at all with the Vietnamese
31 villagers, I just filmed the action that was going on and if somebody, I mean literally if

1 somebody needed a hand, if they were moving something, I can remember helping doing
2 that but I mean it was very, very minimal contact that I had with the Vietnamese, it
3 certainly was the opposite of Thailand.

4 RV: How about in Saigon or where you were staying there at the villa did you
5 have a lot of contact with civilians there?

6 TA: No, not much at all, not much at all. I always asked myself why and I guess a
7 lot of it had to do with seeing how the Vietnamese worked with us and how they were
8 always out, I mean they were just always out, not they, a lot were out to just turn a dollar.
9 A lot were forced and conscripted into jobs that they didn't like and they just; the one
10 thing that I always hoped that I never ended up with was a Vietnamese unit in combat.

11 RV: Yes, I was going to ask you; did you ever go out with a South Vietnamese
12 unit?

13 TA: No, but ask Bryan Grigsby that question. He, he spent some time with them
14 and he can tell you a little bit more about them. He was, he was in Saigon during the
15 second offensive of Tet and I was up near Hue with a guy near Ken Powell doing a sweep
16 with the 101st Airborne while he was covering that. It was May 7th, 1968 and the 101st
17 were responsible for protecting the approaches to the city of Hue and they had a name for
18 that mission, it was called Operation Carateen Two, it was named after a 101st Airborne
19 mission from the Normandy invasion in World War II. Again, when I was up there we
20 were just doing a search and destroy mission and I was just covering the troops, walking
21 along and I had a, I had this Aeroflex 16F, with a two hundred foot magazine and a belt
22 battery pack and I had no place to carry water so I gave this water to Ken Powell to carry
23 for me. We'd been filming the group most of the morning and doing a sweep of the area,
24 we were walking with them and we were heading towards this burnt out village and all of
25 a sudden I mean it just opened up right in front of us, couldn't have been more than
26 twenty yards in front of us, fifty feet in front of us, AK-47s opening up and they just, just
27 really went at it and again like I think Bryan said this, you always worry about getting
28 into a firefight, I mean you spend more time worrying about this type of activity than you
29 actually are in it. And the next thing you know, you just kind of take over and start doing
30 your job. Well, Ken Powell I told him, I said look, I said we're going to go in this burned
31 out Buddhist temple, I said, "Whatever you do, don't go pulling any John Wayne stuff

1 because you're going to get pinned down and not be able to do your job." Well there was
2 a bunker in front of the temple and I said, "Stay here with me." As soon as I got those
3 words out of my mouth he was running, and Ken was not the most agile guy in the world
4 at that time, he was a big boy and he came, he just jumped into this crater and he never
5 got to put his camera up, I mean it was just sprayed all the time. Anybody that put a
6 weapon up or anything was just getting, just getting hosed. Well I ran into the temple,
7 and I had an ABC cameraman next to me and I could see Powell in the crater right in
8 front of me and the ABC cameraman and I were, we both had Aeroflexes and we were
9 both shooting with these large zoom lenses and I'm thinking I'm fairly safe, I've got the
10 lens out one of the shell holes in the crater, or in the temple and so did the ABC guy but I
11 don't think the NVA understood I only had a camera because they put an RPG in the
12 temple and they blew myself and the ABC guy about fifteen feet out the side of the
13 temple. The ABC guy had several chipped teeth and his ears were bleeding from the
14 concussion, I mean we both should have been killed, I mean they were yelling, "Hey,
15 there was guys in the temple back there, are you okay, are you okay?"

16 RV: Did you take any shrapnel, any kind of wound?

17 TA: Nothing then, nothing then. And I yelled out to Powell, I said, "look, I got to
18 get the hell out of here," I mean they're just wailing away at this and I said, "Stay there
19 and we'll meet up and I'll come around the other side." Well, as I started to move across,
20 more fighting flared up and I hit the ground again and filming some things, then I came
21 across the sergeant that had been shot in the stomach and he had killed an NVA, this was
22 a group of NVA we ran into and he was standing there. The sergeant had, his stomach
23 was all dressed up and he was standing, smoking a cigarette and I remember his flicking
24 that cigarette down into the dead guy and just crushing it in this guy's body. I mean it
25 was pretty brutal looking.

26 RV: Were you filming this?

27 TA: I did and I'm still wondering where Powell is all right, and looking for him,
28 looking for him and eased up over where he was and they moved on and blew up the
29 bunkers and I'm over there, nobody's seen him, he's gone, they don't know where he's
30 at. And this was a, probably a company strength I was with. Well in the film business we
31 had this ASA, it's the speed of the film, like ASA 400 you can make shots late into the

1 evening, the lower the ASA, the more light you need and I was shooting with this ASA
2 16 and its really, if I don't have enough light I'm not able to keep filming. Well, the last
3 shots I got were two Huey gunships that just flew over the top of us and it looked like the
4 rounds, I mean literally were, not figuratively, literally going right over our heads and I
5 think you guys got this Army photographer film there and towards the end of it you'll see
6 that footage and it was amazing, and that was the last shots I was able to make that night.
7 So from that time I wasn't really able to shoot anything more and I guess the last stuff I
8 had before that were guys just resting, wounded, dead NVA, guys going into the bunkers,
9 in these tunnels and blowing them up. And many times these guys kept going into these
10 bunkers and throwing grenades in and twenty minutes later somebody would emerge and
11 start shooting at us again. And it was just, finally I just sat down and I had no water and
12 it was hot, it was, you know I've been carrying this battery belt and these guys just kept
13 popping up and shooting at us from these bunkers, all right. Well our new guy spotted,
14 NVA stuck his head up and he ran over and tossed a, and this guy had just been in
15 country, I don't know a couple weeks I guess, and threw a grenade in and the only
16 problem was he didn't count to three like you're supposed to, threw the grenade in and
17 the grenade came back out as fast as he threw it in and it killed him, killed a guy next to
18 him, wounded several other of us that were there. I mean I dove as he tossed the grenade,
19 you know they yell "Fire in the hole" and I'm diving away from it and shrapnel went
20 everywhere and one hit me in my left cheek, in my rear. I just thought somebody, you
21 know I thought it was the blast of the rubble, I didn't even know it was shrapnel. I just
22 thought it was like pieces of dirt and I mean I, I think back to that in almost slow motion
23 and thank god I was diving in the way I was diving. And so anyway I actually, right after
24 that I couldn't film any more, I picked up some guys bloody flak vest and an M-16. So,
25 I'm carrying that and everywhere we went somebody was shooting at us that night, I
26 mean it was, we'd have twenty minutes of a lull and then next thing I know we were
27 being shot at.

28 RV: Were you firing back?

29 TA: I had never fired, no. I think the only time I ever fired a rifle was an M-16 at
30 a shooting range with some LRRPs one time, that's the only time I ever fired a rifle there.

31 RV: What about Powell?

1 TA: Powell, well I'll get into that. Well, about two AM we stopped walking and I
2 was with some guys that had, it was in a rice paddy where there's even a water buffalo
3 looking at us and I had my first drink of water since probably two o'clock in the
4 afternoon. I had a ton of iodine pills and the other guy let me use his canteen and I just
5 filled it up and shook it up and filtered it through my teeth, it was sludge but you know it
6 was probably the best drink of water I ever had in my life. Well, Powell, I kept looking
7 for him and looking for him and I was scared that he got hit and something really bad had
8 happened to him, I mean I'm telling, you have a really strange feeling of being isolated
9 when you're with a group of men you don't know, you're in combat and they don't have
10 a clue who in the hell you are and you're worse than a new guy to these guys. Now here I
11 am carrying this huge camera, battery belt around me, flak vest and an M-16, I mean I
12 must have looked like the biggest dork in the world walking along with these guys. Well
13 all night there was explosions and gunfire and we just kept moving forward and snipers
14 were around us and again just dehydrated from the fear of battle and scared to death I'm
15 going to step on a mine, they took out a tank that night, I'm carrying a ton of gear, I mean
16 I really was wondering if I was going to get out of there and the whole time I'm awfully
17 pissed off at Ken Powell for doing what I told him not to do because I don't know if we
18 would have stayed in this predicament as long as we did. Well the next morning as we
19 were walking out of this, we finally I think about 2:30, 3:00 the contact was broken and
20 that was the end of it, but we had to walk back to the firebase and when I came out into
21 the light a medic said, "Hey, you're all filled with blood man" and I was. Again I really
22 didn't even feel it, I mean and the next thing I hear is this voice, "Hey, I've been worried
23 about you man." It was Ken Powell. I found out he took a Medevac APC back to the
24 base when the firing died down; he was going within an hour. So I, all night long, I was
25 scared that something happened to him, scared something was going to happen to me and
26 then getting hit on top of it. And I took a chopper back to Phu Bai where I went to the
27 aid station and got sewn up and they had the shrapnel taken out and Powell thought that
28 was very humorous and that even pissed me off more. And I said, "What a way to get a
29 Purple Heart." I said, "I knew I was going to get a lot of razzing about that one" you
30 know, so. You want to continue here?

31 RV: Why don't we take a break right now?

1 TA: Okay.

2 RV: Okay, sir why don't we go ahead and continue. You had just gotten
3 wounded, or gotten the shrapnel removed from yourself.

4 TA: And I did know that that day, that same day I was hit that Saigon was being
5 overrun again. They called it the second Tet Offensive of 1968. Tan Son Nhut was shut
6 down, I didn't know about that. All essential aircraft, we couldn't even get a ride out of
7 Phu Bai. One of our guys, Harry Breedlove without me knowing about it had also been
8 wounded the day before I think, he was wounded on the 6th, I think I was hit on the 7th of
9 May. And we finally, we sat around a runway, I was getting sorer and sorer and I wasn't
10 feeling the greatest and I remember sitting there by a field hospital in, I'd already packed
11 up my camera again, I was just waiting for a ride and Chinook came in with a bunch of
12 badly wounded Marines and one of the men was carrying a severed arm of someone
13 else's with him and I just looked at those guys and I said, "oh, my god" I wished I would
14 have had the camera out because it sure said a lot about war. I was desperate so I found
15 out where the Air America base was and I found an old DC-3 that was being loaded and I
16 talked to one of the pilots and he finally agreed to let us go on his flight with him back to
17 Saigon. It was interesting sitting in this plane, there were some pigs, some Montagnards
18 and some other small bales of something that smelled horrible but I didn't ask about it, I
19 was just happy to be on a plane and sitting there getting a ride back. But when we got to
20 Saigon it, I got to see from the air what I'd always seen from the ground, tracers
21 everywhere and flares lighting up the city and I remember the plane coming in, it really
22 was one of the worst landings I'd ever had in my life.

23 RV: Really, what happened?

24 TA: Well, the plane came down on one tire, on one wing, bounced off sideways,
25 same thing happened on the other side and bounced again and I mean we were just
26 skidding down the runways and crate were flying around in the plane and it was, I said,
27 "oh, my god, this is it" but he pulled it out and we landed okay, but I mean there was still
28 just stuff happening everywhere, tracers going everywhere at the airport. At one end of
29 the airport there was a French cemetery, where there was a lot of fighting going on but
30 that's where all that, I think that's where most of the action was coming from.

31 RV: Was this at night?

1 TA: Yes. I still had to get back to the villa, we got through to the villa and they
2 sent a team out to get us and they were escorted by the White Mice, what they called the
3 Vietnamese police and after we left that air base, you know the streets were deserted but
4 you could hear occasional gun fire and there was another curfew out and nothing
5 happened on the way back to the villa. The next day we did our captions and those things
6 were getting sent off to the States and that was used by NBC Nightly News, that footage.
7 And I had to report to a field hospital near our villa in Saigon and the next day, or it was
8 that day I guess when I reported to the field hospital, Captain Rick Griffith was shot in
9 the arm and my friend Bryan Grigsby jumped out while Griffith was under fire and
10 Griffith had been knocked over by when he got hit, Bryan laid his camera gear and his
11 recorder down and ran out and pulled Griffith out of harm's way while being shot at.
12 Bryan won a Silver Star for that. And I guess that was the last offensive that year that I
13 knew about and I know I went back to Hawaii on May 16th of 1968. The commercial
14 press, and we, we were just doing our job, that's all we did, I mean this was our job in the
15 commercial press those guys made a living by trying to be the bravest and get the story
16 out the first and sometimes they even trampled over each other getting stories. I
17 remember when I was at Khe Sanh it was just a madhouse with the commercial press just
18 running over each other and they were, I mean I was quite amazed at just how pushy they
19 could be and of course we were at the bottom of the food chain in their opinion.

20 RV: Why did they think that do you think?

21 TA: Oh, I think we were just Army grunts to them then. You know we weren't
22 "part of the press." Later I, I know we've talked to a lot of them and they didn't feel that
23 way at all, I mean later on they said, "We always wondered what happened to you guys
24 and what you guys did" but at that time to get a story and to be the first one to shove a
25 microphone into somebody's face, it was pretty amazing to watch.

26 RV: How did you guys get along in the field, I mean were they?

27 TA: Oh, fine, no there was no, when we were out in the field we usually stayed in
28 a public information area. I mean if there was some battle going on, before we could get
29 out to, oh like in Phu Bai for example there was a PIO office and before you could get out
30 to Cam Carrol or out to some of the other areas you might end up spending the night at
31 the quarters there at the PIO office and we often went out for beers and chatted about

1 what was going on and sometimes if it was a big battle, like going into Ashau, there
2 could be twenty, thirty people there. It just depended on what was happening and where
3 you were at that time.

4 RV: Do you have any memories of any specific reporters?

5 TA: The only ones I, I mentioned to you before, Sean Flynn, who was a
6 cameraman, a freelance cameraman. He was a real decent guy. I'm trying to think who
7 else. There was one fellow that was the morning anchor for CBS and I can't remember
8 his name, he still does work for CBS, really a nice guy and talked to him quite a few
9 times. I guess that, and I also talked to, like there were some Korean reporters that were
10 interesting to talk to, because the Koreans had sent to ROKs over and just talking to
11 them. It was interesting but I think basically we got along pretty well with them but we
12 were still I think overall just because of the way that the barrages that I got involved with
13 where they were trying to get a story, I mean they didn't care who they ran over,
14 including themselves, I mean it just was amazing.

15 RV: Did you find the field commanders when you guys were out in the field
16 together showed any preference towards DASPO and the military press versus the
17 civilian press?

18 TA: Oh, it was funny, yes sometimes they did. Sometimes we got better
19 treatment than them but most of the time they were treated better than us. I mean these
20 guys wanted their names put out in front of a lot of people and that's how they did it but a
21 lot of guys just, you know they knew we were out there working just like they were and
22 we got some preferential treatment. It just depended on the field commander. I was, I
23 sure was glad to get back to Hawaii though after that trip.

24 RV: So pretty eventful first time in Vietnam?

25 TA: Yes, yes I mean, I think I saw one job really that wasn't a combat operation
26 of some type that time, everything else was a combat op. Yes, I was very, very pleased to
27 get that behind me and leave there. And I knew I was going to come back at least for one
28 more tour before my days in DASPO was over and I wasn't even looking forward to that
29 already. But it was good to go back to Hawaii, it was really expensive there and I made
30 about \$150 a month and I just bought an old 1953 MG and the payments were about \$50
31 plus the insurance a month and I lived in a barracks and I think before we left there was a

1 number of us that were trying to find an apartment but we stayed in the barracks and did
2 more training or trained other people and looked at captions and while we were there
3 President Johnson and President Thieu had a conference there about the war and we had a
4 huge, of course we had probably about twenty guys back and we covered that very
5 thoroughly. I think I mentioned to you a difference between a blint camera and a non-
6 blint camera. Well they had, they gave me a non-blint Aeri, a thirty-five millimeter Aeri
7 and I mean I was way in the balcony just shooting cutaways and when that thing went on,
8 everybody in the whole audience when he was giving the press conferences turned
9 around and it was awful, I mean I'd turn it on and just almost walk way from it, I was
10 very embarrassed. [Laughing] Well, my, that seemed to be over with in a quick hurry
11 living back in Hawaii but I got a great assignment. My third TDY was with a small team
12 and the officer in charge of that was a guy named Bill Sanhamill, he was a captain. There
13 was another fellow by the name of Chuck Abbot and Tom Larson and myself. Abbot and
14 I shot the motion and Larson did stills. We didn't, I don't know if we, I think if we did
15 some sound we just probably took turns doing sound and getting some wild sound,
16 meaning non-sync stuff. We were civilian status on that whole job, it was great.

17 RV: Where was it?

18 TA: Well, we flew; I'll get into it. We flew commercial and we had these huge
19 weight restrictions on our baggage because we were flying commercial, we took a ton of
20 equipment and film with us and we were focused on three subjects. We left Hawaii on
21 the third of August in 1968 and I think we arrived at Taipei, Taiwan on the 5th of August.
22 The first production was how the Taiwan government manufactured two and a half ton
23 trucks for the military use in Vietnam, they just assembled truck from components that
24 we shipped over and we spent about two weeks covering that story. We stayed in Taipei
25 and took taxis each day across to the port city, which was on the other side of the island,
26 but it didn't take us maybe an hour to get there. Boy I'll tell you, that was an interesting
27 country. Every inch of that country seemed to be cultivated up the sides of the mountains
28 and rice paddies. I remember the city though being a gray kind of a gloomy looking city
29 at the time, without any very attractive buildings. It was just; I think it was built for
30 expediency and not for any aesthetic values.

31 RV: Where did you all stay in Taiwan?

1 TA: We stated in a hotel downtown and we would, I'd go down to the Navy's
2 Officer's Club with Bill a lot, he and I got along very, very well. We've maintained close
3 contact, we speak to each other a few times each year. The second part of the trip
4 involved us capturing a story on ammunition renovation and fuel storage facilities and
5 our next stop was Okinawa. That was an interesting story. We met the base commander
6 and he was a full colonel and he directed Bill to stay in the officers' quarters and us to
7 stay in the EM billets and Bill said to the colonel, he said "Really," he says, "Look, I'd
8 like to know if there's a good hotel that we could stay in in Cadena and work out of."
9 The colonel just went nuts, I mean he was, there was another colonel, full colonel in the
10 room as well and Bill said to him, he says, "Look, we're authorized to stay in civilian
11 hotels and it would be better for the team if we did so." So this colonel said, "Let me see
12 your orders" and the colonel read them over and handed them to the other colonel and
13 said, "I've never seen anything like this before," he said, "These men are authorized to
14 steal." Hello?

15 RV: I'm here.

16 TA: Yes, did you get the last part?

17 RV: They're authorized to steal?

18 TA: Yes, he said, "These men are authorized to steal" because he's never seen
19 anything quite like our orders.

20 RV: So he thought that you all were basically had it easy.

21 TA: No, no I think he thought that we, when he said, he said he was being
22 sarcastic when he said it, he said, "In other words, he'd never seen orders like that
23 before." He said, "We're authorized to do just about anything we want to in other
24 words."

25 RV: Right, you had run of the place.

26 TA: Pardon me?

27 RV: You had a run of the place basically?

28 TA: That's right. Let's see, I remember us going a long ways away from the base
29 and we had, we went to this factory, it was outside and they were Japanese civilians
30 working along benches and unscrewing heads of mortar shells and I think they were 105
31 shells that howitzers used and they had repacked the shells and make sure they were up

1 to, that they would work. So I never realized that ammunition got old and I guess they
2 sent this stuff back, back and forth every six months or every year, but I'll tell you what I
3 was sure, I think I was more nervous filming around that group than anything because I
4 was expecting, I was hoping you know, no electrical sparks, nobody was smoking, there
5 was a lot of ammunition there. Then the next part of our trip took us to Japan and in
6 Japan we were covering the same thing, ammunition renovation and fuel storage. We
7 landed in Tokyo and proceeded to Yokohama where we stayed a few days. We again
8 covered that same thing, the storage of fuel and the ammunition renovation. One of the
9 sites where it was stored was a tunnel that was built during World War II and the inside
10 of the tunnel was gigantic. It was, at the mouth of the tunnel, two railroad cars could get
11 into it, side by side. Once you were in the tunnel it was probably, oh I don't, I'm going to
12 say fifty, sixty feet high. And it was all lined with stones and bricks and it was just
13 incredible, I mean this was built for keeping the war going during the World War II if
14 they had to. And it went back probably a quarter of a mile if not more but we had, and
15 there most of it was fuel that was being stored inside there. We did go to Hiroshima and
16 we've seen that.

17 RV: On business or pleasure?

18 TA: That was pleasure. And we finished up in Sasebo and that's where the oil,
19 lots of oil terminals were and that's where a U.S. Navy base was as well and I think they
20 refueled the, I know there was an aircraft carrier there that was off the shores of Vietnam
21 and that's where they would get new supplies and refuel and get back. We took, while we
22 were in Japan I remember taking a public train, one of those fast trains, we flew Japanese
23 Airlines and actually we flew real close to Mount Fuji, we stayed in some old Japanese
24 inns, this was before Americans really traveled throughout Japan and the economy had
25 taken off, we used to sleep on the Tatami mats and had the Soji screens. Bill Sanhamill,
26 he had some pressing business back in Taipei, actually I think he was going back to see a
27 girlfriend or something and he left us in Tokyo and he took leave and he flew back to
28 Taipei and we were supposed to fly back to Hawaii and when Bill left us he also took his
29 portion of the weight allowance with him, so we went to check in on our civilian aircraft
30 and we were told we were so far overweight it wasn't funny. So we called Hawaii and
31 Hawaii said, well, now we were making \$26 a day for per diem there, they said, "Well, I

1 guess it's going to be a week or so before we get you your orders, enjoy Tokyo." And we
2 stayed at the Stars and Stripes Hotel, are you familiar with the *Stars and Stripes*
3 newspaper?

4 RV: Yes, I am.

5 TA: Yes, that was where the headquarters was and for \$2 a day we had like a
6 dorm room, you know a quad and it was great, so we had a nice week vacation paid for
7 by the Army. And we did a lot of touring there and enjoyed that a great deal. Then it was
8 back to Hawaii.

9 RV: How long did this TDY last?

10 TA: That one was, I think I came back the 13th of September, what I go out,
11 August, first part of August, I guess about six weeks, seven weeks, something like that.
12 And we were back in Hawaii and we did find, I did find an apartment with three other
13 guys from our unit, it was great because usually two of us were there at the most at any
14 given time. I was only back thirty-nine days before I was sent to Korea. I arrived in
15 Korea on the 22nd of October and this Captain Richards that I mentioned earlier that used
16 to have us over to his house and he was a real jokester and I remember standing in line to
17 get processed after I got off the plane and there were no DASPO people there to greet me,
18 which that was really unusual and this line kept moving really slow and finally around
19 the corner I see guys dropping their pants and they're getting shots with a horse vial and
20 it was a gamma gobul shot because a lot of guys were coming down with spinal
21 meningitis. Well, Dick Richards let the line get to about four or five guys just before it
22 was my turn, he's laughing like crazy, he says, "Come here, get out of line." He thought
23 that was really funny.

24 RV: Were you laughing at this point?

25 TA: I was not laughing at that point.

26 RV: You were relieved not to get that shot thought.

27 TA: Yes, I was real relieved not to get, because we had international shot records
28 that were filled up, I mean because of our TDY, every time we went out and back and
29 forth, some of the shots had to be given again and we got to know the medics over at the
30 place there in Fort Schafter, my name almost. Well, anyway we stayed in a villa; it was
31 more of a true villa than we had in Vietnam.

1 RV: Was this in Seoul?

2 TA: This was in Seoul, yes and it was greeted at the door by Mr. and Mrs. Yi,
3 they were an elderly couple that they looked after us, they cooked and cleaned and
4 washed our clothes, they also had a little dog that ended up being our mascot. Mr. Yi's
5 father was a Korean general who actually built the house and he rented it out to anyone
6 for income. I think we had that house for about two or three years and the Yis had a little
7 small house behind ours. They were probably in their '50s or '60s, they were working
8 for us and the big assignment we went sent for Korea for was of course to document the
9 Pueblo crew release. And while we were waiting for that major release, we covered
10 everything from railroad tunnels and bridges to North Korean infiltrators trying to kill the
11 president of South Korea. Again I traveled all over that country, from one end of it to
12 another and it was kind of an interesting country, they had an actual fall like what we
13 have in Michigan but a lousy, lousy winter, really cold there. Talmadge B. Harverson, he
14 was a, I think he and I both went over at the same time and he was working with me on a
15 story covering bridges and tunnels and god, we were out forever and we had afford
16 Scout, I think that was the name of the truck, kind of a forerunner to an SUV, we had
17 blowouts all the time an done night we slept outside in our mummy bags and we woke up
18 with about six inches of snow on us, we ended up sleeping in a jail, couldn't sleep in the
19 truck, we had so much equipment in it, but we had Talmadge V., that's what we called
20 him, we had a great opportunity to cover some combat in Korea and about sixty North
21 Korean infiltrators were, I mean these guys were though, I actually think they were
22 probably even tougher than our Special Forces, they were making their way south and
23 their objective was to get to Seoul and kill the president of South Korea. And the U.S.
24 Army, they provided helicopter support from the 6th Aviation Platoon and they helped
25 move the troops around and helped spot for them as well and let's see, the North
26 Koreans, they just, they were amazing. They were jumping ahead of these locking lines
27 because they were moving so fast but boy I'll tell you what, the South Koreans, every
28 time they caught up with them they were taking dead bodies with them, these North, they
29 were catching them one by one. But we'd been with one chopper crew all day and at the
30 end of the day the other chopper crew asked us to cover them and I had actually stepped
31 aboard their chopper and Talmadge says, "Hey, let's stay with the group we've been

1 with." They were heading back to their base and over this Ulchin Mountain Range. Well
2 we took off for the base, the other chopper radioed to us about a snowstorm that they had
3 run into and they said they were going to climb over it and come over the ocean and
4 come back in underneath it. Our pilot decided to follow the mountains roads and we were
5 flying really low and the storm was coming at us and not only was it getting dark, we
6 were running out of fuel and there was one other thing to worry about, sixty North
7 Koreans, probably only about forty of them left by that time. We really were running out
8 of fuel and were trying to find a place to land on the roads and Talmadge was on one rail
9 of the chopper and I was one the other looking for power lines, making sure he wasn't
10 going to hit any power lines or any trees. We actually had to land and just was we were
11 landing they got a call saying that, this was as the fuel light was turning red, they got a
12 call over the radio saying the other chopper had disappeared off the radar screen over the
13 Sea of Japan. They never did find anyone; they didn't even find a piece of the helicopter.

14 RV: Really?

15 TA: Yes, everybody I mean completely missing.

16 RV: And you had been aboard that actually, you were getting into the chopper?

17 TA: I was on it, yes and if Talmadge hadn't said, "Let's stay with the crew we
18 had," I'm thinking wow; talk about nine lives, huh. You just wonder why things like that
19 happen to you. I was starting to feel like a cat with nine lives. We landed that chopper on
20 the side of the road and one of the crew saw a bus coming done the hill and flagged it
21 down and he road that back to the base and they knew we were coming in and they had a
22 truck ready and got back on that fuel truck and showed them where it was at. We had a
23 choice of either riding that chopper back into the base or taking the fuel truck back in and
24 Talmadge and I discussed it and we decided to take the empty fuel truck back in. I mean
25 these guys were so; they needed some time by themselves because of what happened to
26 their buddies. And let's see, I don't know in late November, I had gone into the villa, I
27 had been out and Captain Griffith who had just replaced Captain Richards a few weeks
28 ago was trying to get us all together and he looked pale and we knew something was up,
29 we had no idea. He told us to come in this dining room that we had and he said he was
30 just informed that, by Hawaii, that Rick Ryan had been killed and gosh, you just can't

1 believe, you just, I think probably of Rick at least once or twice a week every day of my
2 life, yes.

3 RV: What happened to him?

4 TA: Rick was covering a story up in, well actually, he was covering a story on
5 people sniffers and he was in one of the people sniffers actually doing cutaways of a guy
6 manipulating it. A people sniffer is a helicopter that's got very sensitive devices in it that
7 can actually tell if there's troop movement through an area by detecting body odor. And
8 he was shot down by a, either by a missile or an anti-aircraft gun and he was part of well,
9 he was part of this story, I mean the other guys had done the cutaways the day before and
10 he said, "Nah, it's my turn" and he was really a very talented guy and one of the nicest
11 guys in DASPO and then I also got to know his family which was really, really sad. But
12 the mission that he was sent on, it really could have been filmed in Saigon because there
13 was a unit of people sniffers there working and the, OIC, the officer in charge, his name
14 was Peter Friend decided that our guys had been spending too much time in Saigon for
15 other reasons and he wanted them out for awhile. A lot of us never have forgiven him for
16 what he did, it was just a casual way to waste a life of a young guy, he didn't need to be
17 sent up there to do that story.

18 RV: How did you deal with that personally at the time?

19 TA: Well, I didn't. You mean with Rick's death at a time?

20 RV: Yes, sir.

21 TA: I just, I guess I, first thing I did is write his mother a letter and the Archives
22 has got a copy of that, and her return to me and I just, I just had to be alone for awhile,
23 had to get out of the villa and walk and think it through, I mean it just certainly made an
24 impact on me and like I said I still think of Rick every week. You know, and again I
25 didn't know about this, we didn't know about all of the things that went on with his death,
26 I mean all I knew is that he was in that people sniffer but later when we got back you
27 know I was told about what, why, what happened, I mean a lot of guys in our unit were
28 really, really upset about this and usually the officer in charge, there is a body to be
29 identified he's supposed to go do it and he made one of my other friends, Chuck Abbot
30 do it.

31 RV: So this guy didn't even go identify the body.

1 TA: No, no, wouldn't go, he didn't want to do that. He was, he was not a very
2 well liked man in our unit. I think I'll talk to you a little bit later about that. Well, after
3 we, after Rick's death, Captain Griffith did get us some enlightenment, he got us in to
4 film the Bob Hope show and that kind of took our minds off of Rick.

5 RV: Where was the show?

6 TA: It was in Seoul and gosh, I don't even know if I ever got to see Bob. I did get
7 to meet Ann Margaret and Tom Menteare, my buddy, shot a color photo of her, it was a
8 great shot, he gave one of the prints to me and I actually got it signed about six years ago
9 by her.

10 RV: Really?

11 TA: Yes. And I had a, I'm going to donate to the Texas Tech, I have about four
12 hundred feet of film that I shot that day, processed, paid for the processing myself, I'll get
13 that donated to Texas Tech. But it was fun; it was great going there and seeing that. Then
14 the next thing that happened was December 23, 1968 what we'd been waiting for actually
15 came to fruition, we got word the crew was being released and we'd been waiting for
16 months. So this was really one of the most historical events I probably would document. I
17 was the head mopic cameraman and the one with the most responsibility on that release
18 and much of the film that we were going to shoot would end up going out of Japan by a,
19 it was going to processed in Japan and sent out by satellite, that was really something
20 back in those days, so we really only had one chance to really get this. Everything I
21 learned had better, you know all training, everything I'd been through had really, had
22 better treat me well then because we really had only one opportunity and I know seeing
23 that crew walking towards the hospital with their heavy winter jackets supplied by Uncle
24 Sam and the POW garb they wore, the North Koreans had given them, it was a wonderful
25 sight for all of us. And I remember people clapping and yelling and the next series of
26 shots of them was them signing in, they had, so they could all be accounted for and after
27 signing in different corpsmen led them to different beds and we were capturing all of this
28 using sync sound and I had a sound guy, Talmadge Harveron, following me around while
29 I was shooting all of this and we really had to be agile to get that mike in because he had
30 an umbilical cord to me to the tape recorder and we had to be really careful. I do
31 remember Commander Butcher making sure, I mean this guy was just hobbled, I mean he

1 could hardly walk, he made sure every single one of his men were in a bed before he took
2 his own. And the civilian press wasn't allowed to capture any of this inside the hospital
3 and I remember one of the crewmen asking me who won the World Series, they hadn't
4 even, they didn't even know who had won that and another one asking me about
5 somebody in a popular comic strip and I can't remember what that was, it was Dick
6 Tracy or somebody like that but we were told by Army intelligence not to speak to these
7 guys, not answer any of their questions but we answered those questions. I figured what
8 the hell, what are they going to do right?

9 RV: Right, pretty harmless.

10 TA: Yes, send me to Vietnam or something? But these guys had taken some real
11 beatings and we had one of our other guys had actually, a still guy and another motion
12 picture guy filming the bruises and where they'd been beaten. You never saw it on their
13 hands or their faces but it was the rest of the body that was, that they documented this for
14 because someday I think they were hoping to press charges against these Korean captors
15 that they had. That was, this was just a great story. I mean December 24 we filmed them
16 going back to the U.S., Christmas Eve and I remember getting back to our villa quite late,
17 ready to type in the captions and downloading all the film and you know getting
18 everything ready, it was to get sent out. We left, a couple of us drove out in a, I think we
19 had a quarter ton truck at our villa, it was snowing out and we got, I think it was about
20 eleven PM when we got the film on the plane and I recall someone was with me and we
21 were really cold but I'll tell you what, it was a nice Christmas present for us and it was
22 great seeing those guys get out of there and all those things going on. We got back after
23 midnight and Christmas morning the Yis cooked us a special Christmas meal and the
24 team got letters of accommodation, all of us did for the job that we did there. Let's see, I
25 think one of the lost jobs I did in Korea was ROK training for Vietnam and watching
26 these guys do Tae Kwon Do on each other and braking bricks with their foreheads, I
27 knew, I said, "Man the Vietnamese are in trouble when these guys come into town." The
28 people in Korea were great, they were really friendly. Even back in those days though
29 the students protested, I mean it was amazing, going back to 1968 and they still were
30 protesting back then and to this day I guess the students in Korea like to find something
31 to protest about. But they were great to us, they were very, very good to us and I

1 remember being out doing one of these stories on one of the railroad bridges all by
2 myself and this Korean woman saw me and she walked a couple hundred yards back to
3 her little hut and she came out with a jug and it was rice wine, she kept handing me the
4 rice wine and saying thank you, thank you, thank you and something must have happened
5 to her during the Korean War that was very positive. One weekend we told Captain
6 Griffith that we were having troubles with one of the cameras in every BL and one of the
7 guys in our group knew someone from the Navy's camera repair team, they were in Seoul
8 so when Captain Griffith left one morning I faked working on the BL and when he came
9 back that afternoon the Navy guys had already been there and torn the camera, I mean
10 this thing was in thousand of parts and Rick Griffith was going crazy, he was furious, just
11 furious. He said, "How in the hell could you rip something like this apart, just" I mean he
12 stormed out of the house and his last words were, "You better get that f-ing camera back
13 together and it better work." Well, he left and the Navy guys came back and put it
14 together and they've done this a hundred times before so they said, "Well, here's a couple
15 of extra spare parts," they scattered them on the table and he said, "This will drive
16 somebody nuts" and when Rick came back they were correct because I told him I got the
17 camera working but I didn't know where all these parts went. He just went ballistic again
18 and he got, he had a very short fuse, and I mean you could just see the face getting red, I
19 just couldn't keep a straight face and I started laughing. Actually he took it pretty good
20 and I was lucky that he didn't court martial me.

21 RV: It sounds like you guys had a really good relationship, all of you.

22 TA: Yes, pretty good, it really was. Yes, that was the end of Korea and I went
23 back to Hawaii.

24 RV: When did you go back in January '69?

25 TA: January 21st of 1969 and then I had a couple more trips to Vietnam. Do you
26 have time to continue or do you want to stop now?

27 RV: Why don't we break just for a second here?

28 RV: Let me ask you a question about, if you could compare the different cultures
29 in Asia, you've experienced Thai, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, are there
30 any conclusions or anything you can say in general about the different cultures in Asia?

31 TA: Wow.

1 RV: The big question I know, but.

2 TA: Yes, really its like almost as diverse as Europe is in some ways but somewhat
3 similar. I think the Buddhist culture in Thailand affected them in one way, positively and
4 they were I think, one group that was just such a wonderful group to be around and the
5 Koreans were very, very harsh, it was a, I mean their land is hard, their language is harsh
6 and they were very hard working, industrious people. Same in Taiwan, they were very,
7 very, they had a harsh time as well and they were very industrious and hard working
8 people. I think the only people that I know the majority of that tried to get around being
9 very industrious was probably the Vietnamese and I think I understood that later on but at
10 the time I didn't understand it. And of course the Japanese were very hard working
11 industrious people as well, so overall I think the people in Southeast Asia were the one
12 thread that really was common was hard work.

13 RV: I've heard that before from other veterans, their impression that the people
14 there had to put up with a lot and did a lot.

15 TA: I mean, the way their living conditions were and the way that they did it and
16 they did put up with an awful lot. In Korea for example in the winter you, they had
17 electricity but they didn't have stoves and they had warmers that they put underneath the
18 house, a lot of people died from asphyxiation because of that and they were just, get up in
19 the morning, go to work, might even have an outside john.

20 RV: Where did you feel more welcome as an American, in which society?

21 TA: Wow. I think Thailand by far and then Korea as well, I felt very welcome in
22 Korea. I don't know if that still holds true but a lot of the people that were, that
23 generation was the generation that was saved by the Korean vets and I think a lot of
24 people were very happy they didn't end up under communist control.

25 RV: Okay, so you get back to Hawaii and?

26 TA: Yes, I went back to Hawaii for a little while and I ended up back in Vietnam
27 on March 3rd, 1969 and one of the first jobs I did was a story on the Sherman tank.

28 RV: Now were you based again at Saigon?

29 TA: Yes, same place, villa.

30 RV: Same place, okay at the villa.

1 TA: And I know guys later, I think its sometime in '70 they closed the villa down
2 and they moved into some hotels, what they called military hotels but all of my trips into
3 Vietnam I stayed at the villa.

4 RV: Okay.

5 TA: Well, Congress wanted, they were getting reports on the Sherman tank not
6 doing a good job, it was getting a lot of reports on this tank not being able to oh, climb
7 over certain rice paddies and they were stalling a lot so I was sent to Cu Chi to cover an
8 operation that was being supported by this tank. We didn't run into any enemy fire but
9 we found some dead bodies that were left behind. They must have dropped them and ran
10 because usually they don't just leave their dead laying there. But anyway, we filmed how
11 the tank overheated and couldn't climb over the dykes at the rice paddies and how easy it
12 was for the tank turns to get hit by an RPG and get blown off the tank and we also were
13 showed how they sued the chicken wire and cyclone sensing around the top of the turrets
14 to deflect these RPGs and how they also actually developed bags to hold these, that was
15 the first tank not to have the, it would fire the round out and there wouldn't be a casing.
16 And one of the problems they had was when they were storing these powder that would
17 shoot the round out, they'd get hit by an RPG and it would overheat, it didn't actually
18 have to go through the turret but it heated the turret up so hot that it would cook off those
19 rounds and blow the tank up. And the other bad thing was the, in Vietnam and then these
20 tanks were going through a lot of jungle and it was just being sucked into the radiator and
21 they were overheating.

22 RV: How did the tankers feel about you documenting the problems with their
23 vehicle?

24 TA: They felt good about it; I don't think the commanders liked it too well. And
25 this was one of those cases like "What the hell are you doing here, and why are you?" It
26 was one of those cases where if we had not been DASPO I think we could have been
27 easily biased and filmed that from a different direction but we filmed it the way we saw it
28 and sent our notes in and they took it as such.

29 RV: How conscience were your superiors about making sure that you guys did
30 your job without bias?

1 TA: That's a, they weren't. I think we were more conscience of it, of trying to be
2 non-biased in everything we did. There were a couple of guys back in Hawaii that was
3 their main, one of their main concerns was us doing our job and not being biased. One of
4 them was the first sergeant, he'd been with DASPO for quite some time and he was, his
5 name was Ken Bridgum, he was just a terrific guy and I think he wanted to make sure we
6 did this the best way we could possibly could and that was being non-biased. And the
7 commanding officer that we had, oh I'm trying to think, we had a guy named Captain
8 Duke Austin and after him I have to think of his name but he was a, he also believed in
9 doing the job the best way we could and being non-biased but we didn't hear a lot about
10 it okay. So we really kind of took that on our own. Now, I used to go down to the delta
11 and fly with my cousin, he was a forward air commander in the Air Force stationed in My
12 Tho and I used to go down and visit him and he took me up on a mission and I began
13 filming it and I never knew a prop plane could do the contortions that that thing could do.
14 And what was interesting, the camera I was shooting, I was looking out through the prism
15 of the camera and it was rotating, I didn't realize it was throwing my equilibrium off. I
16 got sicker than a dog, threw up in my jungle hat and he really laughed his butt, he thought
17 he did it because of all the gyrations and everything else he was doing and that was the
18 first meeting with my cousin, it's the first time I ever met him too.

19 RV: Oh really?

20 TA: Yes.

21 RV: Wow.

22 TA: And he thought it was quite humorous that he got an Army grunt to lose it
23 but we became good friends and I flew with him a lot down there and he came up to the
24 villa a few times and he tried to make me sick and I never lost again, but I never took a
25 camera that I had to look through the prism lens again, a mirrored shutter.

26 RV: Now you tried to explain to him why you had gotten sick I'm sure.

27 TA: Yes, I did, he didn't but it for awhile. It was interesting, one of those
28 missions we saw one of the Australian Batwing British bombers, that was kind of neat to
29 see and one time we were coming back where BU had fired a bunch of rockets into a, oh
30 a dyke along like a riverbed and F-4s came in and targeted it. He had one rocket left, we
31 called him Willy Peter, white phosphorus where they would light up the area and we

1 were flying back over a free fire zone and if they saw anybody in that free fire zone you
2 were supposed to blow them out of the water, or in this case the delta, it was a lot of
3 water, put them out of their misery. There was this old bearded Papa-san in a dugout
4 canoe going across the water and we did a look-see, went down to see what we could see
5 from the air and Bud said, you know he gave me a little history lesson, he said, "You
6 know this guy's probably been, his family's probably been in this are for three hundred
7 years" and he said, "You know we're supposed to take guys out like this" he said,
8 "they're not supposed to be here," he says, "So I got to fire on him" and the rocket went a
9 mile in the wrong direction, "Geez, I missed."

10 RV: That's interesting.

11 TA: Yes, and the day before I got down there on one of the last trips one of the
12 pilots had gone to a commissary and filled up the plane with beer and on the way back
13 the beer shifted and these were Cessnas and it moved against the stick, they found the
14 pilot trying to push the beer away in the back seat when it crashed into the ground. What
15 else did I do while I was there? Let's see, I spent that time I spent a week working on a
16 mission with Special Forces training Cambodian Army units to become paratroopers.

17 RV: Where was this?

18 TA: That was up near Cam Ranh Bay and we actually filmed them jumping a
19 week after they went through the quick airborne school of one week. That was used by
20 ABC. Let's see another network story.

21 RV: Let me interrupt real quick, what was your impression of the Cambodians?

22 TA: They were really quiet and they really hung to themselves. They seemed to
23 be kind of tough but we really didn't get very close to them. Special Forces kept them
24 kind of, once we got done filming that was it, we didn't even go into the compound with
25 them, so we were staying at a public information office and they were quite a ways from
26 the Cam Ranh Bay, they were in some Special Forces camp, I can't recall, I mean it was
27 just outside Cam Ranh Bay. Another story that made it to network TV and that was used
28 by ABC and NBC was the Red Cross covering the treatment, they came in to see how the
29 NVA POWs were being treated at the Long Binh 74th POW hospital and that's about
30 April 24th, '69. It was interesting, they were repatriating some of the more serious
31 amputees back to North Vietnam and they had an NVA doctor but he refused to, he had

1 been seriously wounded and I can't remember what happened to him but he stayed, he
2 refused to be repatriated. And the Red Cross were mainly Swiss that were there, they
3 wanted to make sure that these people had humane treatment. I was real surprised, they
4 were very cautious about us filming them because they didn't want us using that as any
5 way that we could for propaganda use.

6 RV: What did you see as far as the treatment of the NVA prisoners?

7 TA: Oh, they were treated very well and they really were treated well. They got
8 good food and they got good medical care and I think the Swiss were real pleased in what
9 they saw as opposed to probably how well our guys were treated.

10 RV: Did they get in to see our guys that you were aware of?

11 TA: The Red Cross?

12 RV: Yes.

13 TA: I don't know.

14 RV: I know they were allowed at some points, at some time.

15 TA: That was probably later, that was probably well after I left Vietnam.

16 RV: I didn't know if they had talked about it any.

17 TV: No. They were very, very quiet and very, they just really didn't, they felt
18 uncomfortable that we were even there. What was interesting, the POW hospital was near
19 the place called the Long Binh Jail, LBJ they called it and that was a real hideous site. I
20 mean these were some GIs that had committed something very serious while they were in
21 Vietnam. They, the men slept inside of metal Conex containers at night and they used
22 them to get out of the rain, that was it and it must have been 130 degrees in those during
23 the day and each one of these Conex containers, it was circled with concertina wire and I
24 can't remember how many of these, then they were also surrounded by fences with more
25 concertina wire and all four corners there were guard towers with MPs manning them. I
26 mean I thought it was bad enough to be in Vietnam, but I couldn't believe anything could
27 be worse. I'm trying to think of anything else.

28 RV: How long did this particular TDY last?

29 TA: Well, I was there for three months. We went up to the, hang on a second.

30 RV: Okay, go ahead.

1 TA: I did another interesting story, we went up to the highlands outside of Pleiku
2 to cover a story on Army chaplains and this was really a gruesome assignment, that
3 firebase had been actually overrun the night before and they called in air strikes on their
4 own position. There was 150NVA dead outside the perimeter and riga mortis was setting
5 in, I mean they looked like statues. It was just the most amazing site I had ever seen.

6 RV: Did you film all of this?

7 TA: Filmed that, yes. And some of the bodies that made it inside the perimeter,
8 they had no way of disposing of these guys so they, when they blew up the ammo dump
9 they were blown up as well. There was just a lot of U.S. soldiers in body bags and the
10 chaplain was there, he helped the soldiers grieve over than and he said a mass that I
11 filmed. I mean they were lucky they survived, I mean literally, literally we talked to the
12 CO and he said it was just, and he said hand to hand and said they just hunkered down
13 and called an air strike in on their own position. And I think after 1968 the Pentagon
14 wanted more stories and less combat. President Nixon was started his withdrawal from
15 Vietnam about that time and we found out we had to stay more and more out of Saigon
16 because we were burning up too much TDY. So we, I mean basically we had a bunch of
17 dedicated guys that really wanted to make good documentary stories. I think one of the
18 most interesting stories I did while I was there was the filming of setting up and tearing
19 down of artillery firebases and we used Tom Menteare, myself, John Gilroy and a guy
20 named Joe Premo who was the still guy on it. We would just go out and just keep
21 shooting these things over and over, different angles together to get some of the, we
22 really had our creative juices going on that and that was one of the better stories that I
23 think we actually did. I think it was probably the best job I ever did at DASPO.

24 RV: As far as tearing down firebases and moving them?

25 TA: Yes, how to set up, they were, the Pentagon was asked by the artillery
26 department to set up, to see if they could get us to do a training film on how to do this,
27 how to set up a fire base and then how to tear it down in a war zone. The efforts for this
28 job I was awarded cinematographer for the year for the Department of Defense.

29 RV: Really?

30 TA: Yes.

31 RV: Wow. What made it so good in your mind?

1 TA: Well, it was just one of those jobs that we had time to do, it was an
2 interesting job to film and we had all of the enthusiasm of all the commanders and
3 generals that were in Vietnam to get this story out and get this training going. And really
4 was, you know a good story to do. I got letters of appreciation from general officers, I got
5 a commendation from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for this job, I mean it was a
6 great job. Fort Sill was the, was who the job was tasked for and John Gilroy was our
7 lieutenant, he was one of the few guys that would go out in the field, one of the few
8 officers that actually went out with us and I'm telling you we just took tons of equipment,
9 I mean it was really a pain in the butt when we had to make a move because it was just
10 four of us humping the stuff and they were setting up these firebases in the parrot's beak
11 and literally yards, I mean who knew, I mean who know I mean we actually could have
12 been in Cambodia, I'm not sure. But what they would do is they would do these star
13 positions with the 105 howitzers at each point and they'd dig a large moat, they'd bring
14 in bulldozers and they would make literally a moat around it and they filled it with just
15 about anything they could of ammunition and then they put fifty gallons drums of a
16 mixture of gas, airplane fuel, and what was that sticky stuff that, I'm trying to think of the
17 right word, it would get on you and burn you.

18 RV: The napalm?

19 TA: Napalm, they'd mix napalm in with it as well. And this was all inside the
20 moat and they had concertina wire thrown in there and concertina wire outside the moat
21 and machine guns were placed strategically around, you know in between all of these
22 howitzers and then during the day the base was bracketed by artillery bases, you know far
23 away and the howitzers were loaded with special shells, like white phosphorus or these
24 flechettes and they only had a range of about fifty yards before they would explode and
25 they weren't trying to fire way out and you know get infantryman, they were just waiting
26 for people to come at them. And then they also had puff up in the air and so they would
27 wait, they had about a company of artillery men in there and they would wait until the
28 inevitable and you could see the lights, I mean I wasn't there when they did this, we came
29 and this, after they did this three times they had us document it, but I was told that they'd
30 see the lights of the trucks from the NVA would attack, I mean they'd get to that, start to
31 cut through the concertina wire, I guess the first things they'd be jumping and trying to

1 get across the moat and they'd light that up so that the puff could see where the firebase
2 was and simultaneously the artillery bases let go and as they were charging the howitzers
3 were letting go and it was a real onslaught that they would just, it was really a very
4 effective way to get the enemy suckered in.

5 RV: Did you get to film this?

6 TA: No, we did not get to film it. When we got there they got smart [laughs].
7 They actually had a body count, the three times they set it up the body count was about
8 450 NVA, no casualties for us at all. And that's what they, when they got this reported to
9 headquarters, I mean that's how we were, finally this assignment came around and they
10 said we want you guys to film this because this is an effective way to set up a firebase
11 and kill as many people as we possibly can but by the time we got there, they'd done it
12 about three times and the last time I think the kill rate had gone down significantly, the
13 NVA were getting a little bit smarter.

14 RV: Right, right. Let me ask you a question about, a technical question, did you
15 narrate any of your film, did you do voiceovers or was it just simply the footage?

16 TA: Simply the footage in wild sound or sync sound.

17 RV: Okay, and if we could go back, tell me about the Army chaplains and your
18 impression of them.

19 TA: Wow, they were some great guys. They were, some of them were real
20 military and other ones were just very compassionate people and this guy that we filmed
21 going out, we did a whole story on chaplains and I just did one portion of it, it happened
22 to be that particular one because it was tasked, I mean we probably had three different
23 crews out filming it and the one chaplain that I was with was very compassionate and he
24 had to listen to a lot of things and hold up these guys after what they had gone through.
25 But that was probably the only chaplain I actually really got to talk to.

26 RV: Right. Do you need to say anything else about the firebase?

27 TA: Yes, we met with the commanding general that was in charge of artillery in
28 Vietnam and we actually filmed him in his bunker and he went through how he would set
29 up this type of thing, we brought a lighting package even and it was the first time we'd
30 use that thing and we kept blowing out his generators, but we got what we needed. Then
31 the next morning we were flown to a base that they were tearing down and at that time

1 we needed to demonstrate how these shells worked and the basic, basically the positions
2 of how these things sat up, you need the starts, how they sat in the star system.

3 RV: You're talking about the fifty-millimeter?

4 TA: Yes, the 105s.

5 RV: Oh, the 105s, sorry.

6 TA: And so they let us, you know they fired off a few rounds and they started
7 tearing the base down that afternoon and a squad of infantry was left to defend the
8 perimeter with a skeleton crew on the howitzers. I mean if they were going to attack, we
9 filmed until dark and then we realized we were there with just a squad, going "oh my
10 god" and we knew every time they were setting up these bases they were attacked and we
11 were wondering how vulnerable are we and actually we were given some M-16s and we
12 were asked to defend a section of the perimeter. We said, look, you know we declined,
13 saying we had no experience in what to do. I mean we were cameraman. We said you
14 know if the base gets attack, we'll try to help you at night but that's all we can do. And
15 night long they popped off flares and didn't get any sleep and then the next morning the
16 base was dismantled and while moving, while I was going from one camera position to
17 another, I stumbled over two AK-47s that day, they were just laying in the dust and I
18 found a bolt action rifle. We had, I took those back to the villa and put them up on the
19 walls, war trophies, never did try to bring them back but I always wondered what
20 happened to those things. And you couldn't believe the dust from the Sikorskys and the,
21 you know as they picked up these equipment, I mean everything we had shut was tight, it
22 was just, our equipment was awful, I mean I had never seen so much dust.

23 RV: Now I wanted to ask you, how did you keep your equipment in operation and
24 functional in such an environment?

25 TA: Oh, I mean we really were paying attention to it all the time. I mean if guys
26 weren't paying attention to their equipment they ended up with a bad job because I mean
27 it was rampant, I mean you had the moisture, humidity, or the dust and this place was, it
28 was, it was awful. I mean when we walked back in the base camp people walked away
29 from us, I mean we looked, I mean, I don't think we could have gotten any dirtier, I mean
30 literally they gave us new fatigues and under shorts when we got there.

31 RV: They just gave up and gave you a whole new outfit.

1 TA: Yes, yes, I mean the other ones, we didn't even bother, we just threw them
2 away. I think we held the record for the longest shower in Nam too but then we had to sit
3 down and clean our equipment, I mean it was just filthy. The other interesting, I mean we
4 continued on filming this, setting up a base somewhere else but one of the other
5 interesting jobs we filmed was the one millionth Army R &R guy. I think it was like
6 March 31st to April 5th, we covered a guy that was in the brown water Navy and each
7 service had its delegate for one millionth R & R and this Army guy was a river rat in the
8 Mekong Delta and we filmed, we went out and filmed him doing his job and went on
9 patrols with him up and down the delta and swapping sampans and checking for
10 weapons. We filmed him writing to his wife, he got a, he was getting an all expense paid
11 trip to Hawaii where his wife would be flown in as well. They were going to be put up at
12 one of the best hotels in Hawaii and they had a deal where they were going to fly to the
13 other islands and see different things and they were going to fly to the different islands
14 and see different things and we got this guy into Saigon where he shopped for gifts for
15 his wife. We spent two weeks filming him, we finished the job and it was on a plane
16 going back to Washington and we really captured the essence of this guy and he was
17 really excited about meeting his wife, but as it turned out he got a Dear John letter right
18 before he was supposed to leave, saying she found another man and wasn't joining him.

19 RV: Oh, no did you film that?

20 TA: No, we heard about it after everything was filmed. All I know was the Army
21 was really pissed off. They picked another guy from a different group and a different
22 group of DASPO guys went and shot him and I don't if that poor guy was ever
23 compensated or not, that first guy, can you imagine that?

24 RV: That's terrible.

25 TA: Awful I thought. There's pictures in my file of this guy where we were
26 filming him back in Saigon and also on the river. And that was my second trip and I
27 returned May 29th.

28 RV: Okay, what was it like on the Mekong Delta, down there on the river?

29 TA: That was really different for me to be going up and down the river and, I
30 mean you never knew who you were stopping and some of the places where the river, I
31 mean we were going up smaller channels and well they never knew if there was going to

1 be an ambush or not, because it certainly was uninhabited area. And it was another
2 different piece of commerce that we got to see. Shipping out, that was the, used to be the
3 rice capitol or the bread basket of Southeast Asia at one time and I mean there was a lot
4 of commerce down in that area.

5 RV: Do you want to go ahead and take a break for today?

6 TA: Yes, let's do that.

7 RV: Okay, I'll go ahead and sign it off right now then.