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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Dale Fillmore  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
April 19, 2003; May 20, 2003; June 3, 2003  
Transcribed by Jessica Fontenot**

1           Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Dale  
2 Fillmore on the nineteenth of April, 2003 at approximately 9:15. Excuse me, 10:15. We  
3 are in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Sleep Inn conference room. Sir, thank you very much  
4 for consenting to this interview. Why don't we begin with your early life and if you  
5 would just tell me when and where you were born and where you grew up?

6           Dale Fillmore: I was born on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1947 in McNary, Arizona, which is a  
7 logging town up in northeast Arizona not too far from Colorado or New Mexico. I lived  
8 there until I was almost five years old and when I was becoming—it was an Indian  
9 reservation. There were no schools available. So my folks decided to move back to  
10 Oregon by the time I became school age so that I'd have a good place to go to school.

11          SM: Now what was it like in Arizona as far as I guess—how old were you when  
12 you left?

13          DF: I was still four, but I was almost five.

14          SM: Okay. So you don't have very many memories.

15          DF: Yeah, I was thinking back. There's two things I remember about the whole  
16 time and one of them was the thunder and lightning. There was a serious lightning in  
17 Arizona unlike Oregon. I used to sit out on a screen porch and watch it all the time. I  
18 didn't want to go outside, but it was very, very interesting to me. That's one of the things  
19 I remember. My dad was a logging engineer for Southwest Lumber Company and it was  
20 a logging town. The company owned the town. The company owned the houses and the  
21 stores and everything else. It was just like a company town.

1 SM: Now did he stay with the same company (inaudible)?

2 DF: No, no, no. He basically left Southwest Lumber and moved back to Oregon.  
3 He was a logging engineer so Oregon's got a lot more logging than Arizona anyway. It  
4 was a depressed time. It took a while to actually find work when we moved back to  
5 Oregon. It was like 1952 I guess.

6 SM: What part of Oregon?

7 DF: We wound up starting off in—wound up in Oregon in North Bend Coos Bay  
8 area on the Oregon coast. Because he couldn't find work his brother loaned him some  
9 money and he bought a Chevron gas station. So he was basically a Chevron gas station  
10 owner for several years.

11 SM: Now what was it like growing up there in Oregon?

12 DF: Well, it was pretty cool. I liked the beach. I like the coast to this day.  
13 That's where I always want to hang out. So I really enjoyed that. It was a pretty rustic  
14 area. There were lots of places to play. We lived really close to the edge of town so  
15 there's a ton of wilderness that we played in and so forth. I have very great memories  
16 about that. We do have some serious storms in Oregon now and then so they closed the  
17 schools and trees were falling down and that kind of thing. We also had that, but it was a  
18 pretty cool life. I enjoyed it.

19 SM: Did you engage in a lot of outdoors activities, hunting, fishing?

20 DF: I actually stayed there till I was in the third grade. So up to that point in time  
21 I constantly was outdoors year round even though the weather didn't permit. That was  
22 what we did.

23 SM: Where did you go after you left Coos Bay?

24 DF: We moved to Springfield, Oregon. My grandfather had a home building  
25 business there and he died unexpectedly. My dad took over his business of building  
26 homes in Springfield, Oregon, which is Springfield Eugene area.

27 SM: How long did you stay there?

28 DF: Through seventh grade.

29 SM: What was it like there? What are the biggest differences between—?

30 DF: Well, the difference is you're more of a metropolitan area. It's a larger area,  
31 better parks, not much rustic areas though. I was involved in more organized things like

1 little league baseball and swimming and things like that. It was different. I was a little  
2 older and rode my bike a lot and that kind of stuff.

3 SM: Okay. Where did you go from Springfield?

4 DF: We moved. My dad in 1957 or so when basically we had a recession in  
5 Oregon and we wound up with a couple of houses he couldn't sell. So he basically left  
6 the house building business and became an engineer for the state highway department.  
7 Maybe the last year we were in Springfield Eugene area he was involved in some road  
8 construction between there and the Oregon coast. Then he got transferred to Roseburg.  
9 Roseburg, Oregon, is in southern Oregon along Interstate 5 and it's where I actually  
10 wound up going the rest of junior high and all of high school. So I actually consider  
11 Roseburg my home. That's where most of my friends, high school friends, and so forth  
12 still live or are from. So Roseburg is really where I consider myself I'm from.

13 SM: Okay. What was it like growing up there?

14 DF: It was wonderful. Hunting and fishing and things like that. I was an  
15 outdoors type person. The people I hung out with, we did that a lot. So I camped and  
16 boy scouted and hunted and fished and went to school begrudgingly because of all the  
17 distractions of hunting and fishing. So that was a great area for that sort of thing.

18 SM: What did your mom do? Was she a homemaker?

19 DF: My mom actually was a bookkeeper. She was a homemaker until probably  
20 Springfield Eugene days when we were a little bit older and she felt like she wanted to  
21 add a little bit of income and so on and so forth. So she went to business school in  
22 Eugene and became a bookkeeper, account and short hand, great short hand and all that  
23 stuff. She worked at a furniture company in Eugene. When we moved to Roseburg, she  
24 went to work for a lumber yard and was a bookkeeper for a lumber yard.

25 SM: Now you mentioned that you'd found school a distraction from hunting and  
26 fishing and other activities. Were there any subjects that you did enjoy, that you were  
27 attracted to?

28 DF: Well, this sounds like I'm bragging on myself, but I guess you're asking the  
29 question. I was a very intelligent and I was able to get very good grades in high school  
30 without much work. I took advanced placement courses in calculus and so forth. I was  
31 basically a math science type. I did very well there. In fact I've got a degree in

1 engineering now. So that's basically part of that. I didn't really have any trouble with  
2 school. I love the social aspects of school, but I didn't like to study or knuckle down. I  
3 did skip school quite a bit when I went hunting.

4 SM: What did you like to hunt?

5 DF: Everything. Birds, deer, whatever, whatever was in season. We built a boat  
6 to float the North and South Umpqua Rivers. During duck season, one of our dads—my  
7 best friend was a guy named Bob Paxton. His dad would either take us up to about ten  
8 miles upriver. My dad would pick us up at the forks where the North and South Umpqua  
9 came together. We'd float that hunting ducks. We'd float one river one weekend and the  
10 next river the other weekend. We did stuff like that before—we didn't have our driver's  
11 license at the time. We had to rely on—

12 SM: How did you build your own boat?

13 DF: Well, Montgomery Wards had these unfinished prams. They were like flat  
14 bottomed boats, no point. One end was more pointed than the other, but there's no point.  
15 It's just a pram. They're unfinished. They're plywood. They're basically like fifty or  
16 sixty bucks a piece and you buy them at Montgomery Wards. My best friend's dad was  
17 an All State Insurance agent. They had a Sears' storefront, their catalogue storefront. So  
18 we went down and went through the catalogue and bought fiberglass stuff. We fiber  
19 glassed—we reinforced the, fiber glassed the corners and all that stuff and painted it duck  
20 drab brown. Dutch boy had two duck drabs. One was brown and one was green. We  
21 painted it the same color as the muddy rivers in the winter time. It worked really well  
22 because we got a lot of ducks that were actually buzzing us not knowing that we were  
23 there. We were so invisible to them. We wore field military type field jackets and things  
24 like that when we hunted. It was a very—we didn't really build the boat. We just  
25 finished it, you know kind of thing. We did it as a partner. So we both owned the boat  
26 until we crashed it a couple of times. The rapids weren't too good on it. We wore it out.  
27 My friend had a golden lab retriever so we took him hunting with us all the time. He did  
28 all the retrieving for us when we shot the birds.

29 SM: It sounds like it was fun.

30 DF: Yeah. I have no complaints. I loved my childhood.

31 SM: What kind of fishing did you do? Was it (inaudible)?

1           DF: Oregon is cold water. A lot of trout, steel head, that kind of stuff, mostly  
2 trout. We did fly fishing, not quite fly fishing with a fly rod. We used the spin casting  
3 and a clear bubble to fly fish. There are a lot of parts in the North Umpqua River that are  
4 fly fishing only. So we did a lot of that—single leg, basically trout fishing mostly.  
5 Didn't go in the ocean or anything, just river bank fishing. The boat was for ducks, not  
6 for fishing.

7           SM: Okay. What else did you do for entertainment, movies, television, stuff like  
8 that?

9           DF: Well, television wasn't that interesting in those days. I had a car. So I spent  
10 a lot of time working on my car.

11          SM: What kind?

12          DF: I had a Fiat 500.

13          SM: Wow.

14          DF: 1959 Fiat 500. I had a job at a gas station. I worked at Chevron station.  
15 That's how I financed the car. I had a lube rack and a place to fix it because I used to tear  
16 it up a lot—just working on the car. In high school I was a member of the radio club. So  
17 we did some radio transmitting for a high school radio station, very short range. I  
18 actually wrestled in high school one time, but that seemed like a lot of work. I didn't  
19 realize at the time, but I was asthmatic. It was too much work and I thought I just  
20 couldn't get in shape, but it turns out later I was actually asthmatic, didn't realize that.

21          SM: What about movies and things like that?

22          DF: Well, we went to movies. Roseburg is kind of a one horse town. There was  
23 a theater there and dragging. We did that all the time if you know what that means. It's  
24 driving your car down the main drag.

25          SM: Oh, yeah. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

26          DF: It's called dragging the guts. I went past the theater. So we went to the  
27 movies once in a while, but that wasn't the main thing. I loved high school football. We  
28 went to all the high school games and things like that. During the week I didn't really go  
29 out that much. If we did anything it was just friends or whatever. I was too shy for the  
30 girls so it was just the guys in cars and sports and stuff like that.

31          SM: Let's see. You graduated from high school I guess in '6—

1 DF: 1965.

2 SM: '65.

3 DF: Class of '65.

4 SM: Quite a few interesting international events of course took place while you  
5 were in high school.

6 DF: Yeah. One I remember very, very well.

7 SM: Yeah. What do you remember the most?

8 DF: The assassination of President Kennedy. I believe that was 1963?

9 SM: Mm-hmm.

10 DF: As a matter of fact our football team was a champion of the division that we  
11 were in. A Portland team was coming down that Friday night. It was a Friday. That  
12 Friday night they were already in route and we were playing the quarter finals for the  
13 state championship that night. That morning or that afternoon, or whenever it was. I  
14 don't remember the time, but it seemed to me I was sitting during the lunch hour listening  
15 to the radio so it must've happened in late morning or whatever. We heard about the  
16 assassination of President Kennedy and it was very, very demoralizing for all of us. As a  
17 result of that—as you see, I do remember that.

18 SM: Do you want to take a break?

19 DF: Just a second here. It was a very demoralizing situation. As a result of that  
20 their football team didn't even know about it and ours did. We decided not to cancel the  
21 game because of the fact that they were already there. It was one of the Portland area  
22 teams. It's usually one of the southern area teams against the Portland area teams. That's  
23 the football powers in Oregon. So we got just killed that night, but we were basically  
24 undefeated until that time. I do remember that.

25 SM: Of course it's been written about President Kennedy and how he represented  
26 a more youthful and vigorous generation of America. Was there that feeling in your  
27 school?

28 DF: I don't really think it so much about President Kennedy himself. I wasn't  
29 politically charged. I do know he was very popular and he gave America some backbone  
30 it seemed like that we needed at the time, but I think the biggest deal was just the fact that  
31 a president could be assassinated. That was probably the single most thing that blew us

1 away. It was just like it was impossible to happen and it happened. Of course we didn't  
2 realize, even though we took history in high school we didn't realize he wasn't the first  
3 except for Lincoln maybe, but there's actually others. I think it was more of a shaking of  
4 confidence or something else. You get in the mood. There's a lot of other people  
5 probably who are more politically astute, but as a group you mourn together kind of  
6 thing. You just follow in the group of it.

7 SM: Absolutely. Were there any community mourning or memorial services  
8 held that you remember?

9 DF: I don't recall any. There may have been. I'm sure there were. I mean, it  
10 was something, but I don't recall any. They didn't cancel school or anything like that. I  
11 guess everybody didn't really know what to do. It had never happened before at least  
12 in—so.

13 SM: Was it talked about very much by your parents? Did they talk about it with  
14 you?

15 DF: I don't remember specifically. I probably had a little bit more emotion, but  
16 not now, not even was then—now that I've had a little bit more world experience. My  
17 family, we're Democrats although I'm not. They were Democrats and so he was our  
18 candidate at the time and all that kind of stuff. I don't really, I guess I really don't  
19 remember anything specific of that except for that I remember sitting in the lunch room  
20 listening to this over the radio. They piped it in for everybody to see. I went to the  
21 football game and it was a pretty quiet crowd.

22 SM: I would imagine. What about other major Cold War things? For instance  
23 the Cuban Missile Crisis, '62. What do you remember about that?

24 DF: I hate to say, but I was really into myself or something. I just didn't know  
25 what was going on in the world.

26 SM: You were a teenager.

27 DF: I guess. You know when I watched the movie *The Thirteen Days of October*  
28 or whatever I probably learned more about it ten years ago or five years ago, whenever  
29 that movie came out, than I knew at the time. There was no fear—the ban, the bomb and  
30 shelters in the backyard. I don't even know if that's even then. It probably was. None of

1 those things bothered me. We were in a little logging town out in Oregon. The world  
2 was big and our world was pretty big. It didn't include that stuff. So not really.

3 SM: Given your interest in science, I'm very curious about Sputnik. Did you—?

4 DF: I was very interested in that. As a matter of fact I built a telescope. Admin  
5 Scientific Company used to advertise in *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics*. My  
6 folks gave me a subscription to one of the two. I think it was *Popular Science*. There  
7 was that build a telescope for two hundred dollars kind of thing. I got involved in that  
8 and I actually built one, six inch reflecting telescope in a little shed next to the house. I  
9 didn't quite get it finished. I scratched the mirror. So I kind of put it away and my folks  
10 kept it for the whole time until I came back from Vietnam and I actually had my own  
11 household and family, whatever, then they handed it to me and said, "You pack it around  
12 for a while." So I actually finished the telescope in 1986 for Haley's comet's return.

13 SM: Oh, that's great.

14 DF: I did that. I was very interested in astronomy, particularly astronomy and  
15 building the telescope. I'm pretty mechanical. I actually build a lot of stuff. I built my  
16 house for instance and things like that.

17 SM: Do they still make them? Was it easy to find a replacement (inaudible)?

18 DF: Basically, Admin Scientific Company still existed. I got a hold of them. I  
19 don't remember if I wrote them or called them or whatever. They sent me all new  
20 grinding materials. I kept my old mirror blank and the old tool. So I had to grind out the  
21 scratches and bring it back into specs again for the parabolic part of it. That was quicker  
22 than actually grinding out the chunk in the first place. I also knew a lot more about  
23 telescopes. So I don't know if you know what F number is, but I made it a faster F speed.  
24 I made it an F-6 instead of F-9, which is what it was before. So anyway I changed it a  
25 little bit. I was able to finish it up. Admin Scientific Company is actually a little bit  
26 more organized, more like a Radio Shack. You can actually buy telescopes and stuff  
27 from them now. When I did contact them one thing I do remember is that they didn't  
28 make the—they're more of a retail store now and they didn't make the pieces anymore.  
29 Barnes and Noble, which is a bookstore, actually has a division that took over all that  
30 stuff. So I actually bought all of the grinding powders and stuff from Barnes and Noble.

31 SM: For crying out loud. I would never have guessed that.



1           DF: Well, they put me on to it. I wouldn't have guessed it either. Anyway, I still  
2 have the catalogue and stuff. I still have the telescope.

3           SM: Oh, that's great. Okay. What did Sputnik signify to you and your family?

4           DF: Americans, George Patton said it in his movie. I don't know if he actually  
5 said it, but George C. Scott said it anyway that Americans are fighters and they're  
6 competitors and to me that was an inspiration for us to go kick some butt. That's what I  
7 thought about Sputnik. I thought it was interesting that they used a dog when they sent  
8 animals up instead of monkeys or whatever. I thought maybe they got more dogs than  
9 monkeys or whatever. All it looked to me and that's probably one of the things I  
10 remember about President Kennedy more than anything is he was up for the challenge.  
11 That's what I remember about it is it just basically lit the fire under us technologically  
12 speaking. One of the things that of course probably came across my mind and I know it  
13 later did for certain as I would've loved to have gone to work for NASA (National  
14 Aeronautics and Space Administration) as one of the engineers that are involved in that  
15 or engineers or scientists. By the time I actually became an engineer scientist I was no  
16 longer interested in working for NASA because it's in Florida and I want to stay in  
17 Oregon.

18          SM: When you graduated in '65 of course the U.S. had found itself pretty heavily  
19 involved in Vietnam already. Previous years, 1964 the Gulf of Tonkin incident, were  
20 they a blip on your radar screen?

21          DF: Well, I remember them. Roseburg is a small conservative town. We were  
22 kind of—I don't know what the Midwest is like, but you think of the small rural kind of  
23 conservative kind of town. We were very interested in the competitive aspects of what  
24 was going on in the world. At my age I really didn't care too much about politics in  
25 general, but I knew I wasn't interested in communism. Democracy was better and so and  
26 so forth. Also, it was a time when the military was considerably considered a favorable  
27 occupation, an honorable occupation. One of the things that another friend of mine that  
28 actually was my friend in the radio club, his name was Mike Biggler. He and I decided  
29 we wanted to try to get in the Air Force Academy in our senior year. He was a football  
30 player, big guy. He wrestled and was a good wrestler. He actually studied and he  
31 actually got good grades and things like that. We're still good buddies anyway in spite of

1 that. We both decided to go through the process of trying to get in the Air Force  
2 Academy. We applied to the—found out how to do it and applied to the congressman  
3 and senators for appointments and so forth. In the mean time they set us up for a flight  
4 physical up at Portland Air Base in Portland. So he and I drove up there, took the flight  
5 physical and both passed it. I'm sitting there being a little bit—I guess I was not as  
6 confident, self confident as I should've been or could've been, but I said, "The worst  
7 thing that could happen to me is he gets appointed and I'm not. That would really tick me  
8 off." So I actually bailed on the concept of going to the Air Force Academy. I decided to  
9 not do it because I didn't have the qualifications I didn't think. I eliminated myself I  
10 suppose. In the meantime he went ahead and pursued it and actually got appointed to go  
11 to the Air Force Academy. I was real happy for him and kind of wished I was going with  
12 him because that would've been a pretty cool job I thought. Of course the Air Force  
13 when they know you're doing that they send you pictures of the chapel and all those  
14 kinds of things that make them famous. Anyway, some of the things I thought about  
15 when you talk about the Gulf of Tonkin and all that stuff is being in the military. I was  
16 predisposed to that way of thinking. My family is not a traditional military family. My  
17 dad was not in the military. He was 4-F for health reasons during the Second World War.  
18 My uncle was in the Navy actually, went to ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) and  
19 became a Navy officer during the Second World War. We have some war relics from  
20 that. Other than my uncle, there was really no history in our family of military. It's not  
21 like you got support or anything. It just felt like kind of a cool job. I guess I'm sort of an  
22 adventurer much like my daughter. You didn't get a chance to talk to her last night, but  
23 she's been all over the world already. She's twenty-one just on all kinds of reasons.  
24 That's kind of what I wanted to do. I just wanted to get out of Roseburg and go do  
25 something cool. I thought the military would be a good reason for that.

26 SM: When you decided to withdraw your application—

27 DF: I like that, withdraw.

28 SM: Yeah. From the Air Force Academy, what were your plans? Did you have  
29 any?

30 DF: Well, I was just gonna go to college. My dad went to work in state. My  
31 uncle went to work at state. That is a family tradition going to college and becoming an

1 engineer or something. Fortunately we had what they called advanced placement classes  
2 at high school which gave five points for an A instead of four. Even though I didn't  
3 study very hard or whatever I still had well over a three point GPA. So I decided I was  
4 just gonna go ahead and just go to college and get into the engineering program. My  
5 uncle was a chemical engineer. My dad was a civil. I was gonna become a mechanical  
6 because I like telescopes and cars and more mechanical things. So I basically applied to  
7 Oregon State, got accepted and went to college.

8 SM: Got your degree, your mechanical—

9 DF: No, I was too young and immature. I couldn't study. I got introduced to—  
10 some people came down from Corvallis and they were fraternity guys. They were  
11 recruiting you for fraternities. That happened. So I went up and rushed and joined a  
12 fraternity. There were girls and there was keggers and spring parties and all that kind of  
13 stuff. What I found out in college is I couldn't not get good grades without studying. I  
14 had very, very poor study habits because I didn't need any up to that point. Basically I  
15 got a 2.08 the first quarter. I got a 1.68 the second quarter. They put me on probation.  
16 Also at the time there was a lot of drafting going on. I had a 2-S student deferment.  
17 Vietnam was going on. Nobody really wanted to go to Vietnam. It looked like a pretty  
18 nasty situation. Everybody says that, but in the back of my mind it sounded to me like an  
19 adventure. I played the company role in not wanting to go. Every time the mailman  
20 would deliver everybody'd duck and say, "Is there anything in there from the draft  
21 board?" or something like that. Anyway, this was going on at the same time in my mind.  
22 I was not doing well at college. I could not settle down and study and so forth. I called  
23 my folks. I was also feeling guilty because my folks were paying for the college and I  
24 wasn't really producing. That made me feel a little guilty. I called them and said, "I  
25 think I'll go join the military." They talked me out of it. By that time my dad had been  
26 transferred to Ontario, Oregon, which is on the eastern edge of Oregon by Idaho. So I'm  
27 basically on the Idaho border. So he says, "Why don't you come on home? We'll fix  
28 you up an apartment in the basement and you can go to Treasure Valley Community  
29 College and just chill out a little bit." I agreed to do that. I went to Treasure Valley  
30 Community College the last quarter. We had quarter systems instead of semesters—so  
31 the last quarter. What I discovered was that in community college everybody that went

1 there were also friends in high school. There was absolutely no social interaction with  
2 anybody outside. At Oregon State everybody was strangers. So you made friends and  
3 developed relationships, so forth. I was basically out of the loop completely. I was  
4 probably—the loneliest period in my whole life was that next couple of months I was at  
5 Treasure Valley Community College. I basically decided I was going to join the Army.  
6 The reason I decided to join the Army because of Vietnam the Coast Guard was filled up.  
7 The Navy and the Air Force had long waiting lists because nobody wanted to be in the  
8 Army or the Marine Corps that had any brains anyway. So I said, “Oh, shoot. If I keep  
9 screwing up in college I’m gonna get drafted. If I get drafted I won’t have any choices  
10 and I certainly don’t want to be a Marine.” So I went down and talked to the Army  
11 recruiter and I was my own smart-ass self. He asked me what I wanted to do and I said,  
12 “I want to fly.” He says, “Oh, yeah. No kidding.” He said, “Do you know Army has  
13 more aircraft than the Air Force?” I said, “No, I didn’t know that.” Off we went and  
14 took the test. Next thing you know on July I was at Ft. Polk, Louisiana, in the warrant  
15 officer candidate helicopter flight program. I hadn’t taken a flight physical for the Army,  
16 but since I passed the Air Force Academy flight physical I was pretty confident I would  
17 pass it. I took that chance and joined the Army.

18 SM: Now what month and year was this again?

19 DF: Well, I joined July first. That shows you how stupid I was. I forgot about  
20 the July fourth weekend. I joined July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966.

21 SM: A couple of quick questions about going to the University of Oregon.

22 DF: Oregon State.

23 SM: I’m sorry. Oregon State, OSU.

24 DF: OSU. Right., no University of Oregon. That was our enemy.

25 SM: OSU, a couple of questions about being in school there. First of all, in  
26 between the keggers and other activities, I guess studying, how much awareness did you  
27 have of the Vietnam War and what was happening?

28 DF: Just that we didn’t want to do it and people were getting drafted and how we  
29 were calculating not getting drafted and the minimum we can get by with and that sort of  
30 thing. It had nothing to do with any bravado or whatever. We were just trying to avoid  
31 it.

1 SM: You weren't reading the newspaper very frequently or watching the news or  
2 anything like that?

3 DF: No. You watched the news, but at that point in time there hadn't been that  
4 many demonstrations yet. It hadn't really got to the anti-war part of it yet. There's  
5 probably a few people, probably less than what we have now with Iraq kind of deal. It  
6 wasn't like it happened—most of the negative-ness happened when I was probably over  
7 there and I probably didn't get as good a view of that then either.

8 SM: AT OSU, what would you say was the general reasons students, I guess your  
9 fellow fraternity members, fraternity brothers, what was their general reason why they  
10 didn't want to go to Vietnam?

11 DF: Well, it's dangerous. Oregon State University is a—to probably compare it  
12 in Texas for instance it's the Texas A&M at Oregon State. It's the engineering. It's the  
13 land grant school. It's the ag center. It's also now a space grant sea grant too cause they  
14 have an oceanography program. So it's basically the science and engineering school.  
15 The kids that go to Oregon State come from—I won't say they're highly intelligent.  
16 Actually they do have higher SATs than the University of Oregon for instance, but the  
17 (laughs) technical people tend and the agricultural people tend to come from the rural  
18 areas which are very conservative as opposed to the metropolitan left wing liberal areas.  
19 We didn't have—it wasn't Berkley. Now the University of Oregon was kind of like  
20 Berkley, but Oregon State was not. There wasn't as much of an anti-war climate there as  
21 it was as just protecting your own body. There wasn't a lot of demonstration, that sort of  
22 thing. It wasn't that kind of college.

23 SM: No teach-ins or anything like that?

24 DF: No. No. Our professors had PhDs in engineering, not PhDs in liberal arts or  
25 philosophy or history. Anyway, it wasn't quite like that. It was just a matter of you don't  
26 want to get drafted. You'll wind up being—a smart guy in college is gonna wind up  
27 walking point in an infantry squad. So that was the kind of thing.

28 SM: Okay. When you finally made your decision that you were going to go into  
29 the Army, before you went down to the recruiter, did you talk it over with your folks  
30 again?

1           DF: I told them I was gonna do it. I didn't exactly discuss it with them. I just  
2 said, "This is a bunch of BS. I'm not interested in college. I don't want to buckle down.  
3 I just want to go do something. Right now there's a lot of action going on in the world  
4 and I'm missing it," so to speak. So basically that's kind of what it was. My dad being  
5 the male of course was half proud and half scared and my mom was all scared. Military  
6 is kind of a macho thing so there's no question about it. I can't say we're all macho guys,  
7 but it is a man's thing.

8           SM: Well, when you found yourself down there in Ft. Polk, Louisiana, for basic  
9 training, what was that transition like?

10          DF: I thought I'd really screwed up. Oregon is a mild mountain Mediterranean  
11 climate. It's not very humid except when it's raining in the winter time. In the summer  
12 time it's fairly at a low humidity, beautiful weather. July, especially in Eastern Oregon  
13 where I was at, at the time. Ontario is eighty, ninety, hundred degrees, but twelve to  
14 fifteen percent humidity. When I got on that plane to fly down to Ft. Polk all the warrant  
15 officer candidates went to basic training at Ft. Polk at that time. Most of the other guys in  
16 the neighborhood got to go Ft. Ord, California, or some cool place like Monterrey  
17 Peninsula. I've never really been out of the West Coast in my entire life. I'm heading  
18 down to Louisiana. So that was a tremendous adventure in itself. I was pretty excited  
19 about the whole thing. I got off the plane in Houston because I had like a six hour lay  
20 over there. I just gagged coming out of the airplane because of the heat and humidity. I  
21 could not believe it. I was so uncomfortable. It was just a shock to me. I said, "Man,  
22 what have I done to myself?" It got even worse when I got to Louisiana, which is only  
23 another fifty miles away from Houston. That was the first thing and then it was a DC-3.  
24 I don't know if you remember that, but they had DC-3s back in those days as airliners.

25          SM: I remember.

26          DF: It was Trans-Texas Airlines from Houston to I guess Leesville or whatever it  
27 was, the airport that served Ft. Rucker or Ft. Polk. They picked us up in an OD green  
28 school bus and took us out there. Then this tall skinny guy with a funny hat started  
29 yelling at me when I came off the bus. He says, "Man, this is even worse than I"—I  
30 cannot believe what I did. I had this really cushy job so to speak as a student at Oregon

1 State and now look what I'm doing. It's hot and the dirt's red and it's chokingly humid  
2 and people are yelling at you. I guess that's the intent. That's what it's all about.

3 SM: Yes, sir. Quite a shock.

4 DF: Big shock.

5 SM: What was the most challenging aspect of basic training given that you're  
6 asthmatic I'm—?

7 DF: Once again I didn't really know I was asthmatic. My biggest fear was that I  
8 had made this—in those days because there wasn't a lot of volunteers because of the  
9 Vietnam War the enlistment criteria was kind of interesting. The warrant officer  
10 candidate program was only a two-year enlistment. Now there was an obligation once  
11 you graduated, but the idea was if you washed out you wouldn't have time to be trained  
12 to be something else really. So you'll wind up being a clerk some place or whatever for  
13 the rest of your enlistment.

14 SM: (Inaudible) or infantry?

15 DF: I don't know for sure because advanced infantry training and then by the  
16 time you finished that you know it depends on when you wash out. The flight school's a  
17 year long so you're less than a year left gotten basic training and flight school. There's  
18 not much time left to retrain you to do something else. So who knows. You probably  
19 wound up just in some sort of—who knows. Who knows what.

20 SM: I see what you're saying because of the time frame.

21 DF: So anyway it looked like a reasonable risk to me since I passed it. So when I  
22 got down there I wasn't comfortable in the weather and it was physically exerting. I kind  
23 of liked the Army though because everybody had to kind of behave themselves. It was  
24 the first time I ever laid eyes on a black person in my life was at Ft. Polk. I found out  
25 they weren't particularly different. They had moms and dads same as you did and all that  
26 kind of stuff. So I learned. My adventure was progressing and I was learning a little bit  
27 about the world. It was very, very difficult physically for me just because of the heat, the  
28 temperature and the time of the year. When I got scheduled to take my flight physical,  
29 they detected a heart murmur. That scared the heck out of me because the reason I'm  
30 there was to go to flight school and all of a sudden there's a possibility I wasn't gonna  
31 pass the flight physical. So they brought me back and they did an upper GI, whatever the

1 Barium stuff and they did an x-ray. They found out I had a hiatal hernia. The esophageal  
2 tube was kind of pushing against the heart. The heart murmur was intermittent and it was  
3 not caused by any heart defects. I passed the flight physical. In the years following it  
4 turns out that about every third flight physical they detected a murmur. About two out of  
5 three they didn't. It was not that big a deal, but it scared me for a while. I was because  
6 of I guess the intelligence was okay and because I was kind of gung-ho and all that kind  
7 of stuff I wound up being in leadership positions and so forth. I did have difficulty trying  
8 to make an eight-minute mile though and it turned out that was probably the asthma.  
9 Once again I made it and of course you have to run in combat boots. It's not like today's  
10 Army when they have a t-shirt and pair of shorts and some—we actually ran in full  
11 combat gear for our PT (physical training) test and whatever. Anyway, I wound up being  
12 in the top ten or twenty percent, whatever it was, made private E-2 essentially coming  
13 out, which is irrelevant because I was gonna be an E-5 as soon as I got to flight school  
14 anyway. It was a step, a milestone. I liked it. I liked the shooting. I didn't like forced  
15 marches and that kind of stuff, but anything that was heavily exerting I didn't care for,  
16 but mainly because I didn't realize I wasn't physically up to it necessarily, but I was  
17 young enough that I still met the requirements. I loved throwing grenades.

18 SM: Oh, did you?

19 DF: That was really cool.

20 SM: How many did you get to throw?

21 DF: Well, that's part of the training, but not enough I can tell you that.

22 SM: I thought it was only one.

23 DF: I think it is only one.

24 SM: Well—

25 DF: Time's up already, huh?

26 SM: Yes, sir. Why don't we go ahead and take a break? This is a logical place.  
27 We can talk about preflight and flight over the telephone. This will end the first  
28 interview with Mr. Dale Fillmore. Thank you, sir.



**Interview with Dale Fillmore**

**Session [2] of [3]**

**Date: May 20, 2003**

1           Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Dale  
2 Fillmore on the twentieth of May 2003 at approximately 9:25 Lubbock time. I'm in  
3 Lubbock, Texas, and, Mr. Fillmore, you are in—

4           Dale Fillmore: Sherwood, Oregon.

5           SM: Sherwood, Oregon. Thank you, sir. All right, why don't we begin today's  
6 interview with a continuation with where we left off. Basically why don't we talk about  
7 basic training? If you would, describe your first impressions and describe the training  
8 that you went through.

9           DF: Well, my first impression was that I basically moved from Oregon to Ft.  
10 Polk, Louisiana, and did it in July. The weather differences were suffocatingly different.  
11 About the first thing I remember is on the flight down I had to spend some time in  
12 Houston. In the middle of the night, I think I got in, in the evening. The next leg of the  
13 flight to Ft. Polk on Trans-Texas Airlines. I remember it wound up being a DC-3 as well.  
14 I had to basically sleep in the terminal and I just could not believe how hot and humid it  
15 was. That's when I started doubting the decision I made to get into the Army the very  
16 first day there. When I finally got to Ft. Polk, Louisiana, I remember my drill sergeant.  
17 His name was Sergeant Bastito. He was an E-6 or an E-7, probably an E-6, tall skinny  
18 guy. They basically—I got off the bus. I don't remember getting on the bus or  
19 something off the aircraft, but as soon as we got to wherever we were going I got on the  
20 bus or got off the bus and it was like an OD green school bus. This guy started yelling at  
21 me. It was also the Fourth of July weekend and that's when I realized that I wasn't using  
22 my head again when I joined the Army. I joined on July first not on July fifth. I actually  
23 missed the Fourth of July weekend with my family, but I spent it at Ft. Polk when  
24 everybody else was on leave or pretty much off the base. I was in a holding unit sitting  
25 through the Fourth of July weekend with really nothing to do. I don't remember getting  
26 issued any clothing. So I was in basically the civilian clothing that I brought in the  
27 barracks more or less semi supervised, but not doing anything. That was my first  
28 impression of basic training.

1           SM: Why don't you describe how basic training unfolded for you, what your  
2 daily routines were like and some of the more interesting or memorable aspects of basic  
3 training?

4           DF: I was kind of an outdoors person being from this part of the country. One of  
5 the things that I liked about it is that it was all outdoors kind of stuff. I really enjoyed—I  
6 really actually liked basic training. I'm also pretty malleable. I didn't really have a  
7 mindset of my own or whatever so I blended in really well. I was able to do everything  
8 that they did. I enjoyed the rifle range. I enjoyed all of the bivouacking we did. I  
9 enjoyed all of the throwing the grenades and the whole process of training. I actually  
10 liked it a lot. What I didn't like was the long, long days which basically made you so  
11 tired. We'd get up very, very early in the morning. It seemed like it was four thirty, but  
12 it probably wasn't quite that early. I remember getting introduced to a lister bag which  
13 was a water bag hanging from a tripod when we were out in the field a lot because it was  
14 very hot in the summertime down there. So I remember that. I remember getting salt  
15 tablets and not having known about them really in the past. Taking salt tablets daily or  
16 almost with every meal. I remember just feeling hot and sweaty and dirty most of the  
17 time I was there. Also, obviously the duties, the cleaning the restrooms and moping the  
18 floors. I remember a little bit about fire guard. I didn't exactly know what that was, but  
19 somebody had to pace the barracks. There was a two-story old wood barracks from  
20 World War II that were supposedly temporary, basically spending your shift walking  
21 back and forth while everybody else slept as a fire guard. The other things I remember  
22 kind of about the barracks were they had these kind of gunite floors. They were red  
23 gunite and when you mopped them the mop turned red. It was just like a concrete kind of  
24 material. For some how I remember that. I don't know if it was on both floors or just the  
25 bottom floor. Essentially I liked the training. I enjoyed everything about it essentially  
26 except how tired you get and the PT, the physical training part of it. I did a lot of push  
27 ups, but generally they weren't because of my own doing. They were part of the training.  
28 When somebody else would mess up we'd do push ups. That's really all I remember. I  
29 did well. I graduated in the top ten percent or twenty percent, whatever it was to make E-  
30 2. So I was one of those guys that got promoted to E-2 at the end of basic training.

31           SM: What would you say was the most challenging part of that training period?

1           DF: Basically, looking back in retrospect I always had trouble with the mile run.  
2 Back in those days they did PT with full combat. It's not like we had a pack or a hat or  
3 anything, but we basically had our fatigues on and our combat boots. So when we ran the  
4 mile we had to do it in a certain amount of time, eight minutes or something like that. It  
5 was generous. That was difficult for me, but as it turned out I'm actually asthmatic and I  
6 was asthmatic then, but not enough to cause an attack, but enough to make it difficult to  
7 run that mile. That was probably the single most difficult thing for me in the military was  
8 running that mile in the PT test.

9           SM: Okay. What about marksmanship? How did that go for you?

10          DF: Very well. I was a shooter already. I was a hunter. We used the M-14,  
11 which was a pretty sophisticated rifle for what I was used to. I'm used to a bolt action  
12 deer rifle. I had no issues with marksmanship. I qualified and got my marksmanship badge.  
13 I enjoyed the fact that we were shooting at silhouettes instead of round targets. I thought  
14 that was kind of interesting.

15          SM: Okay. What was the composition of your basic training platoon? That is  
16 ethnically and regionally, the general number.

17          DF: That's a good question. Oregon is a small state so most of the time when  
18 you're from Oregon you're usually the only person and that was about the case. We had  
19 a lot of—I met black people for the first time. In Oregon we have black people, but  
20 where I was raised we had a VA hospital and then the entire town, the only black people  
21 in the town was one of the physicians at the VA hospital. So meeting the black people  
22 was new to me. I can't remember his name, but I did have one that I kind of hung around  
23 with. That's when I discovered that black people were people too and they had parents.  
24 They put their pants on one leg at a time and all those same things. Ethnically you had  
25 basically the same mix as probably the military has anyway. Ft. Polk, all the warrant  
26 officer candidates were sent to Ft. Polk, but not everybody that was there were warrant  
27 officer candidates. I was probably one of two or three in my unit that was and everybody  
28 else were Regular either draftees or enlistees and other occupations, other MOS's. I  
29 guess I don't remember too many Puerto Rican or Latin type people. I do remember a lot  
30 from the city. I do remember that once in the city that seemed to think that the toughest  
31 going in were the ones that were really the least ready for military life, considerably less

1 ready than I was. They all made it. We didn't really have any issues within our platoon.  
2 There was no parties with a sheet over your head and dropping soap and all that kind of  
3 stuff. It was pretty peaceful. We had a really good platoon drill sergeant that was very  
4 tough and disciplinary, but also liked us. He had a heart for what he was doing.

5 SM: Were there any instances where drill instructors had to apply discipline in a  
6 forceful manner?

7 DF: Not that I remember, not like *Full Metal Jacket* or anything like that.

8 SM: Okay.

9 DF: No, it was hard training. There was never—I don't remember—I suppose  
10 people got sent to talk to the company commander once in a while or something like that,  
11 but I don't remember any issues at all like that. Not that there weren't any, but I just  
12 don't remember any.

13 SM: Did you every witness any physical contact between the drill instructors and  
14 the trainees?

15 DF: No.

16 SM: Okay. Let's see. Did everyone—so everyone in the platoon seemed to get  
17 along all right?

18 DF: You know we were forced together and you learn the people that are in the  
19 immediate bunk areas around you and after—you've picked out people that you like  
20 better than others, but I don't think there was any—I think it was pretty peaceful that  
21 way.

22 SM: The environment of course kind of forces you to work together.

23 DF: Oh, sure. Sure.

24 SM: It creates that harmony.

25 DF: Yeah. That's when you discover that break down buildup process. I was  
26 easy to break down. I was easy to build back up. Some guys were a little slower in both  
27 of those, but everybody actually made it that I remember.

28 SM: Now what about the drill instructors themselves? How many of them were  
29 Vietnam veterans that you remember?

1           DF: I don't recall. I really don't recall. The one that was our drill instructor was  
2 Sergeant Bastito. You've got to believe that he was, but I don't know that. I have no  
3 way of knowing that.

4           SM: Did they have any kind of Vietnam specific training for you in basic  
5 training?

6           DF: I think the thing was oriented toward it. That's a good question. I think that  
7 we had a condensed version of it when we got to Vietnam in what we call charm school  
8 as far as booby traps and stuff, but I think all of the training that we did—Ft. Polk is not  
9 much different than Vietnam. It's a swampy jungle kind of area as well. When we went  
10 out and did things like that I'm sure it was oriented toward Vietnam. The thing that  
11 wasn't Vietnam was we were using M-14s and they were using M-16s in Vietnam.  
12 Apparently there was not enough for training. They had to use them in battle or  
13 whatever. When you see a basic training movie of any kind, low crawling underneath  
14 barbed wire with a machine gun shooting and the confidence course where you're going  
15 across rope bridges and things like that. I don't think it was specific for Vietnam. I think  
16 it was just general type training. I just think that the people who were there introduced us  
17 to what you'll see in Vietnam. This is this or—part of like the temperature and climate at  
18 Ft. Polk was very Vietnam. They probably mentioned that a lot. I don't remember—see  
19 not having been in pre-Vietnam days I wouldn't really know the difference. The basic  
20 training was really basic training. It was just basic military training, shooting, low  
21 crawling, some hand-to-hand combat with pugil sticks. That kind of stuff, the CS  
22 chamber, tear gas, taking your mask off and getting exposed to that. So that was the CBR  
23 part of it, chemical biological radiation. We basically touched on all military subjects.  
24 Where there was—what I recall is that the real concentrated this is Vietnam was basically  
25 when we got to Vietnam. I'm sure there are certain orientations there. I just don't  
26 remember specifically.

27           SM: Now, let's see. Did you already have orders when you completed basic  
28 training?

29           DF: Yeah. I had a—oh, well, that reminds me. I joined the military. I joined the  
30 Army based on a warrant officer candidate program for helicopter flight school. I had a  
31 school start date and all that kind of stuff, but I did not have a flight physical when I

1 actually signed the dotted line. So I had to take a flight physical at Ft. Polk, Louisiana.  
2 Okay. One of the things ordinarily I wouldn't have done something like that, but I tried  
3 to get into the Air Force Academy or considered it and took a flight physical at Portland  
4 Air Base while I was in high school, passed that one. So I was relatively confident that I  
5 was gonna pass the flight physical. So I took that plunge. It just turns out that when I got  
6 down there and they set me up for the flight physical there was actually a little difficulty  
7 and it worried me for a little bit. I know that now they're a little bit different, but when  
8 you enlisted in the warrant officer candidate program in those days it was a two-year  
9 enlistment as opposed to at three or a four-year enlistment. The idea there is that if you  
10 didn't qualify for a flight physical after the fact for whatever reason like you didn't pass  
11 the flight physical or whatever you had basically only remained in the Army the same  
12 time as the draftee would've essentially. Now it's like a six or seven-year type of  
13 commitment, but back in those days it was not. Those of us who were in the warrant  
14 officer candidate program actually had the shortest enlistment. There were people there  
15 with four years and three-year enlistment and we talked about that. The difficulty I had  
16 on the flight physical they detected a heart murmur. In the process of trying to determine  
17 whether it was an issue or not I got an upper GI, one of those barium milkshake deals. It  
18 turned out I had a hiatal hernia that was basically and the high temperature and humidity  
19 of Ft. Polk was causing an intermittent heart murmur and it wasn't pathological or it  
20 wasn't congenital or anything like that. So I still passed the flight physical, but that was a  
21 scary moment.

22 SM: Right, because what would've happened if you hadn't passed the flight  
23 physical?

24 DF: Well, obviously the worst case scenario is you wind up in the infantry.

25 SM: Yes, sir. That's right.

26 DF: But hopefully since I never found out I don't know what happened, but  
27 typically I would've thought that the military would've taken advantage of the fact that  
28 you were able to pass the academic part of those tests and score really well and put you  
29 into something more reasonable like maybe another aviation job for instance or possibly  
30 an intelligence or whatever. Who knows? We were always hoping for anything but the  
31 infantry of course. There was no promises made that I wouldn't be in the infantry.

1           SM: How many other members of your class were scheduled to go on to flight  
2 school after they graduated from basic training?

3           DF: It seemed to me that there was only two or three of us. I don't remember  
4 who they are. We weren't all necessarily assigned to the same class. I had like a two  
5 week leave afterwards. Some guys had a one week leave or whatever. I don't know how  
6 the class schedules were scheduled, but it seemed to me there was probably in my platoon  
7 of like thirty people there was like two or three that was all that was going to flight  
8 school. In the training unit, the company's level, there might've been more, but you  
9 don't really interact that much with the other platoons.

10          SM: Right. Did the drill instructors know that you and the other members were  
11 going on to flight school and if so, did they treat you any differently?

12          DF: I don't remember getting treated any different, but we may have been—we  
13 were typically put in position as squad leaders and platoon leaders from the basic training  
14 aspect, but all of us were obviously different than the others anyway. It's not like if they  
15 didn't know anything we wouldn't have got that same job because we were more  
16 qualified it seemed like. I mean, just our basic personality and our evident intelligence or  
17 whatever, some college. You know that kind of stuff.

18          SM: Yes, sir. Okay. Now when you graduated you said you got a couple weeks  
19 leave and then you went on to—I guess did you come to Texas for your—?

20          DF: Ft. Walters, Texas.

21          SM: Yeah. Ft. Walters, Texas, for your initial flight.

22          DF: Right.

23          SM: Okay. Why don't you describe that transition?

24          DF: I got promoted to E-2 so I was pretty stuck on myself. I thought that was  
25 pretty good. I did go home for leave after basic training. I don't remember doing  
26 anything particularly. It wasn't much time. I reported back to Ft. Walters, Texas. It  
27 seemed to me that the environment was very similar for at least the first month was very  
28 similar to basic training with the exception that as soon as you checked in there they  
29 promoted you to E-5 for this so called pay purposes. We were in cinder block buildings  
30 instead of the old World War II barracks. I don't remember all of the administrative  
31 details that much, but the warrant officer candidate part was really just an extension of

1 basic training. It was still the—we had—what do they call them—TIs I guess, technical  
2 instructors, which were warrant officers or lower grade commission officers as opposed  
3 to drill sergeants. So that changed. Other than that I really don't remember anything. It  
4 seemed we were cleaner. We got flight suits and flight helmets. We had more showers  
5 and two-man rooms and that kind of stuff. I think. I don't remember about the rooms.  
6 I'm pretty sure we had rooms instead of barracks.

7 SM: I forgot to ask you about Ft. Polk and you already mentioned the humidity  
8 and heat. What was that transition like for you because you had lived in Oregon your  
9 entire life?

10 DF: That's why I mentioned it was stifling for me. It started in Houston when I  
11 was traveling down there. That was probably part of my heart murmur issue was that  
12 transition. I thought it had to do with—the only extended physical activity we had was  
13 that mile run. Everything else was like short bursts or marching or hiking. Marching was  
14 not much different than hiking. I eventually got used to it, but it was a very—that was  
15 probably the single most difficult transition was that heat temperature at Fort Polk versus  
16 what I'm used to.

17 SM: Okay. Did you have any forced marches, long like ten, fifteen, twenty-mile  
18 marches?

19 DF: Well, I don't remember twenty-mile marches, but we marched the range. It  
20 seemed like they were five to eight miles. It seemed to me that there was one long march  
21 that none of us looked forward to that was on the schedule at some point in time we did  
22 that partially at night probably. I don't really remember, but it seemed to me there was. I  
23 never had any issues with the marching part. It was just the running part. Now they get  
24 PT shorts and tennis shoes to run in. They're softies now a days.

25 SM: Let's see. At Ft. Walters, how did they treat you as an aspiring pilot,  
26 warrant officer?

27 DF: Well, the standards or the bar was raised as far as the way they treated us.  
28 We still had a certain amount of harassment and officer candidate kind of stuff. That's  
29 the kind of stuff you see in like OCS, officer candidate school. In the evenings for  
30 instance we didn't have—at the end of the day the day was over. We never—unless we  
31 had night flying when I don't remember doing any night flying until we got to Ft. Rucker.



1 We may have, but I don't remember it. It was much more professional. I think it was  
2 like a nine-month program and at Ft. Walters it was five of the nine months. I think the  
3 first month was actually not flight at all. I think that first month—I don't remember  
4 exactly. I'll have to read *Chickenhawk* again. He does a really good job on the flight  
5 school part of that book. In any case, I remember we probably spent the first month a  
6 little bit more in the officer training and ground school kind of stuff, classes and that sort  
7 of thing. We now had to starch uniforms and things like that I seem to remember. It may  
8 not have been, but we—I don't remember ironing them. We sent them out. It was a lot  
9 more—they took a little bit more professional approach instead of basic military training.  
10 It was now officer training and kind of university style classes. We went into classrooms  
11 and we did that all day long for hour blocks of time or whatever. It just seemed to me  
12 that much, much easier for me. We still had PT. That never goes away in the military.  
13 Other than that I just remember that we had a government. We had a battalion  
14 command—you know student battalion commanders and company commanders and all  
15 those types of things probably more so than in basic training. I think basic training you  
16 were squad leader and maybe one guy got to be the platoon leader, student platoon leader  
17 or whatever. It was a lot more formal organized. We learned how to salute for instance  
18 and military bearing kind of things, a lot of military subject that were more intellectual  
19 like. The ranking system and E-1 through 9, W-1 through 4 in those days and O1 through  
20 10 and that kind of stuff and how it all relates. A lot more probably military history kind  
21 of stuff. A lot more interesting education.

22 SM: Okay. Now, how long did your initial program at Ft. Walters last?

23 DF: If I'm correct I remember it being five months, but like I said the first month  
24 was more likely a non flying month. It was just orientation and a lot of administrative  
25 stuff. The other four months was very, very organized. We did a half day of flight  
26 training and a half day of classroom stuff. The classroom subjects were all taught by  
27 military officers or warrant officers. The classroom part was not at all the warrant officer  
28 candidate or basic training kind of disciplinary stuff. That was mostly back at the  
29 barracks kind of stuff with the TAC (training, advising and counseling) officers, or  
30 whatever we called them. So we got to see the professional side of the military for the  
31 first time. The guys teaching classes and stuff were very professional. They definitely

1 knew what they were talking about. The military handbooks, the flight training manuals,  
2 the weather, whatever the subjects were, were done very professionally and it looked like  
3 college level work to me. The college I took before and after that was similar as far as  
4 the professionalism. We had tables and chairs instead of—it was more like a classroom.  
5 The flight instructor that I had was a guy named Carter. He was a civilian. Southern  
6 Airways had the contract there for a lot of the pilot instructors as well as the food  
7 facilities. So the mess halls and all that stuff were also operated by Southern Airways.  
8 So Ft. Walters, Texas, the only time we really saw the military were our own TAC  
9 officers and most of the ground school type training or the classroom stuff. That's the  
10 general thing. I remember specific guys about the instructor, my flight instructor more  
11 than anything. I missed a couple of things, but—

12 SM: Go ahead.

13 DF: Mr. Carter was a former military guy. Apparently a lot of guys left the  
14 military and then went to work for Southwest Airlines or Southwest Airways or Airlines,  
15 whatever it's called. Who knows what reason? My guess is they made more money there.  
16 They were basically all flight instructors like a CFI, certified flight instructor, would be  
17 today if you were to go get flight lessons. They were all professionals, no military stuff  
18 at all. I do remember that for instance when we're learning to do auto rotations this guy  
19 had the biggest brass balls I've ever seen on anybody. He wouldn't touch the controls  
20 unless the thing was getting ready to flip over or something. Autorotation is a very  
21 coordinated maneuver where you enter the descent and then you have to decelerate to  
22 basically zero and then have a soft landing. So there's a coordination there. Sometimes  
23 you'd forget one section of that like the deceleration part for instance. You'd hit the  
24 runway doing about sixty knots and skid all the way to the end of it. The guy would have  
25 his hands crossed on his chest and even though I forgot a part of the process he didn't  
26 grab the controls unless he thought it was very dangerous, which was very rare. So it  
27 blew me away the balls he had to be able to do that when guys like me were flying.

28 SM: What kind of damage happened to the aircraft?

29 DF: Never anything. I flew the TH-55. My platoon flew that. They had shock  
30 struts. Can you hear my chair squeaking?

31 SM: Oh, it's not bad.

1 DF: Okay, because I'm a fidgety person. I got a squeaky chair here.

2 SM: It's not bad.

3 DF: Something you can filter out I presume.

4 SM: We might be able to, but I can barely hear it. You were flying the TH-55.

5 DF: Right, I flew the TH-55. They had—you know the flight school, the two  
6 aircraft they used were hillers, TH-23s and the TH-55s. Of the two the TH-55 was like  
7 pure training aircraft. It had flexible struts on the skids. It's like you could hit pretty  
8 hard. You could probably drop from a three-foot hover and not damage anything. So  
9 they were pretty sturdy. They had these shoes underneath the skid that were Tungsten  
10 beads that weld on them so they would spark like crazy when you were going down the  
11 runway, but you wouldn't damage the aircraft. You lost control of the aircraft a little bit  
12 because the rotor and tail rotor RPM (rotations per minute) were so low they no longer  
13 had authority over the aircraft. You might just get a little bit sideways or something. As  
14 long as it didn't get completely sideways where it might flip over the instructor just let it  
15 do what it was gonna do. Sometimes you'd drift off one way or the other when you  
16 landed depending on—there was always that pile of dirt or something at the end of the  
17 stage field runway. At the very worst case you'd hit the dirt and wouldn't actually go  
18 into anything. Anyway, it looked to me like the guy was just very, very comfortable with  
19 his ability to recover the aircraft in a very short period of time. I think it was more his  
20 confidence than his confidence in me. It was confidence in himself.

21 SM: Yes sir. Let's see. The first month, what was the wash out rate because that  
22 was kind of the harassment month, wasn't it?

23 DF: Yeah, it was.

24 SM: Did you lose many?

25 DF: To tell you the truth I think the biggest washout—I don't remember  
26 anybody washing out during that harassment phase because we'd all—there were prior  
27 service guys in our unit. There were guys that were prior E-6s or whatever. They  
28 probably had a little bit less tolerance for that kind of stuff because they already knew  
29 what the real Army was like. I don't actually remember anybody washing out per say  
30 because of the harassment kind of thing. Somebody may have had a death in the family  
31 or a family issue of some sort or something like that that possibly got them moved to a

1 different class starting at a little later date or something. I don't remember anybody  
2 washing out. The biggest washout period was really the learning to solo phase. They had  
3 a specific requirement. I'll throw some numbers out because I kind of remember them. I  
4 wouldn't bet my life on any of these numbers, but I think the average person soloed in ten  
5 hours. They expected them to solo by fourteen hours at the max. It was between seven  
6 and fourteen hours depending on your skill level and maybe prior kind of training. Once  
7 you got over fourteen hours you basically had to deal with a board of review or  
8 something if you weren't soloed by fourteen hours. It seemed like the absolute dead  
9 thing was seventeen hours flight time. I soloed around nine or ten hours, right in the  
10 average. That's where we lost people who were just not capable of learning to fly for  
11 whatever reason either internal fear or just skills, not having coordination or whatever.  
12 Helicopters are not particularly easy to fly till—you think they're easy to fly once you get  
13 the hang of it, but getting the hang of it is not that easy.

14 SM: Yes, sir. What was the most challenging part of flying for you, learning to  
15 fly I should say?

16 DF: Basically hovering. The part that you have to learn before anything else  
17 begins is that requires the most skills and the most practice because you get instinctive at  
18 some point in time. You're operating three sets of controls, your foot pedals, the cyclic  
19 stick between your legs and the collective—actually four sets in training because we had  
20 a throttle to deal with on those little helicopters because they had reciprocating engines.  
21 Everything that you did would affect the other controls. That was the most difficult for  
22 me. I probably spent more time learning to hover than any other maneuver including—  
23 autorotation would be the second most difficult.

24 SM: Were there any accidents during your five months there at Ft. Walters?

25 DF: I do—excuse me.

26 SM: In your class particularly.

27 DF: I do remember some accidents. I do not specifically remember anybody in  
28 our unit getting n accidents. One of the things that we used to talk about is there's no  
29 such thing as an accident in flight training. If they can recover the serial number plate  
30 from the aircraft they built a new one around it. We dented a few. There's no question  
31 about that I'm sure. I don't remember—no one in my platoon was killed or totaled one

1 completely. You always hear about, they have five or six or eight company sized units  
2 going through there at any one time at any—they start weekly. I think they start weekly  
3 or maybe monthly, I don't know, or maybe two weeks. Anyway, there was always units  
4 going through and you would hear. You know you'd go to the day rooms and get a leave  
5 or something and you'd wind up bumping into somebody. You'd hear about something  
6 that happened, but general rule of thumb was there were no such thing as accidents there  
7 unless they couldn't recover the name plate on the aircraft.

8 SM: Again, what was the overall makeup of your class there at Ft. Walters?

9 DF: Well, we were all—now we were all pretty much equal as far as intelligence  
10 and capabilities. So there weren't as many differences. I think the background of the  
11 people as far as whether they were city people or rural people or whatever was about the  
12 same as the Army in general, probably the same as basic training. I don't remember  
13 anything specific.

14 SM: Okay. Do you recall whether a majority of the people were from urban  
15 centers or from the rural part of the country?

16 DF: I really don't recall that.

17 SM: You don't remember. Okay. What about the ethnic makeup of your class?

18 DF: The ethnic makeup became more white.

19 SM: Let's see. Of course there were no women.

20 DF: No women, yeah. That was the good old days. (Both laugh) You know that  
21 was a topic I came up with when I was at the reunion two or three weeks ago, whenever it  
22 was. Who was I asking? I don't remember anyway. Some of the things that we did in an  
23 all men Army that are inappropriate with women around and I was just wondering how  
24 that works now because women are still a minority. So therefore they—like shower  
25 facilities or just the jokes you told. The whole military look and feel has got to have  
26 changed.

27 SM: Yes, sir. The culture and the atmosphere has changed completely I'm sure  
28 since you were in. Absolutely.

29 DF: Anyway, there were never any women around so we had a little bit less  
30 constraints on our behavior as far as the men's kind of stuff or whatever that is.

1 SM: Well, at what point did you get opportunities to leave Ft. Walters and go out  
2 and visit civilian community there which is Mineral Wells?

3 DF: I would imagine it probably wasn't the first two months. We did have  
4 almost every night off. I mean, once you got back from your flight in the afternoon or  
5 your classroom in the afternoon, whatever, you had to go through the usual stuff, shining  
6 your boots and getting your footlocker ready and all that kind of stuff for the next day. I  
7 remember the mess halls were kind of relaxed. They were more like cafeterias. Actually  
8 it might not have been Southern Airways that ran the mess hall. It might've been  
9 Greyhound. I can't remember that, but for some reason that popped in my mind, but  
10 Greyhound has done some of the—Greyhound used to do stuff like that. But any case,  
11 they're big mess halls and you'd sit where there was an empty chair. You might meet  
12 different people or whatever. The two things that I remember as far as actually three  
13 things now, actually it's probably four or five things. We probably had an opportunity to  
14 go do things on the weekends. I remember one of these issues was the Baker Hotel. I  
15 don't know if I'd turned nineteen yet or not. I must've turned nineteen by then. So I was  
16 nineteen years old. The county that Ft. Walters and Mineral Wells was in was a dry  
17 county. I had never experienced a dry county in my young life yet. A bunch of us went  
18 in to town, went to the Baker Hotel, which had a bar there on the corner of it. We heard  
19 that you still had to pay the full price for a drink. It was like two bucks. All you got was  
20 ice and a coke and then you had to buy a bottle and they kept it behind the bar. When  
21 you're in there they bring it to your table and then when you left they had to put it behind  
22 the bar again. You couldn't take it out of the building. I thought that was kind of  
23 interesting. That wasn't the way we did it in Oregon. I started thinking about that kind  
24 of blue law kind of deal as far as—it's interesting if it's—you know there's no drinking  
25 on Sunday for instance. Even on your own bottle kind of thing. I was always wondering  
26 if a sin is a sin why is it not a sin on six days a week and only a sin on one day a week.  
27 Obviously the laws in sinship are different kinds of things, but I did poorly (inaudible).  
28 Anyway, I walked into that Baker Hotel bar with some friends. They checked my ID and  
29 I put my military ID and was plain and visible. I was only nineteen years old. As soon as  
30 they checked it they said, "Fine, go sit down." It's like it didn't matter. They were told  
31 to check them not to enforce it kind of thing. So we sat down and drank in the bar at

1 nineteen years old. I never heard of anybody getting out of hand or whatever. I went to a  
2 Dallas Cowboys football game during that period which was in Dallas Fort Worth. So  
3 we generally took the Greyhound bus. Nobody had cars. I don't know if we were even  
4 allowed to have cars there. If we did nobody had them or very few people had them. I  
5 remember going into—might've been the same weekend as the football game, but I went  
6 into a bar one time in Fort Worth and I saw some drug activity going on in there. That  
7 was the first time I'd ever seen that. They did it so publicly I couldn't believe that either.

8 SM: What kind of drugs?

9 DF: It was syringe injected in the forearm or you know the—

10 SM: So probably heroin?

11 DF: Probably.

12 SM: Wow.

13 DF: Not by GI guys, just—we were in this cellar or some place. It was like a  
14 basement type club underneath the building. I think it might've even been called the  
15 cellar. We were sitting back there and there was upfront near the stage they had pillows  
16 on the floor. We were sitting at tables and we were in our uniforms because that's one  
17 thing they did insist that we continue to wear uniforms even off duty when we went into  
18 town. Some guy walked in the door, walked all the way across the whole thing and sat  
19 down on one of the pillows, rolled up his sleeve. I don't remember the details of it  
20 necessarily, but probably the rubber tourniquet and all that kind of stuff. I don't  
21 remember necessarily, but that kind of picture kind of comes in my mind. He took a hit  
22 of something and handed the guy some money and then left. That was the first time I'd  
23 ever seen that, big city stuff.

24 SM: Yes, sir. But this is not a big city.

25 DF: Fort Worth?

26 SM: Oh, this was in Fort Worth?

27 DF: Yeah, this was in Fort Worth.

28 SM: Okay.

29 DF: We took the bus and went into town. Now I didn't see stuff like that in  
30 Mineral Wells.

31 SM: Okay. I was just gonna say.

1           DF: No. No, Mineral Wells is actually a cool little town. I kind of liked it. They  
2 had a pool hall across the street from the Baker Hotel. They had very wide streets in  
3 Mineral Wells. I remember that. They were not busy, but they were very wide. So we  
4 played pool a lot. We went into Mineral Wells probably quite a bit, walked most likely.  
5 Maybe, I don't know how we got there, but maybe somebody—I don't know, maybe we  
6 just walked. I don't remember. I remember the Dallas football game. I remember the  
7 guy taking the hit under the building basement type club. I remember taking the  
8 Greyhound bus every time we went some place at least very far. So I think we were  
9 pretty free to get weekend passes. There was probably some restriction. There were  
10 probably people on duty for whatever reason. I don't think everybody got every weekend  
11 off. I don't remember specifically though.

12           SM: Sir, I hate to pause this at this particular moment. Okay, we're back from  
13 our break. Why don't you go ahead, sir? You said you wanted to provide some dates, I  
14 guess especially with regards to your training posts and the units you were assigned to  
15 there.

16           DF: Okay. I can do that. Basically the date I actually signed my enlistment  
17 documents was June fifteenth. So they apparently gave me two weeks before I actually  
18 had to take off. I enlisted in the Army. The date was 7-1-1966. I do have the unit  
19 training brigade at Ft. Polk if you're interested in that. I can tell you that.

20           SM: Yeah, sure, go ahead.

21           DF: Okay. It was Company C 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion 5<sup>th</sup> Training Brigade. I even have  
22 issuing authority. I've got all the orders. I basically was assigned to that on July eighth.  
23 So between the first and the eighth I was basically in, what do you call it, undetermined  
24 status or basically—that's when the basic training started. I can see right now it was an  
25 eight-week program. I guess the basic training varied from eight to twelve weeks. Mine  
26 was eight weeks. I began my leave on 9-16-68. I did fly home on 10-1-1966. I reported  
27 to Ft. Walters, Texas. I was assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Warrant Officer Candidate Company  
28 Troop Command. That's probably the one that was the non-flying part of it because on  
29 10-28 I was reassigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Warrant Officer Candidate Company Troop Command  
30 which is what I remember is the first month we didn't fly. So we must've had a different



1 unit even. Maybe even moved to a different barracks for all I know. I don't remember  
2 that. So anyway, my flight training actually officially began on 10-28-1966.

3 SM: When did—?

4 DF: Flight pay—

5 SM: Sir, go ahead.

6 DF: Flight pay began on 10-31-1966. What was your question?

7 SM: I was gonna say, when did you leave Ft. Walters?

8 DF: I left—let me see here. I was assigned—basically on 3-6-1967 I was  
9 assigned to student company United States Army Aviation Center at Ft. Rucker,  
10 Alabama. I got the orders while I was at Ft. Walters. I got the order on 2-23 so basically  
11 three weeks ahead of time. Also, one of the questions you asked I do have the answer to  
12 now since I looked at this. You asked me did I have orders to flight school when I went  
13 to basic training. My orders to flight school were actually—I was assigned on 10-1-1966.  
14 The order date was 8-23. So about a month into I started basic training on 7-8 and  
15 graduated on 9-15. So 8-23, which was three weeks prior to graduation, I did finally  
16 have a set of orders to flight school.

17 SM: When you left Ft. Walters, I assume you had orders to go down to Ft.  
18 Rucker, Alabama, and continue your flight training there, advanced flight training. How  
19 many students had your class lost between the beginning of training and the end of  
20 training when you left? Do you remember?

21 DF: I really don't know that, but it wasn't that many. I would say less than ten  
22 percent. They may have been throwing numbers like ten percent at us or something like  
23 that. I think there was only one or two guys in my whole unit, my whole area, social  
24 area, whatever that was platoon or company or whatever, that I think actually did make it.  
25 It was probably more attuned to the fact they didn't solo.

26 SM: Was there anything else about your training at Ft. Walters that you wanted  
27 to discuss?

28 DF: The only thing I would say is that there was a lot of—that's when we started  
29 learning about traditions, some aviation traditions and things like that. We all wore these  
30 colored hats. There was no wings on the hat until you soloed. So that was a big deal.  
31 You get to put the wings on the hat. The other thing is that there was a lake there. It

1 might've been the swimming pool at the officer's club for all I know, but I thought it was  
2 more of a lake, but anyway. As soon as you soloed the rest of the class threw you in the  
3 lake fully clothed with your hat on and everything. So obviously that was a double edged  
4 sword. Nobody really wanted to get thrown in the lake, but at the same time they didn't  
5 really not want, want not to get thrown in the lake.

6 SM: Right. How did the civilian community there at Mineral Wells treat you  
7 when you went off base?

8 DF: I don't remember any incidences or anything that was negative necessarily.  
9 I think that anytime—what I seem to remember was that any time there was a lot of  
10 military people most of us were bachelors. Most of us were still kind of kids. So we had  
11 probably a tendency to be a little bit more troublesome to the family life in the area. I  
12 think people either stayed away from us or—I don't remember anything negative per say,  
13 but at the same time I don't remember girls flocking around me or anything else. I don't  
14 remember anything positive or negative. It was probably just kind of a typical military  
15 town where most people left you alone kind of thing.

16 SM: Let's see.

17 DF: I do have one other incident at Ft. Walters.

18 SM: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh.

19 DF: I was just trying to think about this during the break. We had a dance at the  
20 large main hanger, at the heliport where we brought in bus loads of girls from the  
21 University of—Texas Women's University in Denton, Texas. I remember it may have  
22 been kind of a graduation dance or a promotion dance or whatever when you moved on to  
23 the next thing because it was probably more toward the end. I don't remember doing it,  
24 but once which would indicate that—I remember that happened all the time, but I only  
25 participated one time where they brought bus loads of girls in. Basically, everybody  
26 passed the hat to pay for the buses. I don't know who worked it on the other end, but  
27 anyway three or four busloads, enough girls for every guy, would show up at the hanger.  
28 We did dancing. Texas Women's University wasn't known for pretty girls, at least the  
29 ones that came to visit us weren't. They were probably more of the ones that were  
30 getting desperate themselves.

1           SM: You mentioned that you not only went to Mineral Wells of course, but you  
2 also got to travel a little bit in Texas. When you made your trip to places like Fort Worth  
3 and Dallas how did the civilian communities there treat you because as you mentioned  
4 you would go in uniform?

5           DF: I don't remember anything. There were no studly bullies trying to pick a  
6 fight or anything like that. We traveled in packs. I mean there was always three or four  
7 of us together. I remember that we were cautioned just to kind of behave ourselves. I  
8 don't remember any trouble. We weren't ever denied admission to any place that I  
9 remember. Like that cellar club, that was obviously—there weren't very many military  
10 people in there. There might've been three or four of us and we were all together. I  
11 don't remember exactly how we got tickets to the Cowboys game, but I'm not so sure  
12 that it wasn't a bunch of tickets were available and we all popped in for a bus ticket and  
13 went in. I don't really remember anything negative. The whole thing to me—you have  
14 to keep in mind that technically I'm kind of an adventurer. Everything that I did from the  
15 time I joined the Army until almost the time I got married probably was an adventure to  
16 me. I looked at it with just an opportunity to go do something cool. Even if I was spat  
17 upon I would've considered that part of the adventure because I've never seen  
18 discrimination before or whatever. I'd probably get ticked off at the time, but the overall  
19 picture of the thing was just a new experience for me. It's like experiencing the black  
20 people for the first time and the drug use for the first time. Anyway, that's my attitude. I  
21 was on a huge adventure.

22           SM: Okay. Did you witness any kind of anti-war activity at all throughout your  
23 time in the United States before you left for Vietnam?

24           DF: No.

25           SM: Let's see. Any other memorable experiences about Ft. Walters before we  
26 move to Ft. Rucker?

27           DF: Not that I can remember of. I remember there was an aircraft there that was  
28 called 007. We always thought that was the—James Bond was apparently popular then  
29 because it was a notable tail number. There was also a certain rivalry against the TH-55  
30 pilots versus the H-23 pilots as to who had the best aircraft and the easiest one to fly and  
31 all that kind of stuff.

1 SM: Which one did you think was better?

2 DF: Well, obviously I liked mine because it was the one I knew, but we had more  
3 horsepower per pound than the other one had. So we got to do a little bit—we were less  
4 likely to get in trouble power wise than the Hiller pilots were. Hillers were kind of  
5 underpowered. So if we did something stupid like come into a high hover in an LZ  
6 (landing zone) on a hot day we wouldn't necessarily crash like they would.

7 SM: How was your cross country flight?

8 DF: You know that's a good question. I remember it, but I don't remember—it  
9 seemed to me we went to—where did we go? It was somewhere between Ft. Walters and  
10 Lubbock. Is there city—you know Possum Kingdom, beyond Possum Kingdom? I don't  
11 remember.

12 SM: Not sure.

13 DF: Anyway, that seemed to me that might've been at night or at least we did one  
14 at night. It was uneventful. I don't remember anything other than I successfully  
15 completed it.

16 SM: Okay. This was of course the standard magnetic and timed flight.

17 DF: Right.

18 SM: Magnetic azimuth.

19 DF: Yeah. These were not IFR (instrument flight rules) aircraft by any means.

20 SM: Well, why don't you go ahead and describe the transfer from pre-flight and  
21 flight school at Ft. Walters down to Rucker, Alabama, which was primarily your  
22 transition to the Huey, correct?

23 DF: That's correct. Well, there's two things we did at Ft. Rucker. The first thing  
24 was a tactical flight ticket. So we had fifty hours of training in an OH-13. That was the  
25 only aircraft that we flew in training that we never became rated in because we never  
26 took off and landed it. The instructor took it off and landed it. We were on the hood all  
27 the time. So that part I remember. Of course the transition to the Huey, which was  
28 extremely exciting for us cause that was the real helicopter. We finally got the—the one  
29 that's actually OD green and all those kinds of things. The other thing I will mention is  
30 that I became friends with people in primary helicopter school at Ft. Walters one of  
31 which had a car. His name was Duberly. I remember that. We drove from Ft. Walters to

1 Ft. Rucker in his '57 Chevrolet. So one of the things that interested me on that trip is that  
2 all the new states that I'd never been in before. We drove across Mississippi for instance.  
3 I went across the Mississippi River. I remember the bridge and the Mississippi River  
4 sign on it and stuff like that that it was kind of a road trip like college kids like to take  
5 right after college or whatever. Anyway, that was pretty interesting time for me. It says  
6 here that I was actually—we moved to Ft. Rucker on 3-9-1967. The orders were actually  
7 after the fact. Well, that was flight status. So 2-23 was the orders. We knew once again  
8 three weeks. That must be—or four weeks on that one ahead of time. The only thing  
9 memorable about the trip was the fact that we were now adult enough. I use that term  
10 that allowed us to drive. We didn't have to wear uniforms. When we got to Ft. Rucker  
11 all the BS of the candidate stuff went away. Ft. Rucker was one hundred percent flight  
12 school and even though we are all WOCs, warrant officer candidates, there was no more  
13 TAC officers per say and forced marching and all of the officers stuff. It was like we  
14 finally made it. We were finally in the Army now, the real Army. That part I remember.  
15 I do remember some of the customs and courtesies. For instance, if you ever didn't show  
16 up for class because of sunburn—a lot of us went to Panama City all the time. I was one  
17 of them—or something like that that was a court-martial offense. We avoided that or if  
18 we did get so badly sunburned we couldn't fly we still flew. We just pretended it didn't  
19 hurt—that kind of stuff. That's basically it. I remember the night flying at Ft. Rucker  
20 was considerably more dangerous because we were actually taking off and landing in  
21 very, very minimal light if any light at all into confined areas. It was more jungly than  
22 Ft. Walters. The cool thing about Ft. Walters is everyday was a flying day. The weather  
23 was always good. You know that area is probably not too much different than Lubbock.  
24 It's flat. A few boulders and some pentacles around, but it was pretty much pretty easy  
25 flying. When we got to Ft. Rucker that's when we really got to learn the flying formation  
26 and going into confined areas and trees and doing things as teams and units and things  
27 like that. We also did survival training there. I don't think we went to Eglin Air Force  
28 Base or anything like that, but there's enough jungle at Ft. Rucker that we did some of  
29 the Ranger—well, I don't know if it's Ranger stuff or not. I've never been to Ranger  
30 school, but anyway night hiking with a compass and a map. Basically it's a circa escape  
31 and evasion training in the Vietnam kind of based atmosphere.

1 SM: How long did that last?

2 DF: I don't remember. The trip that we took with a compass and map and stuff  
3 was at least a full twenty-four-hour day. We did it all day and all night. It was really  
4 dark.

5 SM: Did they put you through any kind of a POW (prisoner of war) scenario?

6 DF: No. I don't remember that. I think we got briefed on—we had typical  
7 classes on the Geneva Convention kind of stuff you know, name, rank and serial number.  
8 Nobody put us in a stockade or tried to torture us or anything like that. It's probably  
9 more intellectual training or classroom stuff than physical stuff.

10 SM: Killing your own game, eating it and that kind of stuff.

11 DF: I'm not so sure we even get involved in that. I don't think that we even did  
12 that. I remember basically the only part of that I really remember was weird that we  
13 basically were marching through the jungle at night and it was so dark and we had these  
14 little reflectors on the back of the helmet from the guy in front of us. If you were more  
15 than about a foot behind him you couldn't see him. That's how dark it was. There was I  
16 remember a red headed kid that was deathly afraid of snakes. There was kind of an  
17 incident involved with that. We hear this blood curdling scream and of course everybody  
18 turned their flashlights on. This guy was so afraid of snakes that he just knew he was  
19 gonna get bit by one. His leg brushed like a blackberry and scratched his leg. He thought  
20 he'd got snake bit. So he took a lot of ribbing after that about the briar snake.

21 SM: Okay. Now did you do much ground patrolling or anything like that,  
22 familiarized yourself with what the grunts were doing in comparison to what you were  
23 doing?

24 DF: No. The grunt stuff ended in basic training.

25 SM: Yeah. That's what I figured.

26 DF: Which is fine by me.

27 SM: Oh, yeah. What about firearms? Did you guys get any kind of special  
28 training with side arms, with twenty-fives?

29 DF: I was awarded the sharp shooter badge for the .45-caliber pistol. Actually,  
30 no rifles. We were pistols now. That was—I got there. That was only within a month  
31 after I got to Ft. Rucker we did that.

1 SM: Let's see. What was the—did your class move in mass from Ft. Walters to  
2 Ft. Rucker? Did everybody (inaudible)?

3 DF: Yes. The class 679 which was the class I was in moved in mass. We stayed  
4 together. Now that's not to say that somebody didn't leave the class for whatever reason,  
5 emergency leave or something and winded up joining the class 6710 for instance, but for  
6 all practical purposes we stayed together as a group.

7 SM: What was—?

8 DF: There was like eight platoons though. I mean, it was quite a—pretty large  
9 class.

10 SM: Yes, sir. What was the most challenging aspect of instrument training for  
11 you?

12 DF: Actually, the challenging thing if you want to use that term is this is the fear  
13 of the check ride. Once again I enjoyed the training. I got into a link trainer for the first  
14 time. I thought that was kind of cool. You know an artificial machine that taught you  
15 that. We spent a lot of time doing one of those. I enjoyed the flying. There was three of  
16 us flying. The instructor basically took off and landed. One of the two of us were on the  
17 hood. The third person would fly along. I don't know if we acted as copilot or helped  
18 with tuning the radios or things like that. I don't remember. The only thing—no, it was  
19 the whirly bird type aircraft, the Bell 47 GH-13. I got TH-13, T I think it was called  
20 actually. I found it interesting and it was challenging, but the check ride by the way, the  
21 reason I remember about the sunburn stuff is I got badly sunburned just before the check  
22 ride.

23 SM: Oh, boy.

24 DF: I took the check ride and passed it in spite of the fact I could hardly bend my  
25 leg.

26 SM: I guess that would be very challenging.

27 DF: Yeah, but maybe also very focusing.

28 SM: Yes, sir. Okay. How did your instructors treat you?

29 DF: Professionally, very professionally. Always the ground school instructor, the  
30 classroom instructors—you know it was military. You raised your hand and you said sir  
31 and all that kind of stuff, but it was always pure one hundred percent classroom

1 instruction just like you'd get at any college or university. The interaction—the  
2 instructors would sit there after class. You could go up and talk to them even though they  
3 were real officers or real warrant officers or whatever. We had people as high as colonels  
4 as instructors at one time or another. Most of the time they were captains or warrant  
5 officers. You didn't see too many lieutenants I guess by the time you—their ranking in  
6 the military and the Army part of it and the second lieutenant, first lieutenant get  
7 promoted pretty fast to captain.

8 SM: How many of your instructors either at Ft. Walters or Ft. Rucker were  
9 Vietnam veterans?

10 DF: Probably all of them. Our TAC—I remember our TAC officer was a  
11 Vietnam veteran and he flew B models down in the Delta. I don't remember. We didn't  
12 see him with class A's on with all their awards and decorations. I don't remember. I  
13 didn't know what they were at the time anyway probably. I think almost everybody that  
14 the military in flight school were Vietnam veterans.

15 SM: Did they discuss their specific experiences very much with the cadets with  
16 the students?

17 DF: Only if they got asked. Our TAC officer, you know after work he went  
18 home to his family I'm sure, but every now and then he'd stay late or something and we  
19 would be shooting pool or whatever. We'd say, "What's it like flying in the Delta?"  
20 "Oh, you know," whatever. It's like I say once you left basic training the situation  
21 improved as far as being a soldier. Once you left Ft. Walters it was just like you really  
22 were really a pilot and a soldier. I mean there was a class distinction because you're a  
23 WOC instead of an officer, but there was none of that. It was all helpful stuff and no  
24 harassment.

25 SM: Any particular interesting aspects of your check ride when you—

26 DF: The instrument check ride?

27 SM: Pardon?

28 DF: The instrument check ride?

29 SM: Either the instrument check ride or your final check ride in the Huey.

30 DF: I don't even remember the final check ride in the Huey so apparently it was  
31 pretty ordinary.



1 SM: Well, what was that transition like for you going from the TH-55 to the  
2 Huey?

3 DF: It was wonderful. What I remember of course is it's more complex to start.  
4 The checklist was longer, a lot more instruments to get used to reading. So it was  
5 challenging in that way. It seemed like I recognized right away that the bigger the  
6 aircraft the easier they are to fly. The TH-55 was not a very forgiving aircraft. It has a  
7 very, very light rotor system. So you have to be extremely quick to go into autorotation  
8 after the instructor cuts the engine on you because the rotor blades come to a stop pretty  
9 quickly. On a Huey one of the things they demonstrated is they did a hovering  
10 autorotation. While the engines still shut off they picked it up to a three foot hover again,  
11 did a hundred and eighty degree pedal turn and set it back down again. We had so much  
12 inertia in the rotor system that it was practically kilt—you really had to screw up bad to  
13 hurt yourself in a Huey. It was a great aircraft. You could see how much love we  
14 showed toward it when it showed up at the reunion.

15 SM: Yes, sir. What model Hueys were you guys training in?

16 DF: Mostly A's and Bs. The A models were the first Hueys and they were a little  
17 temperamental as far as starting goes. They didn't have as much horsepower and they  
18 had an engine that had a tendency to hot start especially if you had a little bit of a  
19 tailwind when you were starting. So it was a little trickier. The newer Hueys—all the  
20 good stuff was in Vietnam. So we basically had ex-Vietnam veteran helicopters or really,  
21 really early ones.

22 SM: Mm-hmm. Okay. What about the aircraft themselves, the skins, were these  
23 models that had been flown to Vietnam and patched, bullet holes patched and stuff? Did  
24 you guys notice that?

25 DF: We may have noticed a few like that, but that wasn't something we—we  
26 didn't examine every aircraft or anything. We might say, "I don't know what this patch  
27 was. I suppose it could've been a bullet hole." "Yeah (inaudible)."

28 SM: Well, just bring a little bit reality to your training the fact that—

29 DF: Well, it would and it may have, I just don't remember. I don't know if the A  
30 models were ever in Vietnam, but some of the Bs might've been.

1 SM: When you—let's see—well, was there anything else that you wanted to  
2 discuss with regards to your transition into the Huey and the training at Ft. Rucker?

3 DF: The only thing that I remember as far as the training is that I was a smoker in  
4 those days. One of the things that we heard is smokers have a little bit worse night  
5 vision. Just as a little background my son is congenitally night blind and I'm not sure  
6 that I'm not a little bit night blind myself, but when we did that night tactical stuff in the  
7 LZs and stuff, that was very, very heroing experience for me. I think I was flying left  
8 seat. Two students going into an LZ and I almost crashed coming in short on an LZ. The  
9 only thing that saved me is one of the nice things about being young is that—all pilots I  
10 think have very, very fast eye-hand coordination and very just natural abilities in that  
11 respect. The running lights on the aircraft all of a sudden reflected off the trees like I was  
12 getting ready to crash into the trees. The speed and the ability to compensate just because  
13 of that saved that crash, but I'll tell you one thing. It woke me up. That's an experience I  
14 remember. I think the Ft. Rucker part of the experience, the twenty-five hours of that,  
15 how many hours we get at Ft. Rucker, probably a hundred—well, yeah, a hundred hours I  
16 think at Ft. Rucker. Fifty was instrument training. That left basically fifty. Twenty-five  
17 of that was transition and just learning to fly the Huey. The other twenty-five was all  
18 tactical, flight in formation in confined areas and all that kind of stuff. So that last  
19 twenty-five hours was very hazardous really. That was the Vietnam part of the training.

20 SM: Okay. When you—

21 DF: We did lose people. We actually got some people killed in our class I think.  
22 I'll have to look it up in the VHPA (Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association) directory, but  
23 they have—I don't know if it there was 679, but while we were at Ft. Rucker there were  
24 crashes.

25 SM: Were there really?

26 DF: Yeah.

27 SM: When you—

28 DF: Never at Ft. Walters though. Nobody ever crashed at Ft. Walters.

29 SM: Well, that's interesting. Was it the—do you know what the crashes were  
30 attributed to? Was it just too much power in the hands of some of those students?

1           DF: No. No. No. They were teaching us the hazardous stuff. I mean, when you  
2 go into a tight LZ about twice the size of a helicopter in the middle of the night with no  
3 light and no landing lights or anything else, you left your running lights on thank God.  
4 That's what saved me, but we did all the stuff that we're gonna do in Vietnam.

5           SM: When you were nearing graduation at Ft. Rucker, did you already have your  
6 orders?

7           DF: Yes. That's one of the things—did you remember me sending you a list on a  
8 note a list of events? Like there's thirty-five of them. I'm actually writing stories on all  
9 thirty-five of those.

10          SM: Yes, sir.

11          DF: Well, one of them was—in fact the very first one was the orders to the 1<sup>st</sup>  
12 Cav and the 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav Regiment. One of the things that we did in Vietnam is that  
13 we were all wanting to be pilots. We all knew and were resigned to the fact that we were  
14 gonna go to Vietnam, like ninety-seven percent of the class went to Vietnam. I don't  
15 know who the three percent was, but it wasn't the top three percent or anything like that.  
16 It's just that you got lucky or you didn't—went to Europe or someplace else. We were  
17 all knowing that we were going to Vietnam. Of course now it's 1967 so the Vietnam  
18 War since the Ia Drang Valley and the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav is basically an American war now. It's not  
19 just an advisor anymore. So you pick up a newspaper and the headlines were usually  
20 Vietnam oriented. One of the units that was getting all the headlines was a 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry  
21 Division. So one of the things that we all decided was if we could go anywhere we  
22 wanted in Vietnam as long as it wasn't the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav because they were getting way, way  
23 too much combat to suit us. We all wanted to be General Westmoreland's pilot. We  
24 wanted to fly, but we didn't want to get shot at necessarily. So we'd be sitting around.  
25 Traditionally you get your orders—I thought it was like three months in advance, but that  
26 didn't make sense. When I looked at my order sheet here I actually got orders to  
27 Vietnam about not quite sixty days, more like forty-five days before graduation. We  
28 were sitting there about that time when the orders traditionally came out to assign us to  
29 our unit wherever they were gonna be, just sitting there saying, “Man, where would you  
30 want to go?” “Well, I'd like to be a pilot at MACV (Military Assistance Command,  
31 Vietnam),” or whatever. None of us wanted to go to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav cause that was where the

1 war was and we wanted to go Vietnam. Well, not necessarily go to Vietnam, but  
2 knowing that we were we were gonna try to find a really cush job some place. Anyway,  
3 the orders came out and about forty of us were going to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. I said, "Oh, crap.  
4 We shouldn't have even been talking about this. What a bad deal." We're sitting here  
5 not wanting to go some place and that's exactly where they sent us. We thought we were  
6 life had ended as we knew it. We're really going to a unit that in the headlines everyday.  
7 That's crap. Anyway, about a week after we got our orders, I get this form letter with an  
8 OD and black Cav patch stapled to it from General Tolson talking about the Sky  
9 Troopers and their long history and how on and on and on about how great this unit was.  
10 If you think about it every time you see a major player in today's war, for instance,  
11 Tommy Franks who was in a lot of different combat units. Which patches he wore on his  
12 right sleeve? 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. Everybody that had the Cav patch wears it because that was the  
13 primo unit in Vietnam. Anyway, we start reading these news articles and looking at it  
14 and next thing you know it was that Cav was involved in it, but they were kicking  
15 everybody's butt too. It was not like a losing unit. It was a winning unit. It was a unit  
16 that you could be proud of. During the next two or three weeks you sort of got used to  
17 the fact that you were going to the Cav and the next thing you know you're taking  
18 ownership of it. It's, "We did this," and, "We did that," and so on and so forth. By the  
19 time I went home on leave I was bragging about going to the Cav to all my friends and  
20 family and everything else. That was a transition, a mental transition, for the six weeks  
21 or forty-five days or whatever between the orders and between when we actually went.  
22 Anyway, when I got on the airplane to go over to Vietnam as soon as we were airborne  
23 and maybe three or four hours into flight this E-6 starts reading off names and handing  
24 out orders. I said, "What the heck is this?" He's walking down. We're in a C-141 facing  
25 backwards on what the Air Force would consider airline seats. Anyway, this guy calls  
26 my name. I said, "Okay. Here I am." I read the orders and they assigned me to the 11<sup>th</sup>  
27 Armor Calvary Regiment. I said, "Shit, who's this?" I've never even heard of these guys  
28 before. I got my mind made up to go to the Cav. For sixty days or forty-five days—well,  
29 longer than that now because it's a month of leave to boot bragging to all your friends  
30 and everything else. This is horrible and I looked at those orders and I read them and I  
31 read them. I said, "This can't be happening to me. Who are these people? I've never

1 even heard of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav before. Why do they need so many people all of a  
2 sudden?" They must've just wiped out their whole unit or something because there was a  
3 lot of people on that plane were assigned to that unit. Anyway, I'm sitting there just  
4 worried about this thing. One of the things I noticed on the order is that typically military  
5 orders always resend your previous order if it's a change of some sort. There were no  
6 resending line on this order. It was just a new set of orders to a different unit. So as far  
7 as I was concerned I had two sets of current orders, one to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and one to the 11<sup>th</sup>  
8 Armor Cav. I'm struggling over this cause I'm very potty trained. We're still scared of  
9 our own shadow because we're just the wobbly ones, but we've only been wobbly ones  
10 for a month and up to that point in time we've been crap, a candidate or an enlisted  
11 person. Anyway, when I got to Cam Ranh Bay we sat there and went through processing  
12 and then some guy comes out and says, "All right, all those guys going to the Cav go see  
13 Sergeant so and so or Lieutenant so and so," or whatever it was. "Those guys going to  
14 this unit and that unit," and 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav was on the list. I'm sitting there saying,  
15 "Shit, I'm not going to 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav." I tore the orders up and went over to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav  
16 line. I didn't realize at the time—I knew that for the next three weeks I was looking over  
17 my shoulder waiting for the MPs (Military Police) to show up dragging me back to the  
18 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav and being AWOL (absent without leave) because I got a set of orders  
19 saying I'm supposed to be one place and I'm someplace else. Anyway, so I was really  
20 nervous for three or four weeks and finally I figured, well, shoot. They know I'm here.  
21 They just don't know where. At that point in time I learned that the Army was too big to  
22 actually manage carefully. What I learned is that the next time I went to Vietnam I would  
23 decide to go whatever unit I wanted to go to. I kind of just got in that line and went. The  
24 reason I remember that thing is cause I've stewed over it for like fourteen hours while I  
25 was on that plane at what I was gonna do about this because I had in my mind—I even  
26 had my Cav patch sewed onto my uniforms. This just wasn't working for me.

27 SM: Yeah. What was the atmosphere like on the aircraft going over?

28 DF: The what?

29 SM: What was the atmosphere like on the aircraft going over?

30 DF: Well, just hurry up and wait kind of thing. We went through the open Army  
31 base for processing at Oakland, California. We left for Travis. It was just nothing but

1 confusion and lines and issuing this and not issuing that and getting shots and all the crap  
2 that you go through for a couple of days. I think people were friendly. They talked to  
3 each other, but I think it was pretty quiet and solemn. I think the realism that they were  
4 actually going to war now was there. I don't remember necessarily—to me I'm still on  
5 this adventure. So I'm getting up and there's no windows in a C-141. They have a main  
6 door behind a regular kind of entry way behind the pilot section. There's a little porthole  
7 in that about six inches in diameter. We had a line there waiting to take a look out when  
8 there's nothing out there to see anyway. Still there's no window. The plane is not  
9 insulated like an airliner is. It's got the gray quilt kind of button to the inside of the ribs.  
10 We get dripped on by water every now and then or something was condensing on the skin  
11 and freezing and then cooling and dripping on us. It was definitely a cargo plane, not an  
12 airliner. We were facing the wrong way. There's nothing about it that seemed like an  
13 airliner except the seats were kind of like airline seats. I think everybody was pretty  
14 much quiet and we stayed set most of the time and got up to stretch our legs. It was a  
15 long flight. It wasn't nonstop. We landed at interesting places. We landed at Wake  
16 Island for instance in the Philippines, at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines for  
17 refueling I guess.

18 SM: Was there very much banter or it was a pretty solemn (inaudible)?

19 DF: I think people are young and energetic. I don't think it was that solemn, but  
20 there was banter I'm sure. It wasn't party time for sure.

21 SM: What was the approach into Vietnam like?

22 DF: How do you mean by that? What do you mean by that?

23 SM: Well, when you guys were on the final leg flying in I would assume into Tan  
24 Son Nhut or—

25 DF: No. We came in Cam Ranh Bay.

26 SM: Cam Ranh—I'm sorry—into Cam Ranh Bay. What was that like as far as  
27 this is it. This is the final leg. You're on your way down.

28 DF: The line at the window probably got longer just to look out, but I don't  
29 remember it being any different necessarily. It was nice and warm when we got there  
30 which was kind of nice because the plane was cold and miserable like they didn't have  
31 heaters in the sucker. I was still stewing over these orders.

1           SM: Were you? What was your first impression when the aircraft door opened  
2 and you got your first breath of air in Vietnam?

3           DF: Well, everybody will tell you the same thing is it smelled different. We  
4 knew we weren't in the U.S. anymore, but Cam Ranh Bay is like a big beachy Air Force  
5 base. It was brand new. It had new buildings on it. The concrete runways are huge  
6 runways. It didn't look to me like a war zone at all. They had permanent what seemed  
7 like wood structures. We were in class A, I think, khakis. We went off and they  
8 basically gave us instructions and bellowed this and all that kind of stuff. Then we went  
9 to the O club and had a beer or two and just shoot the bull. It was nice weather. No  
10 sound of any war at all, no artillery. We'd see an F-4C take off every now and then. I  
11 thought that was pretty cool because cool after burners and all kind of crap hanging from  
12 the wings which you don't see that much in stateside, ordinales and so forth. So I think  
13 that we—it was a very, very smooth transition because we didn't see any tents or any  
14 combat at all. We didn't carry weapons. It was just kind of like a stateside assignment at  
15 Cam Ranh Bay.

16          SM: Okay. So when you finally did get off the aircraft and start processing  
17 through, what kind of briefings did you receive, what were your impressions about how  
18 people were being handled as they were processed in-country?

19          DF: We were being handled more like cattle than anything. There was just tons  
20 of people coming in and people leaving. One of the comments I guess is that where they  
21 were issuing us our jungle fatigues and stuff like that and then we were going through the  
22 processing in-country getting our final orders to the units that we're being assigned to and  
23 all that stuff. So it was just basically a hurry up and wait, a lot of lines issuing things.  
24 We noted of course the people leaving had faded fatigues and we had brand new ones.  
25 Of course they see us and said, "Oh, God, you guys, you are in for it. Man, now is the  
26 time to shoot yourself. You're not gonna make it past the week anyway," that kind of  
27 stuff. All these guys leaving were saying that kind of stuff to us, just military here are the  
28 new guys stuff.

29          SM: When you finally—so how did you finally make your way to your unit?  
30 Describe that process.

1           DF: Well, that was actually on the list on my number two list. When I decided to  
2 throw away the 11<sup>th</sup> Armor Cav orders and join the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division they basically  
3 once we got through all the processing they flew us to An Khe in a C-130. Now what  
4 was interesting about this—can we take another five minute break here?

5           SM: Oh, absolutely. Hold one second. Yep.

6           DF: I've been drinking too much coffee.

7           SM: We're back from our break. When you got to your unit what were your first  
8 impressions?

9           DF: Before I answer that question I was thinking of something during break that  
10 you can tell me whether it's a good place for it or not, but on my leave between  
11 graduating from flight school and going to Vietnam, there are some significant things that  
12 kind of happened in there. We skipped that part of it.

13          SM: Okay.

14          DF: Do you want to do that?

15          SM: Yes. Let's go ahead and talk about that, absolutely.

16          DF: Okay. One of the things that happened is the friend that I was gonna do the  
17 Air Force Academy with, a guy named Mike Biggler, he actually went to the Air Force  
18 Academy. So he started right after high school and I went to college at Oregon State.  
19 Then after a year of college I joined the Army and I spent eight weeks in basic training  
20 and basically nine months. So another year has passed in flight school. Now he's  
21 beginning his third year at the Air Force Academy and I'm ending my second year since  
22 high school, one year in the Army. In any case, at the Air Force Academy they have the  
23 cadets pick schools that they can attend during the summertime, any branch in the  
24 service. Mike Biggler wanted to go to jump school. So he basically had a starting date at  
25 the US Army jump school at Ft. Benning, Georgia, which was very close to Ft. Rucker,  
26 Alabama. They're only about ninety miles apart or seventy miles apart, something like  
27 that. So we had arranged that we would drive back together from that area because I  
28 graduated flight school about the same time he graduated from jump school. Now I'm a  
29 real warrant officer and he's still a cadet, which he considers himself a third lieutenant is  
30 what they told them there. In any case, we drove all the way back from Ft. Rucker,  
31 Alabama, to Oregon. He also attended my graduation party at Ft. Rucker. The



1 commanding general holds a reception for the new graduates and we had to buy dress  
2 blues and shoulder boards and all that kind of stuff, which was really cool. It's a two  
3 hundred dollar suit back in the days when a really good suit was a hundred in '67. So this  
4 is really custom fitted really nice suit, the dress blues. Anyway, when we drove back we  
5 basically had a lot of opportunity to talk and so on and so forth, but that's just the kind of  
6 the build up of what I'm getting ready to tell you. My folks in the meantime—my dad  
7 was a state highway engineer and he had been transferred to Pendleton, Oregon, by the  
8 time I had graduated from college or from flight school. So when I went back to  
9 Pendleton, Oregon, I really didn't know anybody there. I basically just kind of ran  
10 around and bought some mag wheels for my car and stuff like that. In the process of  
11 running around I got pulled over by a cop in Pendleton, downtown Pendleton, for making  
12 a little bit of an aggressive turn from one street on to another. He thought I was kind of  
13 hot rodding a little bit. So he pulls me over. With an Oregon driver's license, they do  
14 anywhere they ask you if the address is correct. Of course it's no longer correct because  
15 I'm assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Division, APO (Army Post Office) San Francisco, you know,  
16 96490 or whatever it was. I whipped that on him and then he looked at me like this and  
17 he got his ticket book. He may have even started filling it out all ready cause I was a  
18 young guy with a sports car and just did a really aggressive thing. He looks at me and  
19 says, "Kid, what are you gonna do?" I said, "Well, I'm gonna be a helicopter pilot." He  
20 said, "Oh, geez." He says, "Hey, listen, you know take it easy. Let's don't try to get  
21 yourself killed before you get to Vietnam." He had pulled the book up and let me go. So  
22 anyway, from the uniform perspective, the attitude at least in Oregon was that we were  
23 getting ready to go into a very hazardous situation and they didn't want to basically  
24 penalize us at all. They wanted to cut us a lot of slack. It wasn't about a week later I'm  
25 going to another friend of mine's wedding in high school, high school friend of mine  
26 wedding and I got pulled over by the Oregon State police for doing something similar. I  
27 came out on an Interstate 5 freeway. I was probably doing well over seventy miles an  
28 hour by the time I hit the freeway. Probably it was up to a hundred in no time. I had a  
29 TR-4H sports car and it really ran good. Anyway, I got pulled over by the state police  
30 and the same thing. Well, the APO San Francisco worked on this Pendleton guy. Let's  
31 see if it works on the state police guy. The guy actually had half a ticket written. He tore

1 it up and I think they get in trouble for that. Once you get a ticket started you're not  
2 supposed to—you're supposed to finish it. Anyway, it was the same kind of deal. I was  
3 able to horse around a little bit without getting in trouble for that month. I thought that  
4 was interesting because that was the exact opposite of what you'd think, but this was still  
5 1967. The war protesting hadn't really got up to full steam yet.

6 SM: Right. Kind of a get out of jail and get out of trouble free card.

7 DF: Yeah, exactly. It was very useful for me because as a new pilot I of course I  
8 thought my stuff didn't stink anyway. If I could fly a helicopter I should be able to drive  
9 this Triumph any way I wanted to.

10 SM: That's right.

11 DF: So to speak. Anyway that's just something I thought I'd throw in there.

12 SM: Yeah. Well, how did your family feel about you heading off to Vietnam?

13 DF: Well, obviously they were very apprehensive about the whole thing. I mean,  
14 it's not like they can do anything about it. So they were basically resigned to the  
15 situation. We didn't ever get in any arguments or there was never any disciplinary  
16 problems or things like that. I was basically treated as an adult for the first time in my  
17 life. Nobody told me when I had to be back although I didn't have any place to go and  
18 no place to do it with. It wasn't that big an issue. It was basically have a good time  
19 while you're there. I'm sure I had everything I wanted to eat. My mom probably cooked  
20 me anything I wanted, that kind of stuff.

21 SM: Anything else interesting happen during that leave?

22 DF: Besides the wedding, my friend was an enlisted man in the Army and he had  
23 a full military wedding. I was his best man. So that was kind of cool. I wore my dress  
24 blues. That's the second time I wore them. They're probably the third or fourth time  
25 I've worn them the whole time I had them for two hundred bucks. That was kind of cool.  
26 The state of Oregon in general was pretty conservative in those days. It was not a  
27 military state or almost no military reservations in Oregon at all. So it's not like you're  
28 worn out your welcome at any place like you do in Columbus, Georgia, for instance or  
29 the Alabama cities around Ft. Rucker.

30 SM: Anything else from leave?

1           DF: No. The fact that about half our class had brand new cars at Ft. Rucker  
2 because the beaters they were basically head of programs for all of us candidates to give  
3 us a brand new set of wheels. There was a lot of Triumphs. They had a Triumph dealer  
4 there that did a good job at selling us Triumphs.

5           SM: Popular little sports car.

6           DF: Yeah. In Enterprise, Alabama, which is one of the three cities surrounding  
7 Ft. Rucker there was an ad, warrant officer candidates no money down. We were trying  
8 to make trips to Panama City, Florida, every time we'd get and it'd be a lot easier with  
9 your own car. That sounded like a pretty good deal. The guy had never had any cars on  
10 the lot because every time he'd get a shipment in he'd run that ad and they were all sold.  
11 Sold them over night almost—a lot of Triumphs around Ft. Rucker in those days.

12          SM: Back to Vietnam, when you did finally arrive at your unit go ahead and if  
13 you would—

14          DF: Well, the first step we were on the C-130 basically. The C-141 that we flew  
15 from Travis Air Force Base to Cam Ranh Bay was the first time I was ever in one of  
16 those, huge airplane. You saw the C-130s on the ramp and they're all OD. They're not  
17 gray like the C-141 was. They're all green and two toned, brown bottoms or whatever it  
18 is—camouflage kind of. So the thing—once we got basically finished processing in Cam  
19 Ranh Bay and assigned to our unit which was the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, they transported us to An Khe,  
20 which was headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav in those days. The plane took off and we were not  
21 sitting on chairs anymore. We were in fatigues and they had these tie down straps that  
22 were running from left side to the right side of the plane about every three feet. They had  
23 one of those running across. We basically sat down on these aluminum flooring which  
24 was actually movable like palettes. We sat on those and basically put our legs underneath  
25 this strap that was a cargo strap that was running across the aircraft. We'd be ten or  
26 twelve abreast, three feet apart in rows holding on to the straps. That was our seatbelt  
27 and that was our seat. We basically sat on the floor. All of our duffel bags and baggage  
28 were on a cargo net on the tail ramp that moved up and down. So they basically got us in  
29 the aircraft, brought the palette on the ramp and tied it down. So you were basically still  
30 facing rearward for whatever reason looking at your baggage. Now it really is a cattle  
31 car. All ranks, you know everybody that's going basically, an officer, warrant officer,

1 and enlisted men all together. What was memorable about that flight basically is it was  
2 the first time I was ever in a C-131 and the first time I've ever flown on the floor with  
3 this kind of arrangement. Then we went to Pleiku before we went to An Khe. We flew  
4 over An Khe, landed at Pleiku and some of the people got out there. The landing in  
5 Pleiku was what was called a high overhead approach. They basically came in really  
6 high and did a spiraling type approach into the Pleiku airstrip and trying not to veer  
7 outside the perimeter of that airbase which was Camp Holloway I think we called it.  
8 Anyway, that was an interesting high turn aggressive type maneuver going into that. I  
9 says, "Wow, now we're out in the field. This must be the war out here." Of course  
10 Pleiku wasn't like Cam Ranh Bay. Everybody's wearing fatigues and there were tents  
11 and helicopters and all kinds of activities going on. So we got rid of those guys and took  
12 off and then landed at An Khe. For the next week or so we were processed through the  
13 training program, basically the Vietnam orientation which we affectionately called charm  
14 school, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division had in An Khe. We had a lot of time off as officers and  
15 made trips into town. There was a little village outside of the gate of An Khe. It was  
16 called Sin City. You can imagine what that was all about if you haven't heard that  
17 already.

18 SM: Go ahead and describe it.

19 DF: Sin City was basically a collection of bars and whorehouses. The bars and  
20 whorehouses were one in the same. Basically when soldiers came back from the rear  
21 they wanted to get a few drinks or do whatever you can imagine. They went in there and  
22 that's where all of that took place. I actually turned twenty years old during charm  
23 school. So I was there obviously on August twenty-first. I went into town to celebrate  
24 with some friends of mine. We celebrated.

25 SM: Okay. Describe some of the more specific aspects of charm school.

26 DF: Basically that's when we learned about punji stakes and booby traps and  
27 they had a lot of those set up there. It was kind of more of an infantry perspective.  
28 Basically the things—the ground school or the charm school was basically infantry or  
29 ground type school. It had nothing to do with aviation at all. Just basically talked about  
30 what's unique to the battlefield and the area which were the booby traps and punji stakes

1 and ambushes. So there's the classroom instruction and demonstration of the kinds of  
2 things you would see out there. It really didn't pertain much to the aviation part of it.

3 SM: Let's see. Exactly how long did that last again?

4 DF: Well, it was I think—

5 SM: Approximately.

6 DF: I was assigned to B Company which was killer spades(??) B Company on  
7 August fifteenth and was there on August nineteenth. I landed—left Travis Air Force  
8 Base on August eighth. So there was eleven days between the time I left San Francisco  
9 or Travis Air Force Base until I wound up in my unit at LZ English. So one or more of  
10 those days was flying over two or three days at Cam Ranh Bay so essentially a week I  
11 was at An Khe, but not to say that all that was charm school. It might've been four or  
12 five days of charm school.

13 SM: What were your first impressions of the unit in terms of morale and combat  
14 effectiveness?

15 DF: 1<sup>st</sup> Cav?

16 SM: Mm-hmm.

17 DF: It was a gung-ho place. Everybody who was in it loved it. It was the  
18 epitome basically of—looking back it was the epitome of the military unit how you'd  
19 want it to be. It was effective. Morale was extremely good. Everybody there believed  
20 they were in the best unit and had every reason to believe that. They were the ones in the  
21 news all the time. They were the ones that were given the tough tasks and everybody of  
22 course didn't necessarily want to participate in the tough task, but they were proud that  
23 they were the ones given it. So it was kind of a double-edged sword there too.  
24 Everybody was just tickled to death to be in the sharpest or we use the term stract. I  
25 don't even know what that means, S-T-R-A-C-T. Just the sharpest unit in Vietnam we  
26 were in it.

27 SM: When you finished with charm school, what happened then?

28 DF: Well, I was assigned to my unit and two of my classmates were assigned  
29 with me. One of these guys named Ken Getchell and Tom Harnisher you met. You met  
30 Tom Harnisher.

31 SM: Yes, sir.

1           DF: Ken Getchell made it through the whole year there. So we basically all of us  
2 were assigned to B 229<sup>th</sup>. Some of our other friends in our classes were assigned to other  
3 units within the Cav. We basically parted company. All of us in our class that were  
4 assigned, there were like forty of us that were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and class. At that  
5 point in time the three that including myself, two others and myself were what was left of  
6 the class that was in my unit from that point on. I really didn't see or deal much with  
7 anybody else. We were basically flown up to LZ English, which is where my company  
8 was located by helicopter, by Huey. We finally saw some real Vietnam helicopter pilots.  
9 They were salty. They had faded fatigues. They were extremely good pilots. They gave  
10 us the ride of our life because that's part of the initiation into Vietnam. When I was a  
11 senior pilot and I went back to pick up recruits I did the exact same thing. Basically we  
12 flew low level so low that we had to lift the skids to get over the rice paddy dikes. Going  
13 through trees sideways and stuff like that. It was a ride—an A ticket ride to LZ English.  
14 We basically—I'm actually trying to remember. I don't think there was any kind of  
15 reception at all. You were just a new guy and some old guys left and some new guys  
16 came in. They may have come over and introduced themselves. You got assigned your  
17 platoon and your platoon leader may have introduced himself or whatever, but there was  
18 no parties or anything like that. You just had to kind of work your way in. Now you're  
19 in a real combat unit and now you've got to earn the right to interact with real combat  
20 veterans. So basically that was a process. I don't really remember too much about it. I  
21 do remember that it didn't take them long to get me checked out and in the seat. Once  
22 you're up flying basically you're meeting all these senior guys one at a time when you  
23 start flying with them. They pass on their knowledge to you. The check pilot basically  
24 makes sure you're capable. When the AC (aircraft commander) takes you over is when  
25 your real training begins. The first few times they fly more and then the more time you  
26 spend in the seat the more time you get to fly till at some point in time they don't fly  
27 hardly at all.

28           SM: When you first arrived to B Company 229, when you first arrived in  
29 Vietnam really what did you think the United States was trying to accomplish here?

30           DF: Well, that's a good question. I'm not sure I can remember. I can tell you  
31 what I think I thought. I thought we had purpose. I thought we were there to help

1 somebody achieve their independence or to prevent their being assimilated by a  
2 communist world in that area. So basically we were there to assist the Vietnamese and  
3 their strive for independence or to keeping it independent I guess because it was already  
4 supposedly independent. I felt good about it I guess. Nothing changed from the time I  
5 joined the Army from the perspective I mean.

6 SM: So you understood and accepted the Domino Theory and that this is all  
7 obviously part of the Cold War and everything else?

8 DF: Well, that was a little bit more intellectual than I probably looked at it. I just  
9 knew that—I trusted our country to be involved in something that was worthwhile to be  
10 involved in.

11 SM: When you got the unit and that is when you first flew into LZ English, what  
12 was the nearest Vietnamese city or town or village?

13 DF: Bong Son.

14 SM: Bong Son.

15 DF: It was the Bong Son Plain. Are you familiar with Vietnam?

16 SM: A little bit. Yes, sir.

17 DF: It was basically in II Corps, which was the corps right above the Delta. No,  
18 actually it was III Corps.

19 SM: Not too far from Saigon.

20 DF: No. No. It was actually—no, it was II Corps. You're right. It was II Corps.  
21 No, it's quite a ways from Saigon. It's actually north of An Khe.

22 SM: Okay. North of An Khe, gotcha.

23 DF: An Khe was right smack dab in the middle of the Central Highlands and this  
24 was basically more coastal. This was probably twenty or thirty miles north and real close  
25 to the coast, probably five to ten miles from the beach. It was very jungley as opposed to  
26 the High Plains, which was grass and trees.

27 SM: Okay. What did you receive as far as initial briefings when you got to B  
28 Company there at LZ English? What kind of—?

29 DF: There was no reception held in our honor or anything like that.

30 SM: No, not reception, but you had—

1           DF: Basically, somebody grabbed you. I don't remember if it was the operations  
2 sergeant or some guy that was assigned to show you around, but you were basically  
3 assigned your tent, your sleeping area. You probably left it upon yourself to introduce  
4 yourself around. You went to the armory and picked up your pistol. I don't think we had  
5 weapons assigned at An Khe. We might have. I don't remember. Basically we got our  
6 chest protector issued and our cot and all our personal living stuff, the mosquito net, the  
7 cot and sleeping bag and the poncho liner and all that crap. I imagine you were basically  
8 probably spent a couple days settling in. Somebody probably took you under wing and  
9 said, "Let's go into town and get you a lawn chair and you'll need a,"—we had these  
10 little plastic bowls that were like large salad serving bowls that we used to shave in. That  
11 was our—\_\_\_\_(??), everybody had one of those. So we usually bought those off a local  
12 economy. So somebody probably took pity on you and showed you around kind of stuff.  
13 Probably within two or three days we probably were getting checked out by the company  
14 instructor pilot and released for missions. From that point on you learned the routine by  
15 doing. Somebody would get you up in the morning and said, "You're 785. Your AC is  
16 so and so. Be at operations in ten minutes," or whatever. We went to operations. I stood  
17 around while the AC picked up his mission sheets. We got briefed or whatever, or  
18 whatever process that was, weather or whatever. Then the AC basically took you under  
19 his wing and we did all the usually stuff, which pilot preflights what part of the aircraft.  
20 You know in flight school you do everything, but it's a team more when you're in  
21 Vietnam. There's two people preflighting the aircraft. So one guy does the top. One guy  
22 does the bottom or something like that. You meet the crew chiefs. You see the guns  
23 mounted for the first time. We never mounted guns at Ft. Rucker. Just basically you're  
24 starting to blend in and becoming part of the unit. There was no formal training per say.  
25 There was probably a process. I mean, I wasn't aware of. There was probably a written  
26 process some place. We all did it pretty much the same way, but it might've been just  
27 tradition as opposed to a process.

28           SM: When you were at Rucker, did you not get any range time to practice  
29 shooting out of the Huey?

30           DF: No. Gunnery—basically we're all being trained as slick drivers. The ones  
31 lucky enough to get sent to a gun company would get their gun training at the gun



1 company. So that's kind of how that worked. Of course we all wanted to fly guns  
2 because that was the glory job we thought. It turns out the real glory job is actually the  
3 slick driver.

4 SM: Why do you say that?

5 DF: Oh, they're the ones that got most of the medals. Did you get a copy of that  
6 Demilo tape that Harnisher—did Walt ever send you a copy of that?

7 SM: Yes, sir. He sure did.

8 DF: Have you seen it yet?

9 SM: I've not been able to watch it yet.

10 DF: All right. When you watch that you'll see in there because there's one of the  
11 killer spade birds is in that when we're up at Dac Tho. The gun pilot's make a comment,  
12 says, "Those guys are the greatest pilots. Us gun guys we take off and land with a load of  
13 weapons and we expand and we go back in the \_\_\_\_ (??) and reload and take off again.  
14 The only time we touch the ground is when we're reloading or done for the day. These  
15 guys go into these tight LZs day in and day out." He admitted that we were better pilots  
16 than they were basically.

17 SM: Very interesting. Okay.

18 DF: They had the fun job because they got to shoot people, but we were the ones  
19 that were close to the ground that needed to be protected. We were the ones that were  
20 doing the really hard flying.

21 SM: Now when you first got to the unit you were transitioning into what model  
22 Huey? This was in—

23 DF: Okay. Well, the unit, when I first got there the unit might've had two or  
24 three H models, but for all practical purposes they were all D models. The D model, we  
25 flew a few D models at Ft. Rucker. They were old D's, but the A, B and C model had a  
26 shorter fuselage and a smaller rotor system. They had a forty-four foot instead of a forty-  
27 eight foot, or a forty-two instead of a forty-six or whatever, four foot difference in  
28 diameter. We might've flown a few D models at Ft. Rucker, but this is—also Ft. Rucker  
29 as hot as it was and the time of year we were there it's not nearly as hot as Vietnam was.  
30 D models barely had enough power in some of the things that we did. You really had to  
31 learn to become smooth. That's one of the things you learned in Vietnam as an

1 approving pilot is being able to get the most out of the helicopter by not robbing it of  
2 power because of your controls, the way you fly basically. So one of the things that  
3 they—none of the new guys got to fly H models at all until we had enough—until  
4 everybody was starting to fly them for two reasons. The newer aircraft went to the better,  
5 tougher missions and it was a more aggressive type mission. They wanted to make sure  
6 that you were a good pilot. A D model had so little horsepower compared to the H model  
7 that you learned to be a better pilot in the D model.

8 SM: Okay. What was your first experience like flying in combat?

9 DF: You know I was trying to think of that and there was no single experience.  
10 You start off flying what's called log missions or C&C (Command and Control) or just  
11 ash and trash, which are basically all the single-ship type missions. Probably the first  
12 thing that was really exciting was the combat assault itself. I probably was there maybe  
13 as long as a month probably before I even flew a combat assault or if I had flown one I  
14 was pulled off another mission because we need to fill a slot or something. I wasn't  
15 assigned any. So probably the whole concept to a combat assault was I don't remember  
16 any specific one, just the process. It was pretty exciting with the artillery prep and the  
17 gun ships going hot on it and all the process that we went through to do that. So it was  
18 very memorable and I'm sure I was a little antsy about it because supposedly the  
19 dangerous part of flying was those things. That's when you usually took a lot of hit  
20 because obviously you wouldn't be putting infantry troops in there and prepping it like  
21 that if there was nobody there.

22 SM: Now what were you briefed as far as the enemy concentration and  
23 composition in the area? Was it Viet Cong, NVA or a combination?

24 DF: Well, I don't remember any briefing specifically, but in the Bong Son area it  
25 was mostly Viet Cong. There may have been some advisors, Russian. We heard there  
26 was a lot of Russian advisors or Chinese advisors as well. I never saw any of these. I  
27 couldn't tell you for sure. I'm not sure we were ever briefed. That stuff may come out  
28 from your AC when you're flying with him or at the end of the day when you're all in  
29 your skivvies sitting around telling war stories or whatever. I don't know where a lot of  
30 the information came from that we thought we knew or whatever.

31 SM: What was the primary mission of B Company 229 while you were there?

1           DF: Basically, we supported combat support. We basically took care of feeding  
2 and transportation of infantry people primarily and an occasional combat assault. I didn't  
3 learn till later really that the 229<sup>th</sup> itself was primarily assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade  
4 and half assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade. The 227<sup>th</sup> was primarily assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
5 Infantry Brigade and half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade. I should've known that because—  
6 well, not actually knowing that we always seemed to be flying log for the same units all  
7 the time, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup>—units that were 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade  
8 units.

9           SM: When you arrived there, you mentioned that you weren't necessarily briefed  
10 specifically about the enemy composition. As you were integrating yourself into unit  
11 activities whether they be logistic, support missions, leading up through that first month  
12 into your first combat assault missions what kind of preflight briefings would you get  
13 when you got a mission?

14           DF: Well, you know—

15           SM: How detailed?

16           DF: Not that detailed. We were as support people we weren't really privy to—  
17 what do you call them—campaigns or battles or anything like that. If we were flying that  
18 day, somebody from operations would wake you up. You'd get dressed and go grab  
19 yourself a cup of coffee or try to get some breakfast and then an hour or so before the  
20 mission you would go down to operations and the operations guy would tell you if you  
21 were flying log to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> log pad. Your AC knew where it was—  
22 somewhere on English probably. You basically was doing your report there. They tell  
23 you what you're doing until you're released. We did things like take out the mail and  
24 bring packs back, take out breakfast and rations and things like that or whatever they  
25 needed, ammo and all that kind of stuff. That would be a log mission. If the unit was in  
26 coordinates XYZ we don't really know what they were doing there. We just know that's  
27 where they were. We knew call signs for instance and how to get a hold of them. We  
28 learned to call for smoke. That's how we basically did our recon of the LZ and found out  
29 which way the wind was going and all that kind of stuff. Generally there was pathfinders  
30 in these units that were aviation savvy. They basically handled the aviation part of the—  
31 ground aviation part of it. So that was kind of what a day in the log mission was. That

1 was pretty much most of what we did was that kind of stuff. On days that we flew  
2 combat assaults the flight leader had a little bit more information than everybody else did.  
3 All we knew is that we were yellow one or orange six or whatever, what our position in  
4 the flight was. We didn't necessarily even know where we were gonna do a pick up.  
5 They might've said, "We're going up to Happy Valley today," or something like that.  
6 The flight leader had the—we didn't care because we were spending our time flying the  
7 formation and taking care of our own aircraft. We weren't in charge so we didn't pay  
8 much attention to what that person did. We were on a combat assault. We were always  
9 aware of what support we were having whether it was gonna be artillery or whether ARA  
10 (aerial rocket artillery), which was the heavy rocket helicopters or whatever. We would  
11 know that. We would know the details of the combat assault as far as the proposed  
12 landing time—where to pick the troops up, how many sorties, that kind of stuff. As far as  
13 what the unit was actually doing at their—it was obvious that we were assaulting them in  
14 some place, but it was always a search and destroy mission most of the time. We didn't  
15 really get to see the big board which NVA (North Vietnamese Army) battalion was where  
16 and what they were doing and what we were doing combat—that was way above us. We  
17 were just basically grunts ourselves.

18 SM: Did you think—was that ever very frustrating for you?

19 DF: No.

20 SM: Did you ever think that maybe you should be better aware of the bigger  
21 picture and how you guys were working within it?

22 DF: No, not at all.

23 SM: Did your unit operate in what were referred to as free fire zones very often?

24 DF: During the morning briefing if there was a free fire zone we were made  
25 aware of it if we were operating in it. Well, if it's a free fire zone there wouldn't be any  
26 friendlies in it at all including our own friendlies. Typically, unless the scouts, you know  
27 the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup>, guys like that probably did more of that kind of stuff. We basically took  
28 care of a unit, an infantry unit. Obviously there's not gonna be a free fire zone. We may  
29 know where there was one if there was one in route. We may fire our M-60s just to test  
30 fire them, just to get the cobwebs out of them kind of thing. Not specifically, not on the

1 routine missions. We all flew night killer hunter and specialized missions now and then  
2 in which we would be doing stuff like that.

3 SM: Well, what was the relationship like between you and your fellow pilots and  
4 the crews, the enlisted crew members, crew chiefs, door gunners?

5 DF: Well, that's interesting that you should ask that too because there was some I  
6 wouldn't say healing, but there was some transition that we had to do at our reunion with  
7 Bill Quigley being there and some of those other people. Basically the aircraft were  
8 identified by the markings on the aircraft like the paint color of the toe skids, the toes of  
9 the skids, and the heel of the skids if they were red or yellow or whatever, which platoon  
10 or which section the aircraft belonged to. Typically we flew our own. So we typically  
11 flew with the same crew chief more often than not. Some of the crew chiefs which were  
12 the ones in our platoon we probably knew better. We basically treated them as a lower  
13 ranking person. The joke was, "Why do I have to fill sandbags? Aren't there any  
14 enlisted people available?" kind of stuff. There is definitely a rift or a valley between the  
15 officer corps and the enlisted corps. We were never disrespectful. When we were on a  
16 mission together the four of us, like if we stood down at a log pad for lunch for instance  
17 and ate Cs or whatever we'd all sit together. I mean, we weren't segregationist on  
18 missions. We were only segregationists at night when we went back to the unit.

19 SM: Did that rift or that distinction between enlisted and officer, did that ever  
20 affect morale?

21 DF: Not that I know of. No, we didn't do anything to them except maybe ignore  
22 them. I mean, it's not like we bossed them around or anything. We didn't salute that  
23 much in the field. I guess you're not supposed to salute at all, but we sometimes saluted  
24 once a day kind of thing. First thing in the morning you do your salute and then that  
25 would be it for the day kind of stuff. It's not like we—if we were shooting the bowl and  
26 one of the crew members came by and listened in on the story he may stand there for a  
27 while and listen. We were all one unit, but they lived in a different tent than we did. All  
28 the officer's tents were together and all the enlisted tents were together. So they were on  
29 the other side of the street or whatever.

30 SM: Gotcha. What about the relationship between the warrant officers and the  
31 real officers, the commissioned officers?

1           DF: RLOs.

2           SM: The real live officers. What was the relationship between you guys?

3           DF: As far as we were concerned, the captains, like Captain Hamburger who's at  
4 the reunion, were basically, they were senior officers to us and we treat them with the  
5 same kind of respect we expected the enlisted people to treat us so to speak. There was  
6 no distinction really between lieutenants and warrant officers. We were for all practical  
7 purposes pilots and one of them may have been a section leader by virtue of his rank, but  
8 he was probably in one of our tents. The captains had their own tents and the major had  
9 his own tent. There was not really as big a riff. From the warrant officer perspective  
10 there probably was no riff at all. One of the guys that was a lieutenant when I was a  
11 warrant officer that I've communicated with since then asked me the same question and it  
12 seems to me there was probably more an issue in their minds than there were in ours. We  
13 were the bread and butter pilots and most of the time we were the ACs. They may have  
14 been our boss on the ground, but we were their boss in the air.

15          SM: What was the base camp area like?

16          DF: Tent city.

17          SM: Everyone lived in tents?

18          DF: Everybody lived in tents in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. That's right—everybody out in the  
19 field in tents. When you're back at An Khe you got a wooden building.

20          SM: How often would you go back to An Khe?

21          DF: I only went back once.

22          SM: So most of the time you spent out at LZ English?

23          DF: Till we moved north.

24          SM: Right. Okay. When you were there, you lived in tents. What was the food  
25 like? What kind of—?

26          DF: Food wasn't that bad. Once again I was very pliable. To this day I eat  
27 whatever's put in front of me. So that was no big issue with me. One of the things that—  
28 probably the people we distanced ourselves the most from were people like the cooks. At  
29 least the flight crews are out there fighting with us. These cooks were never out. They  
30 were a different breed. We didn't associate with them at all and I don't even think the  
31 enlisted people associated with them. That's the worst job in the Army as far as I'm

1 concerned is the cook. Our company had its own mess hall. So it wasn't like a battalion  
2 mess hall. We were pretty—each individual aviation unit was pretty self sufficient. We  
3 had our own maintenance and everything. The mess tent—they had an officer's tent and  
4 an enlisted tent. The officers and enlisted didn't eat together necessarily, kind of like on  
5 *M\*A\*S\*H*. At least I don't remember them eating together. The food was always  
6 cooked. I mean, we had roast beef and we had—it was powdered potato flakes that were  
7 reconstituted and probably powdered milk although we did get fresh milk now and again.  
8 I thought the food was always pretty good to be honest with you. Sometimes we'd have  
9 roast beef a month straight because that's the way it came in, the supply system. That  
10 was bad.

11 SM: I would imagine so.

12 DF: The cooks had to be pretty creative. They would try to fix it a different way  
13 every night.

14 SM: What about other amenities? Recreational things? Anything available out  
15 of LZ English?

16 DF: Well, we kind of were—you mean like volleyball nets or basketball hoops or  
17 that kind of stuff?

18 SM: Anything that helped take your mind off the drudgery of war?

19 DF: What we all—a lot of us read. I read a lot. I had pocket books up the gazoo  
20 and I don't even remember where I got them. Sometimes we'd trade them among  
21 ourselves. Sometimes there'd be in operation there'd be a big pile of them or something.  
22 Sometimes we just bought them ourselves or our family would send them to us or  
23 whatever. I have a couple pictures of what I called my AO, my area of operations. Every  
24 picture I have there's at least a dozen pocketbooks on the shelf. We made our own  
25 furniture out of ammo boxes. We made our own—when we moved into a place for new  
26 the tent would be set up in the dirt basically. We'd have to sandbag it. We all basically  
27 arranged our bunk—you saw what the tents looked like. They were thirty-two by sixteen.  
28 We used to get a section between one post and the next post. I always had the corner.  
29 For some reason I never had the middle section. I always had an entry way. You kind of  
30 get used to your spot. So even when you move, you kind of claim the same spot at the  
31 next place. So everybody's kind of used to what—there's always artillery batteries and

1 there's two 105 Howitzer rounds in every box. So every time they fired two rounds  
2 there's a box. We would tear them apart and make furniture with them and floors. We  
3 had these .50-cal ammo cans which are kind of the wide ones that hold underground. We  
4 used those for—they were gasketed and they were steel. They had a handle on them so  
5 they were like little sealed box. So we'd keep our letters and our writing utensils and the  
6 stuff that we wanted to keep out of the moisture, not turn green on us. We collected  
7 pieces like that. We had our lawn chair and our wash basin. We probably did more just  
8 kind of playing cards and shooting the bull, drinking. We built our own officer's club  
9 almost everywhere we—sometimes it was also our bunker. That was kind of what we  
10 did. We didn't really go into town much in the field because it wasn't the same as going  
11 into Saigon.

12 SM: It wasn't as safe.

13 DF: No. It wasn't and you never went by yourself anywhere.

14 SM: What about availability of alcohol and liquor?

15 DF: Very available, for us it was. For the infantry—

16 SM: To include out in the field?

17 DF: Huh?

18 SM: To include out like at LZ English?

19 DF: Yeah. Well, there's out in the field and there's out in the field. We had GP  
20 medium tents. The guys in the field had pup tents or their poncho liner. So the infantry  
21 guys, so to them there was probably no alcohol available to them, but we were pretty  
22 civilized. We pooled our money and go in and buy a little Sanyo refrigerator, one of  
23 those about the height of a desk, you know, two cubic foot ones. There'd be one or two  
24 of those in every tent. So we always had beer and sodas. I didn't drink all that much. I  
25 drank mostly sodas. We changed the tione(??) of the company by stealing. I think the  
26 tione of the company was allowed two, like 1.5 KW (kilowatts) generators. We had three  
27 10 KWs, which we stole from somebody, probably the Navy. We had light sets for every  
28 tent. We built our own stoves because part of that year was pretty cold to us. It wasn't  
29 cold to an Oregonian, but it was really cold to us. We built our own stoves. We'd  
30 modify one of those they used for heating the garbage cans full of water for dishes. They  
31 were called immersion heaters. We modified those and made stoves out of them. We



1 were pretty creative. We did for ourselves. We taught each other how to do it. I mean,  
2 the new guy learned to make his furniture from a guy that had been there for six months  
3 and maybe the guy that rotated out sold his furniture to the new guy.

4 SM: Now was there any drug use that you were aware of?

5 DF: No. There was none that I was aware of among the officers. I really wasn't  
6 aware of from the enlisted people. Now you would occasionally hear somebody getting  
7 caught doing something. There was some knowledge that there was some going on, but  
8 it was not really widespread my first tour. I never actually saw it myself.

9 SM: Let's see here. Any issues concerning the wild animals, bugs, any serious  
10 problems with anything?

11 DF: Well, we took malaria tablets everyday. So there was lots of mosquitoes.  
12 We were required to roll our sleeves down at night. After dusk we were required to roll  
13 our sleeves down. We could keep them rolled up during the day. There were processes  
14 in place to minimize the insect stuff. I don't remember that many cockroaches until the  
15 second tour when we were in more permanent housing. I don't think the cockroaches  
16 liked being in the tent that much. You'd hear of a snake or something once in awhile, but  
17 I don't remember ever them being in the company street. I don't think snakes came into  
18 the—cause the company, there may have been some vegetation there when we first set up  
19 camp, but there was absolutely no vegetation once you lived there for a little bit. There  
20 wasn't any place. We had pets. We had dogs and monkeys and stuff like that as pets.  
21 When we were back at An Khe we shot some tigers and elephants and deer. You may  
22 have heard some of those stories a couple of weeks ago. Especially the Central  
23 Highlands had beautiful, wonderful game.

24 SM: But as far as animals or problems within a base camp area or anything like  
25 that?

26 DF: No.

27 SM: No snake bites?

28 DF: Not that I remember.

29 SM: Did you guys ever have any USO (United Service Organizations) shows  
30 come out?

1           DF: There were USO shows. I never went to any of them. They were not as  
2 easy for the Cav guys to get to although one of the guys in our unit took Martha Raye  
3 around. We got pictures of that. So we may have provided transportation. I never  
4 personally did. I never personally went to any USO shows. I think Bob Hope went to  
5 Phu Bai and An Khe and places like that, but never to English.

6           SM: Did that bother you at all?

7           DF: I don't remember that it actually bothered me. I was probably a little  
8 disappointed because you hear of Miss America or some Hollywood dancers or Ann  
9 Margaret or something like that. You'd always like to get close to that, but it wasn't  
10 like—I didn't lose any sleep over it. It was just an adventure I missed.

11          SM: Right. You guys didn't get any films then either did you?

12          DF: Any what?

13          SM: Films, movies?

14          DF: Except for the training films of Rocky, Rocky's training films, no.

15          SM: Right. Okay, right. Code name training films.

16          DF: Right.

17          SM: All right. Let me go ahead and pause you quickly for a moment real quick.

18          SM: This'll end the interview with Mr. Fillmore on the twentieth of May.

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**Interview with Dale Fillmore**

**Session [3] of [3]**

**Date: June 3, 2003**

1           Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Dale  
2 Fillmore on the third of June 2003 at approximately 9:10 Lubbock time. I am in  
3 Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Fillmore is in—

4           Dale Fillmore: Sherwood, Oregon.

5           SM: Thank you. Sherwood, Oregon. Thank you again for consenting to  
6 continue this interview. Why don't we begin today's interview by discussing some of the  
7 combat operations that you remember? In particular from your first tour any combat  
8 operations prior to Tet of '68?

9           DF: I mean, we basically—there weren't that many different things that we did.  
10 They were all classified as either combat assault, logistical resupply, Command and  
11 Control, and then every now and then there was an oddball division type mission that had  
12 to do with PSYOPS (psychological operations) or that sort of thing. Basically, the day to  
13 day operations were either combat assault or logistical resupply. That's what the  
14 majority of the missions were. Would you like to—?

15          SM: Any—I'm sorry?

16          DF: Would you like me to describe the kind of missions, what a logistical was or  
17 a combat assault?

18          SM: Yes, as far as with your unit how you engaged in those particular type of  
19 operations would be good, but also any specific missions that were memorable that you  
20 want to incorporate them as well, that'd be great.

21          DF: Okay. Basically just from a generic perspective, logistical resupply is  
22 basically an aircraft assigned to a battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> or one of the battalions in the  
23 Cav. Often times we were actually supporting other units. When we moved north we  
24 supported the Marine Corps now and then and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. We also were moved  
25 around. The Cav was very, very mobile. As a result of it they took part of it and moved  
26 it to other places. For instance in the late '67 in November or so we were up at Dac Tho  
27 Kon Tum area supporting the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne and the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and our own 1<sup>st</sup>  
28 of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cav that went with us. In those areas of operation we still did the same sort of

1 thing. That was logistical resupply or combat assault. Logistical resupply consisted of  
2 just basically showing up at a battalion logistics pad. The battalion S4 would prepare  
3 loads for us to take out in the field to the various companies that were operating in the  
4 field of that battalion. We would typically the first thing in the morning we'd take out  
5 hot chow. We had these things called mermite cans which are like ice chests made of  
6 aluminum. They were full of breakfast kind of things, eggs and so forth. When we'd  
7 take the food out we'd also bring back their packs. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cav during the day did not  
8 like to operate with a pack. They needed it at night for the poncho liners and the stuff  
9 they used at night. So we would pick them up so they could travel light during the day.  
10 So we'd basically run food out and then we'd sling load the packs back and we'd go back  
11 out and pick up the food and maybe deliver some ammo. All day long we'd basically be  
12 assigned to that unit and all of its operating company. There's one bird for one battalion  
13 and sometimes four companies in the field or whatever they had in the field just basically  
14 making the round. That was usually a long day and at the end of the day we would take  
15 their packs back out to them and pick up any leftover cooking utensils or mermite cans or  
16 water or whatever and bring them back. Then we were released until the next morning.  
17 That's kind of what a log mission was all about. Combat assault, ordinarily you are on a  
18 ready reaction force of some sort. It's time for the day. You may sit around all day  
19 waiting for something or they may have something on schedule to do immediately. What  
20 a combat assault was is that typically there were four to six aircraft, most commonly four  
21 aircraft, and four aircraft would move around a platoon sized unit essentially at one shot.  
22 We'd carry seven persons per aircraft so twenty-eight people is a common platoon size.  
23 Most of them were a table of organization and equipment wise we're always short to full  
24 compliment. So that was about right. We would either just be maneuvering platoons  
25 around. We'd take them out of one area and assault them into another area. What I mean  
26 by combat assault, there's sort of two kinds. There's the routine ones where you just  
27 move people around in a combat assault fashion, but even so we always had gunship  
28 escorts, but a really scheduled combat assault when you wanted to move an entire unit in  
29 a company level unit or even a battalion level unit you would use a larger force, six ships  
30 for instance or maybe two six-ship formations. They were identified. The way the ships  
31 were organized, the flight leader was of the lead flight was always yellow one and yellow

1 two through however many ships you had were the identifications of the other aircraft.  
2 The reason they used the colors and the yellow ones because that's the way the flight  
3 commander didn't have to remember tail numbers or individual call signs to command  
4 the whole flight. He just says, "Yellow two do this. Yellow three do better," whatever.  
5 The second thing any other flights would've been different colors. White usually is the  
6 number two and then if it got any bigger than that it would be red orange and blue green  
7 and whatever, one through however many ships. So anyway, typically the flight was  
8 yellow one through four. If we had a fairly large combat assault to go be yellow one  
9 through six maybe. They would basically prep an LZ which they planned to go into  
10 depending on how big an assault it was with various amounts of fire power. The biggest  
11 situation would be a B-52 strike called an arc light strike maybe the night before just to  
12 soften the area up. About an hour or so before the combat assault they would start hitting  
13 them with artillery. One minute basically the aircraft would be formed up and loaded and  
14 be flying around. Then on about one minute final the artillery would shut off. The last  
15 round in the LZ was always the white phosphorous round, smoke round. That's when  
16 you could tell that the artillery was no longer flying through the air and you had a little bit  
17 more freedom for where you could fly. For the next forty-five seconds or so the aerial  
18 rocket artillery, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> artillery which was called ARA, blue max(?) call signs  
19 in those days would basically prep it with their very heavy rocket laden gun ships. They  
20 would have a lot more gun ships and a lot less mini-guns than a normal gun ship would.  
21 They would prep it for the next forty-five seconds. Then on fifteen second final your  
22 own gun ships would start opening up on the LZ and start basically hitting hot spots if  
23 there were any. More often than not though this oppressive worked and we usually got in  
24 and out of the LZ without a shot fired. Every now and then one of them would get hot  
25 and then the gun ships would go to work. That's basically how combat assault worked  
26 and extraction worked just the opposite except there's no artillery. It's basically go in  
27 and pick the troops up with gun ship escorts and take them out. If you take any fire on  
28 the way out or something the gun ships would engage and soften them up and keep them  
29 off your back while you're moving troops in and out. So that was the two main missions.  
30 Probably of all the flight time that I got in my tour, eighty percent plus was probably  
31 those two missions. There were other odds and end missions out there. One was

1 called—I called it night killer hunter, but since then it's a lot of other names that come by  
2 with firefly and things like that. There is a—the Cav was experimenting with night  
3 operations and trying to learn or develop strategies and so forth. Every time I flew this  
4 mission it would change a little bit. When we first started flying them we would  
5 basically take off with two slicks, one of which was the lead ship and one was full of  
6 flares. We'd have two gun ships with us. They would typically fly at a 1,500, 2,000 feet.  
7 The flare ship would be at like 3,000 feet and the lead ship would be down with the guns  
8 at say 1,500 or 2,000 feet. There was also a Mohawk on the mission, which was the  
9 Army's fixed wing airplane. It was equipped with side lifting radar. They called SLR or  
10 infrared detection. Depending on the kind of mission we were on if we were going  
11 through jungle areas and trails and stuff and heavily jungle they would use the infrared.  
12 Typically they used the side lifting radar which was more for surface traffic on trails and  
13 sampans on road ways. Infrared detected heat of course and the side lifting radar  
14 detected anything that moved over two miles per hour. It would detect it as a radar blip.  
15 We would have a mission that was divided into say four or five quadrants. Most of them  
16 were no fire or free fire zones that there were any friendlies in it we were notified of  
17 where they were and so forth during our preflight briefing. We would go into these zones  
18 in order, one through four or one through five or whatever. The Mohawk would've  
19 already have been there by the time we'd take off for zone one. They were basically in  
20 zone one checking that with their infrared or their side lifting radar. If they picked up a  
21 target they would notify us and we would get the coordinates of it and the gun ships and  
22 the flight leader would take care of that. The flare ship would position himself. The lead  
23 aircraft would call division artillery, which was basically the clearing house for all the  
24 friendly locations both U.S. and Allies. If they detected some movement and there were  
25 no friendlies in the area then they would give us permission to engage the target. We  
26 would basically kick a flare out of the flare ship and these were aluminum canisters.  
27 They were like three feet long and maybe three or four inches in diameter. They'd put  
28 out what I remember was four million candle power. They had a little parachute on them  
29 and the parachute also acted as a reflector. They were called parachute flares. They put a  
30 lot of light on the ground. So you'd kick one of those things out about the time that the  
31 flare would pop the gun ships had already basically know where they're firing. They

1 would roll hot and engage the target, usually a sampan or a vehicle on a trail or  
2 something like that—whatever the target was. Many times there was nothing and we  
3 would finish our sector one. In the meantime Mohawk was in sector two looking for  
4 targets for us. We would enter sector two and if there were targets we'd engage them. If  
5 they're not we would continue on. When we got finished at the end of the sector four or  
6 five whenever we were done for the night we would go back home. So that was basically  
7 a once a night kind of deal. That was—I call them night killer hunter. Later on they  
8 started using division people with starlight scopes on sniper rifles and all kinds of  
9 variation from that. It seemed like every time we flew it there was some new variation.  
10 When I flew it my second tour we were using low light TV with a viewer in the back and  
11 no lights at all. Basically one ship, one single ship with two guns ships and everybody  
12 was sort of quiet and dark. The ship with the low light TV, the lead ship on that, was  
13 actually the low one and they would be down at tree top level looking at targets through  
14 this, I guess they call it flare units or whatever, but anyway it's basically—it looked like a  
15 starlight scope TV screen. It was like the green background low light kind of stuff.  
16 Anyway, that evolved. We were also involved in missions along the DMZ (demilitarized  
17 zone) dropping leaflets with speakers and so forth. Chieu Hoi meant surrender and we  
18 would drop leaflets out telling people that a good time to surrender would be now, that  
19 sort of thing, written in Vietnamese. We'd be flying at five hundred feet above the  
20 ground, which was extremely dangerous to me. That was too low to evade a lot of small  
21 arms fire and too high to not be missed by the people shooting at you. So that was  
22 always kind of dangerous, but we'd be kicking out a lot of leaflets, making low passes  
23 over town, stuff up in the DMZ area—the same thing with speakers. There'd be a  
24 division PSYOPS guy in the back speaking Vietnamese. We'd be flying fairly low so  
25 they could hear on the ground. They'd be telling the same thing, kind of those leaflets.  
26 Those were missions I think I only flew once or twice and I avoided those like the plague.  
27 They were very dangerous although nobody seemed to ever get hurt on them. It just  
28 seemed like they would be. We were Command and Control was basically each battalion  
29 had their own aircraft equipped for their battalion commander. They had multiple radio  
30 steps in the back and so forth, but typically those had to go under maintenance or  
31 something happened to them and we would supply an aircraft for that purpose out of our

1 flight companies, our lift companies. We would be assigned to a battalion or brigade or  
2 an artillery or whatever unit that was doing Command and Control. We'd show up at  
3 their pad early and they would load all the radios on board and bolt them down and plug  
4 them in and all that kind of stuff. We'd be flying some colonel around, occasionally a  
5 general. Sitting pretty high above a battlefield and commanding the battlefield, dropping  
6 the colonel in when he wanted to visit somebody and that sort of thing. So those were the  
7 basic missions. Like I said, eighty or ninety percent of the missions were combat assault  
8 or logistical resupply. There were some odd and end missions that I had done maybe a  
9 one time only deal. For instance I landed on an aircraft carrier one time. That was kind  
10 of a C&C mission, but it was—I don't know. I took some colonel out to visit the Iwo  
11 Jima actually. It was the aircraft carrier called Iwo Jima out in the South Pacific or the  
12 South China Sea I guess it's called, South China Sea. Basically landed on an aircraft  
13 carrier not knowing how. That was kind of an adventure for me. The colonel went in to  
14 see whoever he was gonna see. I don't know if it was the Marine commander there or the  
15 captain of the ship or whoever. The Navy treated us great. They gave us a tour of the  
16 place, got some good food that we hadn't had for a while, opened the PX (Post  
17 Exchange) up for us. Anyway, the Navy always treated us pretty good when we were out  
18 there. I guess they were thanking God that they weren't on land like we were. They  
19 treated us pretty nice. We did odds and end missions like lerp (LRRP) missions, long  
20 range reconnaissance patrol where we—the time we did this, there was a Ranger unit  
21 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. I don't know what it was called. I think it was the 75<sup>th</sup>  
22 Infantry Division eventually, but before that is when we were working with it. They had  
23 a name change or something. Anyway, whatever the Ranger unit was, they did long  
24 range reconnaissance patrols. When we went back to An Khe for our—an aviation unit  
25 had to rotate back every few months to do division support sort of things, perimeter  
26 support and that kind of thing. They did have some military operations going on around  
27 An Khe even though most of the division was elsewhere. These long range  
28 reconnaissance patrols were kind of interesting in that we always used three slicks, no  
29 gun ships. The team, which was maybe a five or six or seven man team, was on one of  
30 the ships that we played this leap frog, drop in to some fake LZs, three or four in a row.  
31 We flew a path that would make it difficult for somebody observing us to know that we



1 dropped anybody off into an LZ. We'd fly trail formation when it may be forty-five  
2 second to a minute spacing. The first ship would drop into an LZ, would do a sudden  
3 deceleration behind a hill, come to a hover. The other two ships would fly over it and  
4 then the first ship would pick up and take off and join the formation about a minute  
5 behind us. What's now, but the second ship used to be the last ship. It looks like three  
6 aircraft went behind a hill and three aircraft came out, but they're in a different order.  
7 We would do that several times until one of them actually let the people out. So nobody  
8 would know where they really did it unless they were actually on a hill top watching the  
9 leap frog stuff, which we usually planned our flight paths so that would be less likely to  
10 happen. We did that kind of stuff. There was always an occasional medevac. We'd be  
11 pulled off a log mission or a C&C or whatever because they had some emergency  
12 medical evacuation of some sort. We always did that kind of stuff. The regular medevac  
13 pilots weren't always available. What else have we got here?

14 SM: How about impromptu SAR missions?

15 DF: Pardon me. Impromptu—

16 SM: Impromptu SAR, search and rescue?

17 DF: Never did any of that although it happened occasionally. Me personally I  
18 didn't get involved in that. Usually if somebody went down—ordinarily unless you're  
19 flying a log mission you're always with other aircraft. So the only time that would  
20 happen is if a log bird went down or somebody from another service, Air Force or  
21 whatever. If we had aircraft in the area we would get a mission to go do that, but it  
22 wasn't so much search and rescue as more rescue. We always kind of knew where  
23 everybody was in that case. So I really didn't get involved in much of that. Up in Dac  
24 Tho we saw where an F-4 went down. By the time we got there, there was already  
25 people in the ground combing it and we were just kind of observing from the heights. I  
26 didn't actually do some of that. We did get some of that pulled off now and then.

27 SM: What about—would the psychological, the PSYOPS missions, how effective  
28 did you think they were as you were conducting them?

29 DF: Well, as a twenty year old wobbly one we didn't really get any feedback  
30 whether they were effective or not. We just kind of did what we were told. We assumed  
31 they wouldn't be doing it unless they were effective. I didn't actually see anybody throw

1 their hands up and surrender. I really don't know. I would imagine they were marginally  
2 effective, but probably what they expected. I really don't have a feel for that. I really  
3 was—you just have no idea how much of a grunt I was. I really didn't know much and  
4 didn't really care much really about what was on the big picture.

5 SM: Okay. Let's see. During the first months that you were there or in the  
6 months leading up to the Tet Offensive of January '68, how would you describe the  
7 tempo of operations? Did it stay constant? Did it increase? Did it ebb and flow?

8 DF: Well, I would think when we were down at LZ English in Bong Son which  
9 was in II Corps and when we were back at An Khe as far as we were concerned we really  
10 didn't have much action. I mean, we did combat assaults. We did logistical resupply. It  
11 was really a good time for new guys like me because we got a good chance of learning  
12 the operations of the area or the area of operations, learning the area, learning how to fly  
13 that aircraft much, much better, learning company policy in the Army way and all those  
14 kinds of things before anything really serious happened. In November around  
15 Thanksgiving when we went up to Dac Tho that was the first real combat that I had seen.  
16 We had done combat assaults and occasionally somebody would take a hit or something  
17 and it was rare enough though to me to just taken a hit in the tail boom was enough for a  
18 story. By the time we got to Dac Tho, there was some infiltration from the North  
19 Vietnamese which really started getting involved more with the NVA kind of soldier as  
20 opposed to the Viet Cong kind, which typically you get involved in with city, the small  
21 villages and combat assaults in the plains area or over in the Bong Son area which is over  
22 on the coast. When we went to Dac Tho we were actually dealing with regular Army  
23 North Vietnamese troops, PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) troops or we called them  
24 NVA. They were well equipped, well armed and very well trained. Battles were a lot  
25 more intense over there and we had a lot of opportunities to actually get in where the  
26 bullets were flying. That was the first time I got one of my awards and I wasn't even an  
27 aircraft commander. When we got back from Dac Tho it was back to Bong Son. It was  
28 back to the same old stuff again, not really much going on and then they moved us to I  
29 Corps which was farther up north. When we got up there, when we first showed up it  
30 was kind of like a surprise I think to not only our own Marines and other people there that  
31 we showed up, but also to the enemy. They were pretty fat, dumb and happy fighting the

1 Marines who had basically control of I Corps and the way they did things. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cav  
2 went up there because they were a quicker reaction force. They could move around  
3 quicker and make things happen. We basically were fighting nothing but North  
4 Vietnamese soldiers at this point in time and that's when the combat picked up. So it was  
5 in January, but it was before Tet. We moved up. I don't know. Between January first  
6 and January tenth I think to a little LZ north of Phu Bai that we called Tombstone when  
7 we first landed there. It was also renamed to something related and it eventually became  
8 Camp Eagle. So I had three names, Tombstone and Camp Eagle. One that's in the  
9 history books are the one that was in between. I can't remember. Let's see if I even have  
10 it written down here. It doesn't look like it. Anyway, Tombstone—when we first moved  
11 up there the Cav had never really moved that far in-country before and a lot of the  
12 aviation units like ours loaded the aircraft up with our personal belongings of the crews  
13 and went up. I don't remember. I think—well, in my platoon anyway—I don't know if  
14 the whole company flew up. I think so. We would find a spot—they didn't have  
15 anyplace at Phu Bai for us so we just found a spot out in a graveyard called Tombstone  
16 with no perimeter or anything else. We were sleeping on the ground without a perimeter,  
17 aircraft parked there, and really didn't have any trouble although we were particularly  
18 nervous about it. We usually like to have, being aviators, we're not consider ourselves  
19 infantry type warriors. Anyway, nothing happened. We worked with Seabees to get us  
20 kind of habitable. They made us some roads and some revetments for the aircraft. We  
21 weren't there probably for ten days or ten, fifteen days at the most before we moved to  
22 Camp Evans, which was a Marine regimental base that they abandoned so that we could  
23 move into there. When we got there we actually had an airfield of things built up. When  
24 we started doing maneuvers around there, there were still Viet Cong in the area on the  
25 coastal cities and so forth. We were basically just getting our bearings. The Marines  
26 wouldn't let us have fuel, wouldn't let us have anything up there. So we were kind of  
27 hamstrung by our own quick reaction. We didn't have our own supply channel set up  
28 before we got up there. We were kind of on our own a little bit. Once the whole division  
29 had moved up there and we started operating probably by the end of January, Tet of  
30 course was in February. Things picked up really, really well. One of my tapes I  
31 mentioned right after we moved up there a guy named Bob Gosslin was doing a combat

1 assault and I was flying log or something else that day. I wasn't with them. His gunner  
2 shot twenty-five NVA prisoners or troops, twenty-five NVA troops just during an  
3 ordinary combat assault. Obviously things have changed. This was probably the battle  
4 of Quang Tri, which was the first part of the Tet Offensive for us. The Citadel at Quang  
5 Tri was attacked first. We were deeply involved in that and then the Citadel at Hue,  
6 which was the one that everybody thinks of as the major Tet thrust was actually two or  
7 three weeks later. So the Tet Offensive didn't actually happen on one day. It was like a  
8 month of action. Definitely things picked up. You know it seemed like an easy transition  
9 for us. We finally got in the war. We were kind of not looking forward to getting in the  
10 war, but it really hadn't been that much and now we actually had some stories to tell and  
11 some things to do. Interesting enough very few people got hurt. We still didn't get  
12 wounded. We took a lot more hits in the aircraft, but it was more dangerous. We weren't  
13 getting anybody hurt yet until the actual Tet Offensive in Hue and then we started getting  
14 people hurt—Rick Beeper for instance. You met him—was wounded during Tet. Some  
15 crew chiefs and so forth. So for the first time we started getting some casualties and then  
16 of course that got us thinking. We started actually paying a little bit more attention to  
17 what we did as opposed to—we were getting a little bit leaner and meaner if you know—  
18 we were becoming more soldiers. We were pretty soft up until that point I would say.  
19 That's the only comment I have on it really.

20 SM: Okay. During Tet, what are your most powerful memories of operations  
21 that occurred?

22 DF: Well, the biggest part of Tet Offensive I missed. I hadn't had an R&R (rest  
23 and recuperation) for a long time and everybody was getting—I think we were authorized  
24 two, but most people were getting one. I was way overdue for mine cause one of the  
25 reasons is I was on a waiting list to go to Australia. They had just opened up Australia  
26 and I didn't really want to go to Bangkok and all the usual places they had. I wanted to  
27 go to Australia where they spoke English and had regular people, what I considered back  
28 home type people. Just before the Tet Offensive at Hue, the Hue part of it, the really big  
29 one, I had actually flown to Australia and was sitting in my hotel back there and reading  
30 the papers about the big combat going on in Vietnam and just being glad I wasn't there. I

1 was wondering what my guys, what my friends were doing, but I was more concerned  
2 that I wasn't there. I was pretty thankful of it.

3 SM: What was that R&R like for you?

4 DF: It was wonderful.

5 SM: Besides of course as you already mentioned the concern of war that you had  
6 for your unit, but in terms of the needed break, what were you able to do?

7 DF: Well, it was a new adventure. There were three guys that sort of got together  
8 on the plane. One of which was a guy named Mike Petrovich who I went to flight school  
9 with and he was in a different unit in the 229<sup>th</sup>. He was in A Company. I knew him from  
10 flight school. So we hung around and then there was an infantry first lieutenant. I don't  
11 remember his name and I think he was one of the units that we supported a lot so  
12 probably 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade type unit. The three of us basically hung around together. We were  
13 on a plane. I don't know exactly when we decided to, but when we got to the R&R  
14 center in Australia they rent you a suit. If you want a suit they'll rent you one. We didn't  
15 have clothes. I had to have my folks wire me three hundred bucks, American Express or  
16 Western Union I guess wired me some money. I had some money to do some stuff with.  
17 We got assigned—the R&R center assigned us to our motels. We got assigned to a  
18 Travel Lodge in Bondi Beach which was kind of fortunate. The three of us were  
19 basically in the same motel. The three of us kind of hung out and it turned out what made  
20 it really nice and interesting is there was a young lady there about our age who's actually  
21 a little older than us. She was twenty-two maybe. She was there with her parents. She  
22 was an American and she was an airline stewardess for United Airlines. Back in those  
23 days they let them fly free on vacation including their family. So she decided to take her  
24 mom and dad to Australia. She was also in the Bondi Beach Travel Lodge. The four of  
25 us hung out together. So her and the three guys, we went to the zoo and we went  
26 shopping and we went to the Grand Prix of Australia, which was one of Jimmy Clark's  
27 last races before he was killed. We just did a lot of cool stuff together. I did some solo  
28 stuff. I rented a cab for a whole day and that was very inexpensive. I did shopping for  
29 my family. It was a great relaxing situation. We went to the beach. In February it was  
30 summer in Australia. It was like the Oregon coast or so or maybe California coast it was  
31 nice and warm in the summertime. So we spent a lot of time at the beach and whatever.

1 It was just a tremendous relaxing—I really didn’t want to go back. I can tell you that. I  
2 could get used to that. One of the things I noticed in Australia is they weren’t particularly  
3 crazy about English people. They had some sailors there. A lot of ships, English ships,  
4 would be parked there for their rest and relaxation wherever they were from. They got  
5 discriminated against by the Australians, but the Americans were highly non  
6 discriminated people. They were very helpful, buying us drinks, all that kind of stuff. So  
7 they loved us and didn’t like the British. I never knew that cause we were kind of all the  
8 same family. We’re all from—I guess that’s because Australia was a penal colony at one  
9 time I guess. Anyway, they didn’t like the English and they liked us. We went  
10 nightclubbing almost every night. Saw go-go dancers for the first time down there. They  
11 had them in the U.S. I just was from Oregon. We didn’t have any big cities in Oregon to  
12 have go-go dancers. It was a good relaxing time. When I got back I was ready to go  
13 back to work I guess. I missed the worst part of Tet Offensive, which was thankful to  
14 me.

15 SM: What were you hearing? As far as the news that was coming into Australia  
16 during your R&R, did you guys keep abreast of what was happening? How quickly did  
17 you hear about Tet when it broke out?

18 DF: We weren’t taking newspapers. We weren’t listening to the radio. We  
19 probably were watching a little TV at night in the room or something. I don’t remember  
20 specifically when I heard about it, but we were probably walking past the newsstand  
21 downtown and saw the headlines or something—the Tet Offensive. It was big  
22 headlines—nothing specific about the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav necessarily. I don’t remember anything  
23 because the Tet happened the whole country wide pretty much. We got the worst part of  
24 it up in I Corps though. I don’t know—I just causally heard about it. I didn’t fix on it or  
25 anything, I just, “Huh, looks like they’re having some fun back in Vietnam.” Then off I  
26 did go to the zoo or whatever. I didn’t really think about it too much.

27 SM: What about while you were in-country for those first few months? What  
28 kind of news were you getting about what was happening back in the United States and  
29 what were your primary news sources in Vietnam?

30 DF: Well, the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper was basically our only printed news.  
31 I don’t remember how they were issued, but I think a bundle—I don’t know if they’re

1 weekly or daily to tell you the truth. As pilots we probably listened to Armed Forces  
2 Radio the most because we actually listened to them on our ADF, which is part of our  
3 navigational radio. We probably listened to radio more than anything. A lot of that was  
4 less news and more rock and roll. They had news and weather of course like any other  
5 radio station. Are you referring to the peace movement sort of thing?

6 SM: Oh, no. Just in general. Just in general. Anything.

7 DF: Most of the news we actually got was letters from our family to be real  
8 honest with you. That was important to us anyway, our local news. The *Stars and*  
9 *Stripes* was a very good newspaper I thought. Of course I don't know if it was biased. I  
10 mean, it told me what I wanted to know.

11 SM: Of course being a military publication I'm sure that—was there any concern  
12 over censorship or anything?

13 DF: No. I wish I could tell you—I just wasn't interested in—people who  
14 protested talked about the war more than I did I guess.

15 SM: Well, when you went back after your R&R what were things like?

16 DF: It was pretty much the same. I think it was busy. It was actually—the  
17 Quang Tri part of Tet happened before I left. It was pretty much the same. I'd heard—  
18 there was a lot of war stories going around. I think people were pretty much normal. We  
19 worked tighter and sharper, but that was before we left. We heard about the guy, the  
20 227<sup>th</sup>, who got a medal of honor or was put in for a medal of honor for making mini  
21 sorties into the Citadel Hue rescuing people. I don't remember his name, but he was the  
22 first aviator to get a medal of honor, an Army aviator, at least at that time. It turns out  
23 there was one awarded also in the Ia Drang, but that probably happened later. I think that  
24 we were much more hateful of our enemy. We were actually a little bit vindictive.  
25 Anytime you hear people getting hurt we were actually out to get them now. So we were  
26 pretty charged up to go do some damage. I don't think there was additional fear or  
27 anything like that. I just think that we sucked it up and became more military. To be real  
28 honest with you I think we actually had more fun. We were actually doing what we were  
29 supposed to do more. A lot of the first few months in-country were kind of like boring  
30 holes in the sky for all we saw. Now it looked like we were really actually doing  
31 something. So there was that kind of attitude, at least that's what I recall.

1 SM: What about the tempo of operations? Did that decidedly pick up upon your  
2 return?

3 DF: Yes, the answer is yes it did. It was definitely noticeable, but the other thing  
4 is that our aircraft availability started dropping. It used to be pretty easy to always have  
5 twelve aircraft up for missions everyday out of twenty. We were getting down into areas  
6 some days when we only had eight. I think a day or two after the A Shau assault we were  
7 down to five or six aircraft that were flyable for missions out of twenty. For the most  
8 part we always had twenty aircraft and then as soon as we got up the—or after the A  
9 Shau we were always short aircraft because the ones we lost in the A Shau we didn't get  
10 replaced right away. So we maybe had five or six flyable, but we didn't have twenty  
11 anymore. We only had eighteen or something like that. Obviously the maintenance man  
12 and the maintenance officer and the maintenance platoon were a lot busier because there  
13 was a lot more bullet holes to patch and a lot more flying hours. Although we had quite a  
14 few flying hours before, but I think early there was I recall a little bit about flying hours  
15 in that there was supposedly—you're supposed to only get seventy flight hours a month  
16 and then you had to get a flight surgeon sign off if you went over seventy. For the first  
17 few months up there seventy was about what we got. The next thing you know we're  
18 getting a hundred hours a month and now they raised it to ninety with the flight surgeon  
19 signing it off. The next thing you know it was a hundred and then 120 or something like  
20 that. It's kind of like catch 22, as soon as you hit your twenty-five missions they raise it  
21 to thirty. That sort of thing was going on. It's obvious that the flight surgeon did what  
22 the Army told him to do cause if they needed you to fly 120 hours a month that's what  
23 they were gonna get. So we were flying a lot more hours. We probably were getting  
24 tired, but I don't remember being particularly upset about it because we all—I actually  
25 wanted to see if I could get an average a hundred hours a month for twelve months. So I  
26 was trying to hit twelve hundred hours anyway. So I kind of welcomed it.

27 SM: What about—?

28 DF: We all had our little agenda, you know.

29 SM: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. How was the morale of the unit in general and in  
30 particular of the crews that you worked with?



1 DF: The morale was very good. Everybody wanted to go kick some butt. I  
2 didn't see any issues with morale except the night of April nineteenth when Major Lang  
3 gave his speech. None of us really wanted to go to work the next day.

4 SM: What happened?

5 DF: That's when people in our unit for the first time got killed. We lost two  
6 aircraft on the assault of the A Shau Valley. One complete crew and one person out of  
7 the second crew. We all took hits including me and I'd never taken a hit up to that day  
8 and never took another one afterwards actually. I was sort of bulletproof. I considered  
9 myself kind of bulletproof. Anyway, that was such a bad day. There was so much anti-  
10 aircraft fire, so much .50-caliber fire, so much ground fire. It seemed like the only way  
11 we could get through the day was by luck. It seemed like it was inevitable that we were  
12 gonna get killed that day. We made it through the day. We didn't want to go out there  
13 the next day, but basically we got our pep talk and speech and the next morning we got  
14 up and went out there. It was about equal to the day before, but it didn't seem to be—we  
15 had less casualties or no casualties. From that point on it was just a mission that you had  
16 to do and became easier and easier as each day went on. That first day was like getting  
17 kicked with by a mule. It really woke us up. They really were trying to hurt us out there.

18 SM: Yes, sir. Would you say that—so that was the hardest part of your first tour,  
19 the hardest series of battles?

20 DF: Yeah. The A Shau Valley was definitely the hardest. Khe Sanh was nothing  
21 compared to that. Khe Sanh we had just finished up before we did the A Shau Valley.

22 SM: Wow.

23 DF: Yeah. It was really bad.

24 SM: Are there any particular events that you recall related to the assault in the A  
25 Shau?

26 DF: Well, interesting enough the last couple years as I'm starting to get back into  
27 the thought processes here I basically let Vietnam go for thirty years or so and then I  
28 started for whatever reason I started thinking about it again and getting involved and  
29 hooking up with people I used to know and so forth. The one day that I remember the  
30 least was April nineteenth. I remember how bad it was and that people got killed that day  
31 and I remember a couple of incidents that happened to me, but basically that whole day

1 was blank. I mean, it was just like I erased it from my mind. It was that bad. I  
2 remember a number of incidents. Do you want a specific story or something?

3 SM: Well, whatever you remember specifically about the battle that occurred  
4 there and this was obviously one of the most difficult things you encountered in Vietnam.  
5 So you can talk about it.

6 DF: This is the day that tested my courage. I had never considered myself a very  
7 courageous person. I'd just been pretty lucky and sharp enough to avoid most any  
8 situation that I would actually have to have some courage for. This is the first day that I  
9 actually found out what courage meant. Courage meant to produce in spite of fear as  
10 opposed to being fearless. That I discovered. We were basically that day we were to  
11 assault part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. Typically we didn't support the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. We were  
12 primarily a 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade people. So we didn't have the lead for that day. This is stuff I  
13 learned later, part of it, but it all makes sense with the story. So we were in the second  
14 flight of thirty aircraft or so. The 227<sup>th</sup> this whole helicopter battalion had to leave that  
15 day and they typically supported the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. We typically supported the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.  
16 So the second group of aircraft was us. We were flying into the A Shau Valley. We had  
17 already heard over the radio the carnage so to speak. "I'm going down. Mayday.  
18 Mayday. I'm taking hits," and all that kind of stuff that goes over the radio traffic. We  
19 hadn't even come over the edge of the valley and we'd heard that. So we were already in  
20 deep weeds. We knew coming over there, but you're in formation and that's one of the  
21 beauties of the military and the concept of formations and the concept of the way they do  
22 battle. You can't just get out of the formation. It's not like you can go home. You're  
23 kind of stuck so off you go. Since you're stuck you've got to do the best you can. When  
24 we basically came in for the first sortie that's when we saw the anti-aircraft fire and all  
25 that kind of stuff. Basically it was just drop your nose and head and try to get in get out  
26 before somebody noticed you were there. Obviously they noticed we were there and  
27 shooting at us. Anyway, the first sortie was the surprise and then of course the second  
28 sortie you already knew what you were getting into. So it was worse. You sit in there  
29 just basically shaking in your boots and adrenaline running and indigestion and  
30 everything else you can think of and loading up another set of troops knowing you're  
31 going back in there again. The weather was kind of bad and we had to deal with the

1 weather situation. Some people described us as climbing out. I'm not sure we climbed  
2 out the first day, but when we got over the valley the valley was fairly clear. We only  
3 had a single ship LZ so we were strung out for a long ways when you had thirty ships  
4 strung out at about a forty-five second interval. There's like thirty minutes worth of  
5 ships. It takes thirty minutes just to get the first sortie in one at a time. Then if you had  
6 an aircraft go down in the LZ or something, the second ship behind him would have to  
7 make a go around, join the tail and the one behind him probably had timed a maneuver  
8 around the aircraft that was down. So it was kind of messy that way. Two instances that  
9 happened to me personally that day was I was—one of the things that we were trying to  
10 do is that once we got infantry on the ground we didn't want to go outside of the  
11 perimeter that they established. We knew that once we were in the perimeter—of course  
12 when you're four or five hundred feet above the ground they can shoot at you from a long  
13 ways outside the perimeter. We tried to keep in the secure area that at least if we went  
14 down we'd be going down behind our alliance instead of in front of them. So our  
15 thinking was—so when we come out of the LZs we would pull in a lot of power and  
16 make a real tight turn and try to stay real close to right where we dropped the people off.  
17 So I was in about a forty-five degree bank making a right turn around a barrage of bullets  
18 came in through my cargo door which is open, the whole, the opening, in one door and  
19 out the other. I saw five or six tracers when I was looking. I was flying and I was  
20 looking out the right—I was making a right turn. So I was basically looking through the  
21 cargo door when it was flying just to keep my visual reference to the ground. I saw five  
22 or six tracers coming through. They shoot four solids to one tracer or five solids to one  
23 tracer. I don't know if four in one or five in one. You can sit there—that was machine  
24 gun fire. So anyway, that was the first or second sortie. That was that story for me that  
25 day. Later after—apparently we did five sorties or we were planning to do five and on  
26 our fourth sortie I started getting a vibration in the rotor blade. You remember the book  
27 *The Red Badge of Courage*?

28 SM: Yes, sir.

29 DF: I hadn't read it at that time. I've actually read it later, but this was my red  
30 badge of courage. Now I had a reason to go back. I was getting a vibration in the cyclic  
31 stick in the control systems. So I contacted a flight leader and said, "I've got a vibration

1 and I don't know what the deal is." He says, "Go on back." So I said, "All right. You  
2 talked me into it." I was basically after the fourth sortie I was heading back to  
3 operations. I was really glad that I was not in that bunch anymore. I didn't feel any  
4 remorse about leaving the others behind or anything. I just wanted to get out of there.  
5 That's where I started losing it as far as the courage part goes. I was looking for any  
6 excuse I could do to get out of there although it was a legitimate excuse. I really did have  
7 a vibration. When I got back to operations we had flown every flyable ship that day. So  
8 I was pretty comfortable knowing that I wasn't going back out again because there was  
9 nothing they were gonna assign me. As soon as I shut down they actually had brought  
10 another ship up and it was marginally up. It turned out to be Bill Quigley's ship, 785 as  
11 we discussed it later on. It wasn't completely up. It had some issues with it, but they  
12 weren't non flyable issues. They were just—enough was wrong with it that it was the  
13 pilot's prerogative to take it or not. So I told operation I wasn't gonna take it. The  
14 operation sergeant, Mike Ward, who you now know laid into me because he had just  
15 heard about his boss' death, Dave Nessitz's death. He was a little on edge. He was  
16 pretty upset anyway. He said, "That ship's flyable. They need you out there. Get your  
17 ass out there," basically. I agreed with him. I went and cranked it up and headed on out.  
18 So he was the guy that slapped my face when I was being—what do you call it when a  
19 woman gets hysterical? I wasn't really hysterical, I just didn't want to go back out again.  
20 Anyway I cranked it up and got up and we headed on out. Then the whole flight was real  
21 easy so I never had to go back out again after that day or that day. I never had to go out  
22 that day again. That was my closest slip to actually just not wanting to be in this war  
23 anymore. After the speech that night I was back in the saddle the next morning and  
24 nothing else deterred me from that point on. That was my one little break down in the  
25 whole war.

26 SM: What was the crew's response to Mike Ward and his—?

27 DF: Well, the crew wasn't there.

28 SF: Oh, okay.

29 DF: Just me and the copilot and I'm not sure the copilot was there because they  
30 assigned us the aircraft. I went up to refuse the mission and he was probably down  
31 preflight. It was just me and Mike Ward.

1 SM: How did you feel about what he said to you?

2 DF: I felt that he was right and he was very insubordinate. He was so right that I  
3 wasn't gonna worry about it and I didn't want it to ever come up to the surface again so  
4 that was it. He got away with that and you can see he's a great guy.

5 SM: Yes. So what was it like going back?

6 DF: Going back the rest that day?

7 SM: Mm-hmm.

8 DF: Well, it was just like I got my sense knocked into me. So I was heading  
9 back out live or die. When I told you I was leaving the valley with a hit, going back to  
10 operations with no remorse?

11 SM: Mm-hmm.

12 DF: Well, I had the remorse now. I didn't want to leave my buddies out there by  
13 themselves not that I could help much, but I figured I might as well be out there with  
14 them if they were gonna be out there. So he knocked the sense into me basically. I was  
15 starting to feed on myself.

16 SM: What was the rest of the day's action like? Were you able to provide some  
17 relief, bring some people back? How (inaudible)?

18 DF: As soon as I got altitude and contacted a flight leader that said the fifth sortie  
19 had been scrubbed. Just turn around and go back. Everybody was heading back. No one  
20 else did another sortie either. I did the same number sorties as everybody else. I had a  
21 way to get out of the last one, but it turns out everybody did.

22 SM: What was your relationship like from that point on with Mike and the unit?

23 DF: I was embarrassed that he had to do that for me. It did not diminish at all. If  
24 anything I had more respect for him. I've actually recently told him that story probably a  
25 year and a half ago and apologized for being the jerk I was. He said he remembered it,  
26 but it was just par for the course he said. It was no big deal. So I cleared my conscious  
27 of it just recently here.

28 SM: Okay. Well—

29 DF: You're the second person to hear this story.

30 SM: What was it like in terms of the operations the following day and so on?

1           DF: One of the problems that we had the first day is we—and I didn't even know  
2 this until later, but we didn't have any gunship support. Apparently they were not  
3 notified when we took off to go assault. They were laagering someplace else. They  
4 didn't get the word. There's always somebody that doesn't get the word. It turned out to  
5 be the gunships that didn't get the word. The next day we had gunships. There was a lot  
6 more suppression. We had enough infantry units on the ground that we had more secure  
7 places to land. We had less incidences. We still had the en route stuff. They were still  
8 shooting at us with anti-aircraft. I didn't know this at the time, but history will tell us that  
9 that valley was actually mostly full of support troops, anti-aircraft troops, supply troops  
10 and things like that. What they had was the biggest battle was basically against the  
11 aircraft. They were basically well armed. Those are the kind of the people they had  
12 there, but the infantry did not have much of an issue. There weren't that many solid  
13 infantry troops on the other side there. They had less problems on the ground than we  
14 had in the air. Does that make sense to you?

15           SM: Yes, sir.

16           DF: So it was actually a huge supply depot for them and that's one of the reasons  
17 we wanted to knock it out. They had infantry there for their own protection, but it wasn't  
18 like we were dealing with the division of infantry. We were dealing with the division of  
19 anti-aircraft soldiers.

20           SM: For the rest of your first tour—

21           DF: It was all down hill from there.

22           SM: Was it really?

23           DF: Yeah. That was a big one.

24           SM: What do you remember most about the operations continuing after Tet?

25           DF: Well, I remember that we were always extremely careful going in there  
26 because everyday somebody would be taking a hit and everyday—I don't know if we lost  
27 the division. Our unit didn't lose any more aircraft, but we continued to take hits in the  
28 aircraft. It was a big valley. There was lots of people there. We had never really got  
29 them all out. We basically did a knockout punch on them, got most of their material and  
30 then left. It's not like we—we didn't actually go in as like a military unit with a front  
31 where they're moving through the valley and basically capturing the valley. We basically

1 went in as a Cav troop and assaulted here and there and collected our stuff and then  
2 pulled out. So there's lots of people left even when we left and even on the last sortie  
3 when we're pulling out of the valley we were still getting shot at and taking hits. It was  
4 basically interesting. We flew higher and faster. We did a lot more—we thought a lot  
5 more about evasion and what we do and our flight paths and making sure we didn't  
6 repeat ourselves and making sure we were flying over places we could land. We just  
7 were a lot more professional. Everyday was dangerous and it got pretty routine for most  
8 of us, but we had—I don't know if I mentioned this to you before or not—but we had a  
9 couple of pilots. One I had forgotten about that I've seen pictures there that wore a steel  
10 pod and a flack jacket even to bed. He was kind of a new guy. I don't remember much  
11 about him, but there was a guy that had come into our unit during that time after the  
12 initial assault and he obviously had read the newspaper accounts of it. Of course he had  
13 heard us talking about it. When he joined the unit they don't go flying immediately.  
14 They spend a week getting oriented and getting their check out and all that kind of stuff,  
15 their flight check out. Then they're assigned to a senior AC. So I'm not sure I had him  
16 on his first mission, but I had him on his first mission going to the A Shau Valley. This  
17 was probably in May. This is probably like two or three weeks after April nineteenth  
18 when it was getting pretty routine. We were probably flying log that day or something. I  
19 picked this guy up. I can't remember his name and it really doesn't matter, but I do  
20 remember he was a prior service guy. He was probably an E6 or an E7 before he went to  
21 flight school and became a warrant officer. So he was an older fella. He was probably  
22 thirty as opposed to twenty. As I was flying out toward the A Shau Valley I said, "You  
23 go ahead and fly." He's basically flying and then the next thing you know the aircraft is  
24 starting to veer to the right a little bit, just kind of making a real slow turn. I tapped him  
25 and just pointed toward the valley, which was a little bit left of where he was flying. I  
26 noticed he was glassy eyed and frozen at the control—absolutely frozen solid. I ask  
27 him—I basically said, "I've got the aircraft." He didn't let go of it. He wasn't giving  
28 me—he was basically in a trance. This is basically a fear induced trance. So I had to hit  
29 him with my clipboard I had on my knee. I had to hit him in the helmet to wake him up  
30 so to speak so I could get control of the aircraft back because he was pretty stiff on the  
31 controls. I took him back to the unit and got a replacement for him. He was—I reported

1 the situation of course. By the time the mission was over that day when I got back that  
2 day with our original mission he was gone. So he basically lasted in our unit till that day,  
3 which is probably a week. There are people out there that were so intimidated by it, it  
4 was—we hadn't seen any of these up till this time. There were people coming into our  
5 unit that were already afraid before they ever even got in the first aircraft. I was sort of  
6 numb when I came in the unit. To me that was an adventure. I was so looking forward to  
7 it. It was different kinds of people—interesting.

8 SM: Any other particular operations, other operations that you recall from the  
9 post Tet period?

10 DF: Actually, it was post Tet but pre A Shau. How's that?

11 SM: Okay.

12 DF: The month of March there was two big incidents. I've written stories about  
13 them both. One of which was a night killer hunter mission. The second one is I was  
14 assigned to the, what we thought were called, Special Forces unit down in Phu Bai. It  
15 turns out it was the studies and observation group of MACV. It's called SOG. Anyway,  
16 they're spooks. They're Special Forces guys, SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) and really all  
17 special guys. We were insurgenting them in and around the A Shau Valley and also  
18 around Kon Tum or around the Khe Sanh area. I was assigned along with Tom Harnisher  
19 as my \_\_\_\_ (??) pilot to this unit at Phu Bai. We flew missions for them. Anyway, we  
20 basically—I had some previous experience with the A Shau Valley even before we  
21 assaulted it as a lot of stories about trucks running up and down the road aircraft landing  
22 at the airstrips at night, enemy aircraft—that sort of thing. The most dangerous single  
23 mission I was ever on was there, but the most danger I was ever in was actually April  
24 nineteenth on the assault of the A Shau Valley. We worked for Special Forces in  
25 inserting these six man teams, three of which were Americans and three indigenous. We  
26 always heard there were Cambodian mercenaries, but they were probably Chinese  
27 mercenaries or other non Vietnamese or non American people. They would go in and  
28 basically hang out in one of the ridgelines of the A Shau Valley and observe. They  
29 usually had a mission of some sort like infiltrate an NVA unit and try to steal a signal  
30 operating instructions, or one of the SOIs, what we called SOIs. Getting a lot of  
31 information for them. Disrupting missions, getting rid of their fuel lines or land lines.



1 They had all kinds of—if you’ve read the book *SOG* you’d know what I was talking  
2 about. Anyway, we worked for those guys for about a week doing insertions and  
3 extractions. That was prior to the A Shau and then after on April first we started the  
4 assault of Khe Sanh which was prior to the A Shau. So basically, our tenure at Phu Bai  
5 with Special Forces ended after the mission I flew on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth.  
6 We should’ve gone back and actually served more, but they called us back. So our  
7 detached status was now we’re back to our unit. It turns out it was because they were  
8 planning this big invasion to help the Marines up at Khe Sanh. So the whole Khe Sanh  
9 thing was two or three weeks, probably two weeks I guess since the A Shau was the third  
10 week where we showed the Marines what airmobile concept was all about. We assaulted  
11 huge amounts of 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade actually into areas and worked our way up to relieve Khe  
12 Sanh. Even though there was some—particularly the scout ships took a lot of hits and so  
13 forth, the assault ships really we got an occasional hit. It was hotter than it had been for  
14 us since Tet basically. It really wasn’t as big a deal as the Marines were making of it.  
15 Part of the reason was because the NVA just when they saw us coming decided to leave  
16 because they realized that they were outgunned. So they gave up and left. It wasn’t the  
17 Marines’ fault. That whole deal that we did up at Khe Sanh and then after the Khe Sanh  
18 and during the A Shau—after the initial assault in the A Shau when we’re starting to fly  
19 two or three weeks into it when we’re starting to fly routine missions again we would fly  
20 more SOG missions, but instead of being attached to SOG down at Phu Bai we were  
21 basically called off the mission during the day and said, “We’ve got a mission for you.  
22 Report to so and so.” We would take ourselves away from whatever mission we were on  
23 and go do that. We were on standby and working with Marine gun ships that time. Most  
24 of the time our own Cobras were too busy. Apparently the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav wouldn’t let the SOG  
25 have any of our Cobras. So we wound up with Marine gunships a lot. We did some  
26 Special Forces stuff over east of I guess it’s west in direction—anyway, into Laos and  
27 other areas that were denied that we were ever in inserting Special Forces guys and  
28 extracting them, denied areas they called them. Anyway, we did a lot of that kind of  
29 stuff.

1 SM: What was it like working with SOG guys? How did they interact with you?  
2 What kind of detailed briefings would you receive? Were they any different than the  
3 briefings you received?

4 DF: Actually they were a lot more detailed than we were used to. Actually, when  
5 we work with SOG we were actually—two things were different. Usually we didn't have  
6 the same aircraft everyday. We'd go to operations to our mission and we would be  
7 assigned an aircraft and a mission. When we worked with SOG we took a crew down  
8 there and that was our crew for the whole time we were there. So we got a better  
9 relationship with our crew people ourselves. The way the SOG missions work is there  
10 was three sets of crew there. They had a Vietnamese Air Force H-34s, CH-34s. The  
11 Army I'm sure gave them their old Army aircraft. They were called King Bees. We used  
12 to call them Choctaws, but they changed the name to King Bees when the Vietnamese  
13 owned them. They had a Vietnamese crew there with two King Bees. We had two  
14 Marine CH-46s and two Marine E model Huey gunships. We had two H model Army  
15 slicks and two Cobras, H-1G Cobras. So we had basically an Army crew, a Marine crew,  
16 and then a Vietnamese Air Force slick crew. Then the Army gunships or the Marine  
17 gunships would take turns supporting the Vietnamese when it was their turn to do the  
18 mission. We would basically rotate every third day we moved. One day we were  
19 primary and then the other crew was secondary and so forth. So if we put a mission out  
20 and then they became primary, the secondary would be at primary and so forth. So we  
21 rotated like that. When we went to the briefings we never really saw the SOG troops  
22 until they actually got on our aircraft. So we didn't have any relationship whatsoever  
23 with them except a case I'll get to in a minute here. Basically when we went to the  
24 briefings we were told where we were gonna be putting these people in, the frequencies,  
25 what their mission was gonna be. Like they were supposed to infiltrate and try to steal an  
26 SOI for instance or actually they were actually gonna kidnap a guy. That was the  
27 mission. So we got briefed on the mission. They didn't leave us any information that we  
28 needed to know they gave us. Typically up to that point we used to go in—they used  
29 to—I'm not sure we didn't this time, but we didn't unmark the aircraft, but I think we left  
30 our ID and all of our identification home. We didn't take any ID with us in case we were  
31 shot down they didn't—I don't remember specifically about that. I remember something

1 a little bit about that. Anyway, I actually flew two missions that I remember. The first  
2 day we were on the primary status and we actually inserted this troop or this small unit of  
3 six guys, three Americans, three indige. We inserted them. I was the backup ship which  
4 meant I flew high and I was the guy to go into rescue the other ship if it got shot down.  
5 That was my job. The other ship was flown by Ron Gutwine and George Phillips. I  
6 don't remember their tail number for their ships. I don't know who their crew were.  
7 They basically did the insertion. Ron Gutwine was the bold guy in our company. He  
8 liked to do that kind of stuff. So he always volunteered for that kind of stuff. I was a  
9 little bit more neutral. I enjoyed the missions, but I wasn't the one that wanted to be the  
10 lead on necessarily. We inserted this troop or the small unit. Then the next day we were  
11 off because we went from first standby to third standby. So now we were sort of half  
12 hour standby versus immediate standby kind of thing. The next morning these same guys  
13 got themselves in trouble. They got captured. They were going in to try to kidnap their  
14 guy and they got captured themselves. They'd shot their way out of it and were on the  
15 run. It was like eleven o'clock in the morning when we heard about it. It was the  
16 Marines turn to fly the mission. So two CH-46s and two E model gunships were the ones  
17 that were supposed to go get them out. It was their turn. Can we break for ten minutes?

18 SM: Sir, I was just gonna ask you if you wanted to, but you started this story and  
19 I didn't want to interrupt. So, yes.

20 DF: All right. Well, this is a good place to quit.

21 SM: Okay. Let's go ahead and take a quick break. Do you want me to call you  
22 back in ten?

23 DF: That'd be great.

24 SM: All right. Thank you, sir.

25 DF: You bet, Steve. Bye-bye.

26 SM: Okay, we're back from break continuing with the interview on the third of  
27 June. Sir, why don't we go ahead and continue that story about MACV-SOG?

28 DF: All right. The next morning where I left off is that the SOG team got  
29 themselves into trouble and got captured and had managed to shoot themselves out of the  
30 situation and were on the run. So there was sort of an expedient need. The weather that  
31 day was extremely bad. The ceilings were below a thousand feet. The visibility was

1 probably a half mile, three-quarter mile in fog and drizzle. It was just a really crappy day  
2 for flying. The Marines were on first standby and we were on third standby. We were  
3 out on the flight line because we didn't really have—we weren't really on standby per  
4 say since we were the third on the list and it was pouring down rain anyway. We were  
5 out just kind of looking at the other aircraft and we were talking to the Marine pilots.  
6 They were showing us their E model gunship which we had never seen before. It was  
7 kind of interesting in that it had fixed armament on the side kind of like our old—what  
8 the E model is, is like an Army C model with GE engines instead of the Lycoming  
9 engines. So they had a little bit more powerful engines. They also had better avionics.  
10 They had navigational stuff that allowed them to do IFR stuff landing on carriers in zero-  
11 zero weather and that kind of stuff. We had basically a VFR (visual flight rules)  
12 equipped aircraft. We had a little bit IFR equipment, but for all practical purposes from a  
13 nav aid perspective was this pure VFR. The Navy obviously spent their money on their  
14 aircraft in different ways than the Army did and it reflected in their different missions  
15 that they had of more IFR and more and more basically VFR type aircraft. The VFR  
16 meaning visual flight rules versus instrument flight rules. Anyway, we were looking at  
17 the aircraft and the aircraft was equipped with fixed mounted machine guns on the side  
18 and rocket pods on the side. They had a nose turret, which was kind of interesting. They  
19 had a little mini-gun in the nose turret. So they had part of the old armament plus some  
20 pretty modern stuff on it. About the time we were looking at these somebody from SOG  
21 operations came out and yelled at all the pilots to get their butts into the operations. They  
22 had an emergency extraction. We all went back there. I don't remember the Vietnamese  
23 Air Force pilots being there. I don't know where they were. They may have been there.  
24 I just didn't remember them. In any case, the Marines were up so they went in. We were  
25 basically informed that the SOG team was on the run and had to be extracted quickly  
26 before they got recaptured. The Marines basically refused the mission due to weather.  
27 That kind of surprised me because they had of the sets of aircraft out there they were the  
28 more capable in weather than the Army aircraft were, particularly the Cobras. The  
29 Cobras were not allowed to fly in clouds at all. So if they couldn't go out, we wouldn't  
30 go out with guns. Marines refused the mission and our team leader, Ron Gutwine, took  
31 the mission. So being the dutiful wing man that I was we all went out to our aircraft and

1 fired them up and took off and we took our Cobras with us. The Cobras weren't able to  
2 fly through clouds as I mentioned before. So we tried to find some sort of low level way  
3 to get out there. There was like a six thousand foot range of mountains between us and  
4 the valley. The east wall of the valley was six thousand foot range of mountains. We  
5 went up a number of different valleys just trying to see if we could fly at low level  
6 somehow or just get on the tree tops and kind of figure our way out there. After fifteen to  
7 twenty minutes of this we decided we just couldn't do it. So we sent the Cobras back and  
8 climbed out on top—contacted the forward air controller that was out there that had the  
9 team and radio contract with them. We started heading out toward the valley. So we  
10 went out without gun ships. We also burned a lot of fuel trying to find another way out.  
11 So we were actually kind of low on fuel to begin with. Probably from Phu Bai it was  
12 probably a half hour, maybe twenty-five minute flight out to the A Shau Valley. When  
13 we got out there the FAC (forward air controller) had the team located kind of. He had  
14 radio contract there on the run. So he sort of knew where they were sort of heading.  
15 During the briefing we were given basically three frequencies, a primary and two back-  
16 ups that the unit had in their call signs and so forth. This was the same unit we put in the  
17 day before. Anyway, they were at the bottom or pretty much at the bottom of the floor of  
18 the valley, one end of it. Well, maybe half way down or so. Ron Gutwine started calling  
19 to try to get them up on the radio and had them pop smoke to identify their location.  
20 They popped smoke and so did about twenty other enemy units popped smoke. So there  
21 was like twenty smokes going on simultaneously. Obviously we couldn't figure out  
22 which one was them. The next protocol was to change frequencies on the radio. So we  
23 changed frequencies to back up and asked them to get their signal mirrors out and flash  
24 us with signal mirrors. Thirty or forty signal mirrors started flashing at us and we could  
25 see the reflections of all these signal mirrors off. So obviously that frequency was  
26 compromised. So we went to third back up frequency and this time to locate them was  
27 we are gonna fly zig-zag patterns, actually Gutwine was. I was gonna be up high  
28 watching basically the zig-zag patterns. When you flew over them they're just gonna yell  
29 bingo over the radio or something like that just indicate where they were. Then Gutwine  
30 would lead them to—give them directions to the nearest clearing that we could get down.  
31 The aircraft at Gutwine was equipped—had McGuire rigs which were kind of like

1 seated—they're ropes with seats on the bottom. With that kind of rig once you get to  
2 drop the ropes through the trees they get on any of these seats and they lock themselves  
3 in. You can fly at the full speed of the aircraft and they won't come off. Since I was a  
4 back-up ship I only had ropes with a knot on the end of it. Typically if I had to use my  
5 ropes we were gonna have to fly at forty knots or less so long as they were on the rope.  
6 Anyway, once again I was the back-up ship. So that shouldn't have been an issue. Since  
7 we didn't have gun ships the forward air controller diverted some fire emissions off some  
8 trips to Hanoi. We had a Navy fire team came in first and was gonna provide us cover  
9 because we were without gun ships. I flew orbits around Gutwine, basically tried to  
10 provide him gun cover with my two M-60 machine guns. The only one that I was  
11 actually using was the one on the outside of the circle which would've been my right M-  
12 60 because the left one was basically in pointing toward where Gutwine was hovering  
13 after we finally located him. Excuse me, I just cleared my throat. We were taking fire  
14 and the FAC pilot was trying to get the Navy aircraft in close enough. This is where I  
15 discovered the Navy aircraft has different missions than the Air Force. They dropped  
16 their bombs from about five hundred to a thousand feet above the trees and climbed out  
17 pretty quickly. We were lucky that they could hit the side of the barn so to speak. They  
18 kept dropping their bombs from high altitudes and climbing back up again. We were  
19 used to little bit closer cover than that. Finally an Air Force fire team showed up and  
20 they got into the trees. It was F-4s and they were just laying Napalm and bombs and stuff  
21 right on the top of the trees. They were down there with us. We liked them better.  
22 Anyway, we were trying to suppress fire. We were getting shot at, but neither one of us  
23 were taking hits. They were just getting a lot of fire, but nobody was taking any hits.  
24 Like God was intervening here again in our lives. Finally Gutwine said he was finished.  
25 By this time I'm getting pretty nervous because we're getting low on ammo and we've  
26 been hovering around there for a long time. I figured he's got these six guys aboard and  
27 we were gonna be on our way just to climb up and get out of there. By the time he pulled  
28 his ropes up past the tops of the trees he only had three guys on board and one of them  
29 was hanging upside down. So there was three guys left in there and I was kind of upset  
30 with Guts for not getting all six of them. I thought he pulled up too soon or something  
31 before they were all on board, but apparently I learned later that they only want three on

1 an aircraft because they get tangled up when they're flying when there's too many ropes  
2 hanging down there. So I had to go in and drop my three ropes out. I had six ropes and  
3 we dropped three of them out. We did them through the trees. Bill Quigley was my crew  
4 chief and Tom Harnisher flew my right seat and I was hovering there trying to get that  
5 last three and of course Gutwine was heading away. He had his mind made up he was  
6 gonna land on the A Shau—the Aloui airstrip was the north airstrip in the A Shau Valley.  
7 The last people to land on that was an Air Force A1E pilot two years earlier who had  
8 gotten a Medal of Honor for rescuing another A1E pilot during an overrun of a Special  
9 Forces camp they called the A Shau Special Forces Camp. It was on Aloui airstrip. So  
10 no American had been on that airstrip in two years and Gutwine was heading down there  
11 with his three guys. I think he had in mind the guy hanging upside down needed to be  
12 put on board or need to be righted up. So he felt that he had to land down there. Instead  
13 of trees there was grass so he could land and get the guys and abort. In the meantime I'm  
14 still hovering without anything besides the FAC pilot and what was left of the ordinance  
15 of the high performance aircraft to protect me. Finally Quigley told me I got my three  
16 guys aboard. I started pulling them up and heading down to the A Shau airstrip too cause  
17 now I could only go forty knots. By this time our twenty minute fuel light was on. We  
18 were very low on fuel and we were probably five minutes into our twenty minute fuel  
19 light. We had a twenty-five minute flight back to Phu Bai once we cleared the mountain  
20 range. So we were clearly thirty or thirty-five minutes away from Phu Bai with only  
21 fifteen minutes worth of fuel left. It was obvious that we were gonna have to land on the  
22 A Shau—on the Aloui airstrip too in the A Shau Valley, the bottom floor of it to get our  
23 guys on board so at least we could get the speed up and see how far we can get before we  
24 run out of fuel and crash somewhere in the trees. We're basically landing on the A Shau  
25 airstrip. The forward air controller was flabbergasted by what we were doing and was  
26 telling the other Air Force pilots to see if they could get in close if they even had nothing  
27 left just to make low passes just to scare the crap out of the enemy while we were down  
28 there to try to get our people on board. So we finally got everybody on board and headed  
29 on down to the valley and climbed up. As we went over the east wall, the six thousand  
30 foot mountain range, and started heading back, one of us—I think it was me, but it  
31 doesn't really matter. One of us suggests that we go to Camp Evans instead because it

1 was like ten minutes closer. So we decided to go to Camp Evans and we were trying to  
2 figure out whether we had enough fuel to make it or not and it didn't really matter. We  
3 were just gonna go until we ran out of fuel anyway. We were on top of the clouds so we  
4 are VFR on top of the clouds. You can't see what's below us. You can't see the jungle.  
5 You can't see any possible landing areas, any firebases or anything else. So if we had a  
6 flame out then we would've been auto rotating through clouds and whatever underneath.  
7 Anyway, we just kept going and the FAC pilot chased us back. He was gonna keep us  
8 covered all the way in case we went down he'd be able to get some help for us. We  
9 basically made it all the way to Camp Evans and my fuel pressure—as soon as I touched  
10 down in POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants), the crew chief quickly jumped out and  
11 started adding fuel just before the fuel went into the tank because that fuel pressure gage  
12 dropped to zero and then popped back up to it's normal rating again. So obviously we  
13 just sucked a chunk of air through the fuel lines. Quigley was telling us the fuel lines  
14 were squealing when we were flying back. So they were already sucking a little bit of air  
15 then. But in any case we all survived. We took them back to Phu Bai and dropped them  
16 off. That led to a very big party the next day or two days later I think. So anyway I got a  
17 silver star for that and so did the rest of the crew.

18 SM: Amazing.

19 DF: Mostly because we were too stupid to go back and refuel before we went  
20 out. We felt that the grunts needed to be extracted. They were on the run. We were  
21 pretty upset with the Marines for refusing a mission. Our motto in the Cav is we never  
22 ever refuse a mission. We always try everything. That was pretty upsetting to us that  
23 they didn't even try especially when they had the better aircraft for the job. In the case of  
24 the gunships they did. As far as the slicks go we had the better aircraft. Those CH-46s  
25 are pretty big. Anyway, so the MACV-SOG guys threw us a party a couple of days later  
26 and that was the first time I was ever in an enlisted club. Most of these guys are enlisted  
27 men. Usually the officers aren't welcomed in enlisted clubs and vice versa. We went in  
28 the enlisted club at Phu Bai and we didn't buy drinks for—well, we never bought drinks  
29 while we were there actually. They always bought our drink. It was a big party. One of  
30 the things that kind of tells you how the training takes over is that we were back at—I  
31 don't know if we were at Sharon yet or not. Either Evans or Sharon, but let's just say



1 Evans. We were back there and when we got invited down, the company commander  
2 which was Rocky Lain let us take an aircraft down there as long as one of us didn't drink.  
3 So I was the designated pilot so to speak because I drank the least of everybody. When I  
4 got down there the party got so good I started drinking too. It turns out that I was the  
5 least drunk of the bunch of us. At about midnight or one in the morning when they  
6 closed the bar I flew home. The only thing I remember about the flight was cranking the  
7 aircraft up and waking up the next morning. I do not remember landing the flight itself  
8 and I was the most sober guy. That's when you know—when I got up the next morning,  
9 I said, "Oh my God, I can't believe it." Then I thought, I wonder where the aircraft is  
10 because I couldn't possibly have hovered it and put it in a revetment because there's too  
11 tight of tolerances. You know what a revetment is?

12 SM: Yes, sir.

13 DF: Two rows of sandbags, one on each side of the aircraft.

14 SM: Right, to protect it from small arms or more important shell fragments.

15 DF: Well, yeah mortars. Yeah.

16 SM: Mortars and shell fragments.

17 DF: These things are about five feet high and they're maybe two sand bags thick.  
18 They're the length of the aircraft. There's maybe three feet on either side of it of room  
19 once you get in it. I ran down there because I thought I'd park the sucker sideways or  
20 didn't even park it in a revetment just put it down any place I could find a spot big  
21 enough to take it cause I was so drunk. I found the aircraft and it was in the revetment. It  
22 was dead perfect aligned. It was absolutely in the middle. I couldn't have landed it  
23 better if I was stone sober. Anyway, I decided from then and there I would never do that  
24 again, but at the same time it was just—we just flew so much it was so automatic. I was  
25 probably unconscious the whole way and still did it. Anyway, that's that story.

26 SM: Okay. Now the—

27 DF: I'm writing a story by the way with a lot more detail.

28 SM: Oh, excellent. Okay. Were there any other memorable missions with the  
29 MACV-SOG guys? I mean, obviously they probably won't be able to rival that  
30 particular rescue.

1           DF: Well, that was a big mission for me. The only other thing is that we had this  
2 relationship with Marine pilots, particularly Marine helicopter pilots that was not the best.  
3 We didn't have any respect for them whatsoever. Marines being what they are we were  
4 the Cav and the Cav was getting all the glory for a change. Marines have gotten it over  
5 the years. Of course they were stumbling with that, but at the same time their Marine  
6 pilots were different than us. We were all young. We were twenty, nineteen, twenty,  
7 twenty-one year old warrant officers. Most of us with no college education—just  
8 basically driving our helicopters like we drove our cars back at the block. Drag the gut  
9 kind of stuff and hot rodding and drag racing and things like that. We kind of flew that  
10 way too. These Marine pilots were all seasoned military men. They were all captains,  
11 majors, rarely lieutenants, but they were all older than us. They were probably thirty or  
12 late twenties. We were young twenties and we still hadn't grown up. They had not only  
13 grown up, but they had families and kids and things like that. We always felt that they  
14 just weren't as good with us. They didn't fly in marginal weather for one thing as they  
15 demonstrated. They didn't take missions sometimes that we would never refuse. We had  
16 this sort of code in the Cav that we just never refused a mission when it came to grunts  
17 because they depended on us for everything and we'd never let them down. At the same  
18 time of course they protected us anytime we needed it too. It was a joint relationship  
19 there. The Marine pilots didn't seem to have that code with their other Marine units nor  
20 with us. So anyway, they also weren't as good of pilot's. We surmised later that the  
21 really good pilots in the Marines are flying F-4s. The ones at the bottom of the list flew  
22 helicopters because who would want to fly a helicopter if they could fly an F-4. In the  
23 Army helicopters were all we had and so the best pilots are for helicopters—so did the  
24 worst pilots. In the Marine Corps we felt the worst pilots probably flew the helicopters  
25 and the best ones flew the bigger equipment, the faster equipment. In any case, on one of  
26 our SOG missions that we were doing later after we went up to Khe Sanh and were flying  
27 just occasional SOG missions pulled off missions, we decided among the ACs to see if  
28 we could get the Marines and the Army pilots, the copilots, to change seats and would let  
29 the Army guys fly in the Marine helicopters and vice versa. You see that on my list  
30 down there, the swapping pilots with the Marines. So we are on a mission, a SOG  
31 mission up there up by Khe Sanh. They went along with it. But to being Cav guys in the

1 ACs of the Army helicopters were pretty experienced guys we decided that we were  
2 gonna show them how the Cav flies formation. Even though we never flew closer than  
3 one rotor width apart—that was sort of the kind of the rule of thumb was one rotor width  
4 is all we'd ever—as close as we'd get. We decided that we were gonna fly with  
5 overlapping rotor blades. We sucked it up so tight that we had about three feet of the  
6 rotor disc overlapping each other. So we could probably—we could've put a ten foot two  
7 by twelve between the two aircraft and walk between them. We were that close.

8 SM: That's pretty dangerous.

9 DF: Yes, it was very dangerous. Nothing happened and we didn't do it for very  
10 long, but we did it enough just to show the Marines how to fly helicopters. We did other  
11 things too. I mean, we were doing—when we spaced the formations out we were doing  
12 some fairly tight turns in formation when we got our rotor blade difference and things  
13 that we did on a day to day basis. The whole idea there was to show the guys, the Marine  
14 pilots, how to fly. Of course they thought we were the dumbest guys in the world  
15 because we were doing that kind of crap. We didn't think that. So anyway that was—  
16 anyway we never did have a respect really for Marine helicopter pilots.

17 SM: Did this surprise you as your experience in-country increased and this  
18 became I guess more commonplace, this gap that apparently existed between Army and  
19 Marine Corps pilots?

20 DF: Well, it only existed at the helicopter level. I'm not sure it existed  
21 everywhere, just certainly in our unit.

22 SM: Yeah. Just for you guys.

23 DF: We're the ones that flew with them a lot. Tom Harnisher will tell you  
24 stories. Are you interviewing him as well?

25 SM: Hopefully.

26 DF: Well, he got abandoned by some Marine gun ships on one of his SOG  
27 missions cause they started engaging him with a fifty cal and they basically peeled off  
28 and went home. Ask him about that when you get a chance. We absolutely hated to fly  
29 with the Marine gunships. Tom actually went to the company commander and asked him  
30 if there's anyway that we could get B Company to fly with us because those Marine  
31 gunships not only abandoned us, but they just were worthless. We're not criminalizing

1 the whole Marine Corps just these helicopter pilots. It could've been their corporate  
2 culture and their one unit, whatever unit it was. To this day I still have a hard spot for  
3 those guys.

4 SM: Well, let's take a—

5 DF: Not with Marines in general, but just the pilots.

6 SM: No. Yeah the—well, your pilot experience and those very specific pilot that  
7 apparently were flying at the same time as you. Let's take a step back. During our break  
8 we talked about a story about hunting elephants and tigers. If you would go ahead and  
9 talk about that real quick.

10 DF: Well, we flew alert missions a lot out of An Khe. This is when we were  
11 back on perimeter defense. We actually flew alert missions and we did some movement  
12 of military people around. One of the things in our briefings that—actually An Khe got  
13 mortared a lot more than we ever got up in English. It seemed like in the Central  
14 Highlands there that An Khe was a fairly large instillation with very few people. Most of  
15 the Cav was deployed out in the field. So there weren't really that many people at An  
16 Khe even though it was a huge facility except the rear echelon types, the supply system  
17 and admin system and charm school and all that kind of stuff that division level kind of  
18 things. That's why they sent a battalion back and an aviation unit back ever—rotated  
19 them back as basically provide that support for them. One of the things that came up in  
20 our briefings is every time we get mortared or something it was implied that the elephants  
21 that were used to pack the mortar and rocket rounds. So anytime that we see an elephant  
22 out there we were supposed to report it and try to kill the elephant. Anyway, we were  
23 always looking for it because it was sport to us. You know we were still kids. I keep  
24 reverting to that, but, man, it's great to the Army to actually let us do this. I mean if we  
25 actually did it accidentally we'd probably go to jail for it. Anyway, we spotted this herd  
26 of elephants. There was like I'd say ten or twelve in a herd. The way we spotted them,  
27 we were coming back from some mission out there and there was an LZ or an instillation  
28 called Kannack, which was northeast of An Khe a ways. It was a Special Forces camp  
29 and there was a lot of Montagnards there and that sort of thing. I think we were coming  
30 back from that area. We saw the trees down below moving like you'd see in the movies.  
31 We kind of slowed down a little bit and kind of made a couple orbits around there. We

1 saw the backs of some elephants coming through the clearings and go back into the trees  
2 again. There was like a whole herd of them. So we decided to engage these elephants  
3 and we opened up on them with the machine guns. What I remember about them is that  
4 these tracers kept disappearing in the backs of these elephants and of course we were  
5 firing four in one tracer, four solids to one tracer. Every now and then a tracer would be  
6 going in there. They would be running. They probably ran for fifty feet or a hundred feet  
7 with maybe fifty or a hundred rounds into them before they finally dropped. It took  
8 forever to make them go down with a 762 rounds that we buried in their back. Anyway,  
9 we wiped out this whole herd of elephants that way. That was kind of interesting. We  
10 also went down to check the damage. Somebody in the unit, it wasn't us and it wasn't  
11 that situation, found an elephant tusk which became part of our red tavern later on when  
12 we built our little tavern there. The tiger issue is that we were in the same time period we  
13 were returning from a mission also when we actually saw a tiger down there. This is my  
14 aircraft. I was the peter pilot on the aircraft. I wasn't AC yet on either one of these  
15 things. So we decided to try to kill that tiger because we were gonna try to look for  
16 decorations for our red tavern, see if we could get a skin up there. So anyway the AC got  
17 the crew chief to shoot him and he shot him in the back and broke his back apparently  
18 because his back legs stopped working and his front legs were still working. So he was  
19 pulling himself into the trees. He disappeared. Jokingly, we know how fierce these  
20 animals get when they're wounded. So jokingly he said, "Do you want us to set you  
21 down there chief and go and get him?" The consensus was no. So we don't know  
22 whatever happened to that tiger, but obviously he probably died later on, but we never  
23 went down to check him out. We got a tiger that day. We've also shot an elk and a deer.  
24 The deer wound up on the red tavern wall. The elk was the other platoon got it and got  
25 the rack and so forth. So there's a lot of wildlife in the high plains actually between Qui  
26 Nhon and An Khe and Pleiku in that area. That Central Highlands was just a wonderful  
27 area of wildlife and hunting. They had pheasants and all kinds of interesting stuff there.  
28 That's the elephant and tiger story. Anyway, we did report—we didn't report the tiger  
29 incident, but we did report the hunting of the elephants. We did get a lessened rocket  
30 attack sequence for a while. I think they were actually used for that packing weapons and  
31 we did eliminate that one herd.

1 SM: Wow. What a shame.  
2 DF: Huh?  
3 SM: What a shame.  
4 DF: Yeah. It is.  
5 SM: Killing those animals.  
6 DF: Nowadays, the Sierra Club would of course be in uproar over the thing and I  
7 wouldn't do it again, but it was wartime and you're younger.  
8 SM: Yeah. You don't have a choice. They're using them as pack animals.  
9 You've got to consider them war material.  
10 DF: Yeah. So, anyway that's that one.  
11 SM: Yeah. What about setting up camp at Kon Tum?  
12 DF: The only reason I put that on my list is that when we got to Kon Tum the  
13 reason that we were sent up there is that they didn't have enough aviation support for the  
14 units that were there. They had a 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that was there and they had 173<sup>rd</sup>  
15 Airborne Division was there. When we got to Kon Tum there was a number of non-  
16 divisional aviation units. What I mean by non-divisional is that 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and the 101<sup>st</sup>  
17 Airborne, which was the airmobile unit then, also had indigenous aircraft. All the other  
18 infantry units, their lift capability came from separate units that were part of the 1<sup>st</sup>  
19 Aviation Brigade. The 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade owned every aviation unit except the ones  
20 owned by the Cav and the 101<sup>st</sup>. So the Cav units were called divisional and the 101<sup>st</sup>  
21 Airborne units were called divisional units. All the other separate aviation units were  
22 basically attached as necessary, the gun slingers and all these other different call signs  
23 you hear. They were all so organized differently in that the aviation units were called  
24 assault helicopter companies and they had three slick platoons and a gun platoon. So we  
25 had two slick platoons in each of our units and we had a gun company with three  
26 platoons. Each of the three platoons supported one of the slick units, one of the slick  
27 companies. So we had a separate gun company and a separate slick company in  
28 divisional because we were related to each other. Non-divisional units had everything  
29 they needed in themselves. So they had their own gunships basically. That was how they  
30 were different in organization. They had a number of these units, 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade  
31 units at the Kon Tum airport. We landed in the Kon Tum area and started setting up an

1 airport, a space for ourselves. They basically kicked us out and said, “You guys can’t be  
2 in here. We don’t have enough room for you and your aircraft. Get your stuff out of  
3 here.” We wound up going down to the end of the runway outside their perimeter of the  
4 Kon Tum military unit there, the military base there. We were on the outside of their  
5 perimeter setting up camp. So we were kind of rejected and I don’t think it was so much  
6 room as just you guys are Cav. We didn’t ask you up here. Somebody else did and we  
7 don’t want you around us. Get the hell out of here. So we retaliated in certain ways, but  
8 we had our platoon leader, which was Captain Hamburger, when we first went up there it  
9 was just our first platoon. Eventually the whole company moved up there. For the first  
10 few days it was just our first platoon and Captain Hamburger got the engineers to lay  
11 some concertina wire around our aircraft and tents. We were basically sleeping on the  
12 ground and underneath the aircraft and so forth for the first few days. We had to eat C-  
13 rations cause they wouldn’t let us in their mess hall and things like that. So when we  
14 finally got our company area built up we got our showers and everything built and we put  
15 a sign on top of the showers and pointed because the unit next door and I don’t remember  
16 what unit it was. Captain Hamburger does. Anyway, they weren’t ready yet. They  
17 weren’t combat ready. They had just arrived in-country about a month before and they’re  
18 going through their—they came in as a unit and they weren’t combat ready. That’s one  
19 of the reasons we were there. We were there basically doing their work until they were  
20 combat ready. They had been there quite a while actually we thought for a month at  
21 least. So we put a sign up on our showers with a point in their direction that says, “Flight  
22 lessons. Five bucks.” We just harassed them every time—we’d low fly over them and  
23 land in our area. We just harassed them all the time, just yell over the wire. “When are  
24 you guys gonna join the war?” kind of stuff. So anyway that’s why I put that on there.

25 SM: What is the story about Vietnamese haircuts?

26 DF: One of the things that was different when we went up to Kon Tum is we  
27 lived—the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav was a field unit. We lived in tents. Our LZs we didn’t have hooch  
28 maids or indigenous people coming into our military installations that we called LZs like  
29 at LZ English. We lived in a tent. We took care of our own area and we did our own  
30 laundry or we sent it out—whatever. The rest of these divisional units they usually had  
31 wood buildings. They sort of attached to a headquarters area and they wound up with

1 better buildings and better showers and better mess halls and all that kind of stuff. They  
2 used to let people—like at An Khe for instance when we were back at An Khe we could  
3 go into town and get a haircut. While we're out in the field we basically cut them  
4 ourselves so to speak. So we went in the town of Kon Tum which was actually kind of a  
5 cool little village, kind of like a resort area you'd think of. It was pretty nice. They had  
6 lots of—I don't know. You're not old enough to remember Tijuana like it was when I  
7 was twenty, but it was kind of like going to Tijuana. So it's third world for sure, but very  
8 entrepreneurial, a lot of little merchants and stores and things like that. I got my haircut.  
9 My first haircut I ever got was a Vietnamese haircut. They were shaving my forehead  
10 and they shaved the top of my ears and they basically if it wasn't where my hair belonged  
11 they shaved it as part of the haircut. That's what I remember about it, just they shaved  
12 everything.

13 SM: Okay. Now did you have very much interaction with the Vietnamese people  
14 in general, civilians?

15 DF: No.

16 SM: I didn't know if maybe you encountered that fascination that some of them  
17 have apparently exhibited towards Americans and pulling the hair on your arms and that  
18 kind—

19 DF: No. No. No.

20 SM: Since body hair is not very common.

21 DF: No, I guess it wasn't. Anyway, no, we didn't.

22 SM: Well, you also mentioned a story about a burned soldier.

23 DF: Okay, well that was kind of a bad night. There was a rocket or mortar attack  
24 and I'm not sure. It's been a long time since. We weren't even on standby to support  
25 them, but we were basically woken up out of dead sleep. There either at Kon Tum or  
26 Dac Tho or some place they had a very, very serious rocket or mortar attack. One of the  
27 armored vehicles got hit. That wasn't specifically why we took off. It was just because  
28 of this big combat situation and a lot of people were getting hurt. Apparently it was a  
29 real vicious attack. So they launched us and when we took off to go down there we were  
30 called in on a medevac situation and there was an armored vehicle that was hit and the  
31 guys inside were burned very, very badly. We got one of these guys. He was like burned



1 over ninety percent of his body. Kind of reminds you of that movie *We Were Soldiers*,  
2 that one Napalm accident with a Japanese-American guy that got burned. This whole  
3 guy looked like that. They put him on there and he was in so much pain that above the  
4 noise of the radios and the noise of the rotors and everything else we could hear him  
5 screaming back there. It was real frustrating for us. It was like two in the morning  
6 because we couldn't get to the hospital. We were heading down to Camp Holloway in  
7 Pleiku, which was the nearest hospital from there that would be able to handle him. It  
8 was probably a twenty minute flight. That whole twenty minutes we [lost audio from  
9 1.00.36-1.00.26] fast enough to get this guy some relief. There is no way he lived, but he  
10 was so badly burned [lost audio] painkillers or anything else for him. So it was a pretty  
11 bad—I do remember that.

12 SM: My goodness. Now in the various medevac missions that you did conduct  
13 did you pick up many burn victims? Obviously this is probably the worst, but were burns  
14 common?

15 DF: This was the worst and probably not very common. The only time we have  
16 would burned would be a white phosphorous grenade of some sort possibly. They would  
17 be spot burns where a piece would burn into you. This was the worst situation. This was  
18 actually the worst medevac we ever did cause this guy was living dead basically. He just  
19 couldn't—they just couldn't stop his pain. That was kind of bad that way. Most of the  
20 time you'd pick up guys that are wounded with fragments or bullets or whatever.

21 SM: Well, let's see. Another story that you mentioned was regarding the soap.

22 DF: Oh, there were seventeen on the list, huh?

23 SM: Yeah, number seventeen, soap anyone? What is that about?

24 DF: The reason I bring this up here is there were two incidences. This one was—  
25 you know in a way we change when we're soldiers in a war. We're happy go lucky high  
26 school kids one day and the next day we're packing a gun and we have life or death  
27 control over others. In the process of doing that you become callus and you become a  
28 little bit unfeeling toward your host. We were actually there as a guest of the South  
29 Vietnamese. At some point in time you can never tell whether they're on your side or on  
30 their side cause during the day they are on your side and at night they're not kind of  
31 thing. The Viet Cong part of it. Any case the only reason I bring this story up is cause

1 it's how our attitude was. I was definitely an AC. I think I must've been around LZ  
2 Evans someplace. I was not even sure what I was doing really. We were going from  
3 Point A to Point B and I don't know if I was on a log mission or just moving an aircraft  
4 someplace or what. I really don't know what the mission was, but it was single ship. I  
5 had decided to fly low level down this river. So there's this river. It was kind of a  
6 medium sized river probably a hundred, a hundred-fifty feet wide and fairly meandering.  
7 Flying at low level we spotted this woman that was taking a bath. Here she was all by  
8 herself out in this river completely bare ass naked trying to take a bath. Here we're  
9 coming low level down the river and I came to a dead stop and started hovering around  
10 her and blowing cold air on her. She's trying to cover up her private areas. She had her  
11 arms crossed in front of her bent over and she was just enduring it. We had a sundry  
12 pack on board. Crew chief had some soap in it. So we started throwing bars of soap at  
13 her just kind of trying to hit her with bars of soap. Finally it just dawned on me that we  
14 were being fairly insensitive and cruel here so we basically left. That little incident  
15 always reminds me that we can't let this war get to us. Anyway, that's the example of  
16 what—that's not quite as bad as the platoon where they started shooting at that one  
17 legged guy making him hop, but it's along those lines.

18 SM: It shows how unfortunately war can make men very cold and callus.

19 DF: Including a guy like me who—

20 SM: Who seems like a really nice guy.

21 DF: Yeah and it was—

22 SM: And is.

23 DF: That's when I realized what I was turning into.

24 SM: That's a really interesting point. I mean, was that discussed very much, the  
25 way the war was affecting guys personally, mentally, psychologically?

26 DF: No.

27 SM: Did you find yourselves acting as checks and balances occasionally on one  
28 another when something like that would happen would someone maybe act as the voice  
29 of conscious and reason and say, "Hey, we shouldn't be doing this."

30 DF: No, not really. What happened on a deal like that is I probably went back  
31 and just mentioned, "Hey, I found this naked woman out there." I was probably bragging

1 about it to a certain extent. Even though my conscious made me stop, I wasn't passing  
2 that conscious on to anyone else as part of the story. So basically all my checks and  
3 balances were all internal, personal. It was the way we were raised or our personal belief  
4 system. That's one of the things that makes us different from other nations I believe is  
5 that we do know when to stop and we—everybody in that unit except for maybe one guy  
6 that I know never got beyond a certain point. We were more like the Klingons. War  
7 talking—we were talking about honor and battle, but we never brought up—we believed  
8 in honor, but we never really brought up these little dishonorable situations. We always  
9 turned them into an honorable situation or just a gag. Some kind of thing.

10 SM: How did these things affect you later as far as—after you came home and  
11 after you started maturing and when you reflected on these types of events over time, did  
12 your conscious start bothering you at that point?

13 DF: They did. That's why I remember it. So my conscious bothers me more  
14 about it now than it did at the time. By telling the stories it helps a little bit because at  
15 least you're sharing it with some other people.

16 SM: Absolutely.

17 DF: Anyhow, what I'm proud about is I recognized what I was doing and  
18 stopped.

19 SM: Yes, sir. At the same time do you think that perhaps one of the short  
20 comings of some of the training and briefings that you and other Americans received in  
21 preparation for going to Vietnam and conducting these types of (inaudible) missions and  
22 operations in-country, that these types of issues were not raised? That you need to be  
23 aware that this is the effect that war can have on you and you have to resist it.

24 DF: I'm not so sure we didn't get such things. I know that we were often told  
25 that we were guests of the Vietnamese and we were supposed to treat them as visitors.  
26 So it wasn't like they'd forgotten about that part of it. It's just your young men. You're  
27 just—I think the Army did a pretty good job of that. Maybe that was one of the reasons I  
28 stopped too. That's what made me realize it or whatever. The young soldiers, whether  
29 they be pilots or infantrymen or artillery men or whatever lower ranking people, officers  
30 and otherwise, don't have the maturity and we were put in a very—what made us  
31 different is that most of the twenty year olds or nineteen year olds are privates. They've

1 got sergeants to look up to and so forth. We were officers. We jumped all that stuff and  
2 we were actually in a position of authority when we really didn't have any experience, at  
3 least the human side of it. I mean, we were obviously good at what we did.

4 SM: Well, yeah, the maturity level, the lack of experience, level. You guys were  
5 still really young.

6 DF: Right. Even these pilots flying today in the Afghan war and stuff, they're all  
7 chief warrant officers. They're all thirty. They were kind of like the Marines. They  
8 remind me of those Marine pilots when I see them on TV today. They don't have the  
9 same nineteen, twenty year old kids that we were.

10 SM: Well, just out of curiosity I think this is a rather interesting subject. Of  
11 course today's military there's this emphasis on sensitivity, political correctness—

12 DF: Professionalism.

13 SM: Well, professionalism's always been there, but professionalism redefined.  
14 Of course now it does include acting in such a way that is not offensive to females that  
15 might be in proximity to you in your unit. There's this heightened sensitivity that exists  
16 today that did not exist when you were in the military.

17 DF: That's right. One of the things we talked about at our reunion I just talked  
18 about with Bill Paris and a couple of guys around there is that how would our life have  
19 been changed if we had female pilots in our unit? The whole dynamics would've been  
20 different. I don't think we would've had the unity that we have. You saw the unity. It  
21 was there.

22 SM: Oh, absolutely.

23 DF: That's thirty five years later. Most of us hadn't seen any of those guys until  
24 that day since we left. It seems that when you introduce—well, I don't necessarily not  
25 believe in females in the military, but when you're out in the field and you're running  
26 around in your skivvies and drinking beer and telling stories and stuff it changes the  
27 dynamics when you've got women around.

28 SM: Well, it changes the dynamics, but I think—

29 DF: Maybe better.

30 SM: If women are there or women are not there?

31 DF: Yeah.

1 SM: Which one?

2 DF: No. No. As far as being civilized when they're there.

3 SM: Right. They act as a civilizing effect.

4 DF: We turn into cavemen you know.

5 SM: When you're alone.

6 DF: When we don't have them around.

7 SM: These are very, very timely, very difficult issues.

8 DF: Right. I'm glad I didn't have to deal with them to be honest with you.

9 SM: Well, let's see. There's quite a few other stories and we have talked about

10 the Khe Sanh missions, Khe Sanh support. There's another one on the list here, the

11 general and the penta-prime?

12 DF: Oh.

13 SM: What is that?

14 DF: This happened up at Khe Sanh too. This is after the assault. We had

15 basically moved into Khe Sanh just to add a few more letters of arrogance. The Marines,

16 all our lives the Marines have been the ones you hear about. John Wayne plays Marines

17 and all that kind of stuff. It was evident to us in the Army that the Army did all the work.

18 I mean, there was more Army there and we did more things and we had more modern

19 thinking the way we did things. We knew it. We passed that kind of arrogance on. That

20 being the sidelight, when we finally actually got to Khe Sanh the infantry units that came

21 up the road basically tore down the front gate, put a sign up there and put a Cav patch on

22 it says, "Khe Sanh now under new management." We were basically—the first time we

23 ever flew over the Khe Sanh installation itself which was mostly underground by this

24 point we had made up these leaflets the day before, four thousand of them, that says,

25 "Have no fear, the Cav is here." We did crap like that. So anyway the Army is basically

26 established at Khe Sanh now and the Marines are finally poking their heads out of the

27 ground. They were getting like seven hundred incoming rounds a day from artillery and

28 rockets and so forth. It's not like they had any options there. Any case, we were flying

29 log or something up there and a C-130 had come into Khe Sanh and crashed. It either ran

30 out of runway or whatever reason. Anyways, it was on fire. So we decided to kind of get

31 out of the air to get on the ground and kind of watch what was going on. Apparently we

1 didn't have anything pressing at the time. So I picked this brand new pad that they had  
2 put penta-prime on. Do you know what penta-prime is?

3 SM: It sounds familiar, but explain it.

4 DF: Well, it's kind of an asphalt material. They had two kinds kind of. Newer  
5 version of it's sort of a polymer material and what it was, was dust—it kept the dust  
6 down. It's like oiling your road. It's like an asphalt material they use to oil roads and it's  
7 thinner than that. It's more of a consistency of light motor oil or machine oil as opposed  
8 to heavy tar at room temperature. So it wasn't something they had to melt like they do  
9 with tar. They would spray it down with these oil trucks. When they build a logistics  
10 pad or something like that for helicopters to land on we create a lot of wind. So they  
11 keep the dust down by putting penta-prime on it. Well, this penta-prime pad was pretty  
12 new. It had just been penta-primed so all the little low areas in it had little puddles of this  
13 material in it, which is kind of like oil, like yucky oil, like old used motor oil. So I  
14 decided just to sit down and watch what was going on. They had the ambulances and  
15 people out there taking care of things, sort of standing by in case they needed us kind of  
16 thing. So I landed at this pad and turned out there was like a two-star general standing on  
17 the edge of it. When I came in and landed I blew a lot of this liquid into the air.

18 SM: Do you need to take that call?

19 DF: Huh?

20 SM: Do you need to take that call?

21 DF: No. I don't know who it is. You can hear it, huh?

22 SM: I just hear the pause.

23 DF: Yeah.

24 SM: But go ahead, I'm sorry.

25 DF: Do you want me to repeat it?

26 SM: No. It was okay.

27 DF: Okay. Anyway, I blew a lot of this penta-prime up in the air and just kind of  
28 splattered. It turns out this general was at the edge of the pad there sort of between me  
29 and the C-130. The C-130 is probably a quarter of a mile away. It wasn't that close to it.  
30 When I landed there he turned around and looked at me and then I could see his helmet  
31 with the two stars on it. I said, "Oh, shit." He starts walking over toward the aircraft. He

1 comes up to my side, the AC side. Our windows are halfway down. We have this  
2 slider—armored slider that moves forward. So I leaned forward in front of the slider  
3 because I knew he wanted to talk to me. He grabs my helmet on the inside and pulls it—  
4 my earpiece toward him and he says, “Do you need to be here?” I said, “No, sir.” He  
5 says, “Get the hell out of here.” Then he walked away. So I said, “Yes, sir.” That was  
6 the penta-prime deal. That was my first encounter with a general in the field.

7 SM: Not as positive as you would’ve liked probably.

8 DF: No. Well, I’ve had him on board before, but that was the one that didn’t  
9 want me being there. Anyway, that’s that.

10 SM: You also mentioned the story about calling in artillery. How frequently did  
11 you do that and what prompted this particular reference to the story?

12 DF: Well, that was my first time. Okay. We had been trained in flight school on  
13 calling in artillery. That was part of our training. You did that from aircraft and whether  
14 it be helicopters or for observation or whatever. We had always—we’d gone through this  
15 idea of bracketing and we had learned all of these things to do to call in artillery. I’d  
16 been in-country for, shoot, this is April, early April of ’68. I’d been there since August of  
17 ’67 and I’d yet to call in an artillery fire. So I had just never done it. Anyway, I was  
18 flying from Khe Sanh back to LZ Stud. I was probably pretty high. I was probably  
19 twenty-five hundred or three thousand feet or so. I heard somebody taking pot shots at  
20 us. It was like small arms fire in full automatic. We were pretty high. We were  
21 essentially out of range. I was sort of on the right side of the aircraft and I was heading  
22 west. So the guy on the right side, the gunner on the right side said, “Sir, I see where it’s  
23 coming from. I can see the tracers coming out.” We were basically out of range so we  
24 weren’t—he says, “You know, I’m gonna call in some artillery on that guy.” So I just  
25 called in division artillery frequency and I said, “Fire mission. Over.” He said, “Roger.  
26 Fire mission out. Give me the coordinates.” We had it all worked out and we flew our  
27 U-shape pattern just like they taught us in flight school. So the U-shaped pattern is to  
28 make sure we don’t get between the target and the artillery tubes because the rounds are  
29 pretty invisible when they’re coming your way. Anyway, we flew our U shaped pattern,  
30 called in the coordinates and he says, “All right. I’ve got a shot over.” He says, “Shot  
31 out. Splash. Over.” That’s when it hit and they say, “Splash out.” He says, “Roger, drop

1 one hundred meters and mark it again,” or whatever. I don’t remember the procedure.  
2 They’d fire into another one and it would drop short and they’d say, “All right. Add fifty.  
3 Fire for effect.” He says, “We give you battery six.” We went through the whole process  
4 just like in school. It was so great. Of course they never shot at us anymore. They  
5 probably weren’t even there by the time the artillery rounds came in. Anyway that’s the  
6 only reason I put that in. It was the one and only time I ever called an artillery mission.

7 SM: What about—did you ever have a chance to witness close air support with  
8 the jets or—?

9 DF: Witness it?

10 SM: Yes, or any kind of—naval gunfire or let’s see what else would be  
11 interesting? A B-52 arc light strikes, that kind of stuff?

12 DF: Well, we’ve seen them. We were never really involved in them. We were  
13 told to stay clear of an area that there was gonna be one. We’ve seen them. One of the  
14 guys in our unit actually got in the middle of one. I don’t remember—they mentioned  
15 that at the reunion, but I don’t remember who it was. I never had anything to do with arc  
16 light. As far as naval gunfire, we had naval gunfire and they were essentially part of the  
17 artillery as far as we were concerned. We’d do a combat assault on the coast or  
18 something. I think we had the New Jersey or somebody over there for a while. We did  
19 get some naval gunfire as artillery support, but I didn’t call it. It was just part of the  
20 mission I was flying. The only time I actually ever had anything to do with that was this  
21 mission here. As far as the close air support for high performance aircraft that mission in  
22 the A Shau with the SOG was the only one that I was actually I was part of. We had our  
23 own FAC guy taking care of that. I was telling the FAC what I needed and he was  
24 passing it on to the high performance guys who took care of it. Did I answer your  
25 question?

26 SM: Yes, sir. It sure does. Okay. Let’s see. Also on the list, leaping POW.

27 DF: Okay. I’m gonna write a story on that. This was a situation also in Khe  
28 Sanh. Most of my really exciting stories happened in two months, March and April of  
29 1968. Nothing had happened much before that and nothing much after that, after May I  
30 guess. So all of these things here are basically that. The leaping POW—I was flying  
31 with Bill Quigley as it turns out this time because he has a little different story on this.



1 My story is the right one. Here it is. We were called up to pick up a Marine or a POW  
2 upward near Khe Sanh some place. I don't remember exactly where. They had a tunnel  
3 system up there. The Marine, this was a Marine unit that had gotten this guy out.  
4 Apparently this guy had been in one of these tunnels and the Marines were shooting tear  
5 gas grenades and doing all kinds of things for like two or three days. This guy had been  
6 in there for two or three days and they didn't want to send anybody in to get him. They  
7 wanted him to come out on his own. Anyway, they finally got him out and I don't know  
8 whether he was unconscious and finally somebody went in and drug him out or whatever,  
9 but this NVA soldier had gotten out. I was in the area. So they tasked me to go pick him  
10 up. Excuse me. So when I got up there they were gonna toss this NVA prisoner on  
11 board and have me haul him back. I said, "Wait a minute here, I'm not gonna haul any  
12 NVA prisoner without a guard. You need to supply me with some guy to guard him  
13 because my crew chief and gunner have got their jobs. They're not guards." They  
14 hummed and hawed a while and they finally got me like an E4 Marine whatever an E4 is,  
15 lance corporal or whatever. He sat on the aircraft. He had an M-16 with him. The POW  
16 was laying on the floor sideways. His feet were at my side of the aircraft, left side, and  
17 his head was at the right side of the aircraft, both doors were open. He appeared to be  
18 unconscious or almost unconscious. The guy reeked of tear gas. I mean, we could smell  
19 it up front and I was in a hurry to get the aircraft going and get the wind flowing through  
20 there because it was bringing tears to my eyes and everything else. When I looked back  
21 we decided to fly low level down the Khe Sanh River back to LZ Stud. Partially the  
22 reason was business was slow and we were looking for things to entertain ourselves. So  
23 we decided to fly low level rather than go up to altitude. The other thing is this guy was  
24 reeking of tear gas so bad we thought we could get the speed up a little bit and just kind  
25 of fly pretty fast and make a fun job out of it. I looked back in the back and this Marine  
26 was just completely oblivious to what was going on in the aircraft. He was looking out  
27 the doors, almost like the first time he was ever in a helicopter or something. I don't  
28 know. So I face forward and I'm not sure I was flying. I think the copilot was flying and  
29 I was just kind of looking around enjoying the scenery. I heard this huge noise. I always  
30 describe the noise when I told the story a long time ago although the noise doesn't make  
31 sense like a lumber truck from a lumberyard that has the rollers on it. They picked the

1 bed up a little bit and they roll this load of lumber off the end and finally the back end of  
2 the bundle of lumber is on the ground and the truck pulls out from under it and the rest of  
3 it comes crashing down and makes this big thud on the ground. That's the sound I  
4 remember. Anyway, I looked back and the guy's gone. The POW's flat gone out of the  
5 aircraft. We were probably twenty or thirty feet above the river doing 120 knots, just  
6 going like crazy—probably 100 knots, maybe not 120. So when I saw he was gone and I  
7 heard the thunk, I said, "Man, the guy just leaped out of the aircraft. He just"—I couldn't  
8 figure out how he did it because he was unconscious, but apparently he had grabbed the  
9 edge of the aircraft with his hands where the floor rolled underneath to the outside of the  
10 aircraft and just vaulted himself out. The Marine wasn't even watching him. He was just  
11 looking out the open doors. So I basically took control of the aircraft and brought it to a  
12 stop as quickly as I could which is at that speed it probably took me a mile to get it  
13 stopped and turned around and got back. When I got back we saw him laying face down  
14 in the river. The Khe Sanh River—are you from Lubbock or are you from someplace—?

15 SM: No, sir. I'm not from Lubbock. I'm from the East Coast.

16 DF: Do you have rapids in your rivers in the East Coast?

17 SM: I've been to them.

18 DF: Okay, well this was—

19 SM: I've been to North Carolina for instance.

20 DF: This was a rugged river. This had rocks in it and rapids and all that kind of  
21 stuff. It blew me away that this guy was laying in the water and he was around some  
22 rocks. It's almost like it was impossible for him to vault himself out, hit the water and  
23 he'd be skipping like a stone for a while because we were going so fast. A hundred knots  
24 is like 130 miles an hour. So he's laying face down, in the spread eagle just like ground  
25 people look when they're face down I guess floating in the water. I don't know how he  
26 missed the rocks if he even did miss the rocks. Anyway, we got back and I came to a  
27 hover right next to the guy. The Marine, I told the Marine to get out and get the guy in  
28 there. He didn't want to get out of the aircraft. You met Bill Quigley, do you remember  
29 him?

30 SM: Oh, yes, sir. I've interviewed him.

1           DF: Okay. I said, “Bill, get that guy out of the aircraft.” Bill stood up and  
2 pointed his M-79 at him and says, “Mr. Fillmore wants you in the water. Get that guy  
3 onboard.” Anyway, he tossed. He got out of the aircraft and tossed this guy back into  
4 the floor of the aircraft and then got back in. Now I didn’t want this guy dying on my  
5 shift and we’d already heard about people getting tossed out of the helicopters during  
6 questioning and things like that, interrogation. So I’m sitting there halfway scared that  
7 they’re gonna accuse us of doing that. Anyway, I call medevac or the hospital pad there,  
8 whatever it was and told them I was inbound with a prisoner of war that had just jumped  
9 out of my aircraft. They said, “Yeah. Yeah, right. Sure,” kind of stuff. Anyway, we got  
10 him back to the pad and just before we got there probably within a minute or two of  
11 coming into the pad, water had started draining out of his mouth and he started coughing  
12 and wheezing and stuff. So he wasn’t dead. We didn’t do anything to resuscitate him. I  
13 thought he was laying face down in the water for like two or three minutes at least. The  
14 fact that he jumped out of the aircraft with that speed and he glanced down the river with  
15 all those rocks in it I thought he was just paste inside, but apparently he survived without  
16 even a broken bone. The next day I had a mission to pick him up and take him back to  
17 Evans for division interrogation. He came out of the H station on a stretcher and he  
18 looked fine. He was wide awake and they had him strapped to the stretcher. As soon as  
19 he saw the helicopter he realized they were getting ready to put him on it he started  
20 struggling because he didn’t really want anything to do with another helicopter again.  
21 That’s that story.

22           SM: Okay. Now another interesting event occurred, Tom Harnisher. In fact I  
23 saw at the reunion I saw the foot pedal from his aircraft where the round went through  
24 him and hit him. What do you remember about that? Where were you when his foot got  
25 shot?

26           DF: I wrote that down for a couple of reasons. This is the A Shau Valley now.  
27 The first four or five days of the assault in the A Shau Valley were basically all assault  
28 days. We weren’t doing much resupply. We were basically just trying to get those 1<sup>st</sup>  
29 and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades in the valley—in between weather and so on and so forth. What I  
30 realized about memories and telling stories when I started thinking about this stuff is that  
31 whole four or five days runs together as like one story. When I told you I didn’t really

1 remember that whole day was a blank, that whole week was a blank actually because I  
2 thought that Tom Harnisher got shot between the toe on the first or second day. It turned  
3 out to be the twenty-sixth. It was like seven days after—the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth  
4 afterwards. Anyway, the reason I remember it is because we were getting a lot of  
5 maydays and a lot of people shot down in that seven-day period. What we got this day  
6 was a call over the phone that says, “This is yellow,” whatever he was or white or green  
7 or whatever he was. “I think I’ve been shot.” The flight leader says, “Well, have you or  
8 haven’t you? How can you think you’ve been shot? Are you shot or not?” He says,  
9 “Well, my foot’s numb and I’ve got a hole in my boot?” Well, all right—anyway  
10 Harnisher was kind of—it wasn’t in a daze or not, it was just he was just trying to—he  
11 wasn’t really that badly injured, but anyway just the way the conversation went it was  
12 just kind of light compared to people mayday, mayday going down you know and that  
13 kind of stuff. “I think I’ve been shot.” That’s why I wrote it on there—a little humor.

14 SM: Right. No, absolutely.

15 DF: Very little.

16 SM: What about the convoy to I guess it was Firebase Sharon?

17 DF: Right. Actually it was LZ Sharon.

18 SM: LZ Sharon.

19 DF: What I remembered about that is this was our second move. We had moved  
20 from English up to Tombstone/El Paso/Eagle and then Evans which was really only  
21 about ten miles away. So the move from Eagle to Evans we hadn’t even finished getting  
22 to Tombstone yet before we moved to Evans. So it was really one move to Evans. Part  
23 of that unit went up—they only had so many aircraft flyable. So some of the pilots flew  
24 them. Some pilots rode along and other pilots went on the convoy. I’m sitting there.  
25 I’ve been in Vietnam all this time and I’ve never actually been on the ground in Vietnam  
26 outside of my own LZs, you know where I live or where we’ve stopped and laagered for  
27 a few minutes. I’ve never actually driven through one of these little villages. I’ve never  
28 seen the kids. I’ve never interacted with the people. I said, “You know, we’re gonna  
29 move from Evans to Sharon,” which was probably a thirty mile trip. Yeah, about that,  
30 thirty or forty miles—anyway, not too long. I’m gonna volunteer to go up on a convoy.  
31 I’m gonna get my M-16 out and I’m gonna put on my flak jacket and steel pod. I never

1 wore my steel pod except during a mortar attack. I'm gonna sit in a jeep and I'm gonna  
2 take my shirt off underneath and just have my flak jacket on over my bare chest so my  
3 arms are bare just like these grunts. I'm gonna be a grunt. So I volunteered to ride the  
4 convoy and I basically rode in the jeep in the backseat of a jeep with my M-16. When we  
5 do these things—none of us like the jungle bars that came in the sundry packs. Have you  
6 heard about that?

7 SM: The jungle bars?

8 DF: Yeah. They're Hershey—they call them jungle bars because they wouldn't  
9 melt at 110 degrees. So they would never melt at five hundred degrees. They were  
10 horrible. Anyway, they were just lousy, but they were candy to the kids. To them it was  
11 better than what they've had and to us they were pretty bad because we know what a real  
12 Hershey bar tastes like. So anyway we always collected these jungle bars that came in  
13 these sundry packs. We collected them and we had boxes full of these things. So we  
14 always like to take them on our convoys and hand them out to the kids as we go through  
15 the town and stuff like that. So I'm sitting here with my box of candy bars and my steel  
16 pod on and my flak jacket on with no shirt underneath. I'm feeling like a real soldier  
17 here. This is great. I rode that whole convoy. At the same time it was a rush because  
18 convoys get ambushed. I was prepared to get out and defend myself or whatever. I mean  
19 my clip was full and all that kind of stuff. It was kind of an anticipation, another one of  
20 these adventures that I hadn't been on yet. I volunteered to do that for the adventure and  
21 just to see what it was like and to hand out candy bars to the kids. I had a rush for the  
22 whole thirty, forty miles just mostly kind of a nervous rush in a way because looking for  
23 ambushes and stuff like that at the same time was completely uneventful. So it was  
24 pretty neat. That's that.

25 SM: Very interesting. What about Wunder Beach?

26 DF: Oh. One of the things we're cautioned about as pilots is not to do immature  
27 dangerous unsafe things. Wunder Beach is—they actually had—there's an LZ Sharon  
28 and actually Camp Evans were on the coastal plains. We were only ten, fifteen miles  
29 from the beach for that whole area up there. Of course Vietnam is very narrow there  
30 anyway. It's only about forty miles across the whole country there. Anyway, we had this  
31 area called Wunder Beach that the Navy used. They had these sea vehicles that had

1 rubber tires on them. They'd launch them off the ships. They basically go down a ramp  
2 of a ship. They'd float like a boat and then they'd come up on the beach. So that's how  
3 they unloaded the ships because there was no docks there. So they had a beach set up for  
4 this and they had these vehicles running in. The Navy would have a little depot there.  
5 Since they had concertina wire around it they considered it a secure area. So on people's  
6 days off we would run an aircraft and run people from our unit over to the beach and let  
7 them put their swimsuit on and go swimming in the South China Sea and so on and so  
8 forth. So on one of these days we ran a bunch of guys over to the beach and we decided  
9 rather than to shut down on the beach—actually we had often shut down the beach and  
10 just got into our swimsuit and went swimming ourselves. We decided to horse around a  
11 little bit with the aircraft to do some fun stuff. There's two things that we did. One of  
12 which was hammerhead stalls. The helicopters are by nature do not stall out like fixed  
13 wings. So they don't operate the same way. We had so many flight hours and we were  
14 so comfortable with the aircraft basically doing whatever we wanted to. We were really  
15 quite good technically as a pilot—we were kind of brainless pilots, but we were good  
16 technically. We really knew how to fly them. So we decided we were gonna see if we  
17 could mimic a fixed wing hammerhead stall. What a hammerhead stall is that they climb  
18 vertically and hanging from the propeller basically until you don't have enough  
19 horsepower to maintain your speed and you basically get slower and slower and slower  
20 until you come to a dead stop and then you start falling backwards tail first. Then you  
21 kick your rudder on a fixed wing and the rudder, the downward force or the upward force  
22 of the wind makes the tail flip to the topside, you know, wind veins. Now you're heading  
23 straight down propeller first and then you pull out of the dive. So that's what a  
24 hammerhead stall is. So we decided we're gonna do that in a Huey too. So we'd fly low  
25 level down the beach at about a hundred miles an hour and pull—cyclic climb. We  
26 basically pull the cyclic back and climb vertically until the aircraft started falling tail first.  
27 Then we pushed the pedals and the tail rotor would bring the aircraft around and then we  
28 would pull out of the dive. What we really didn't know is that when a helicopter has no  
29 loading on its rotor blades, when it's negative Gs or no Gs it actually is useless. It  
30 doesn't have any control surfaces. We didn't realize this. Interesting enough nothing  
31 ever happened. We would be pulling our cyclic climb to the top and we'd kick the tail

1 rotor around and then we were facing straight down and then we'd pull back on the stick.  
2 We had enough airspeed at this time where this control system actually worked and we  
3 pull out of a dive. We would miss the beach by fifty feet or so. We'd pull it out about  
4 fifty feet above the beach. So we did a lot of these at the time, but one time it didn't pull  
5 out very well. I basically got pulled it out about six feet above the beach. So I decided to  
6 stop doing those. I didn't realize it till actually this year when I took aerodynamics again  
7 that I was lucky to live through that.

8 SM: Uh, yes, sir. Wow.

9 DF: So anyway that was the Wunder Beach and the hammerhead stall. The other  
10 thing that we did, we were always trying to figure out ways to be better pilots too. At the  
11 same time we were screwing off we were also thinking about other things. In a  
12 helicopter when you have a load full of troops and you're coming in for a landing into an  
13 LZ you start your approach by taking power off the rotor system and you start your  
14 descent. Then when you get about twenty feet from the ground, the ground cushion  
15 builds up a little bit and you start slowing down, but you don't slow down enough. You  
16 have to pull in a little pitch to help you slow it down and then you get full ground affects.  
17 You start going back up again so then you've got to push the pitch back down to land. If  
18 you look at the movies real carefully at the reunion you see the helicopter come in. It  
19 hesitates just before it comes to a landing. It comes to a hover and he was intending on  
20 making a landing straight to the ground. The aerodynamics of the aircraft make it want  
21 to do that. So you have to force it past that hover spot to get it to land. On sandy beaches  
22 and stuff we don't want to come to a hover. We want to shoot approach to the ground  
23 because we don't want to kick up any sand. It gets in the engines and the rotes of the  
24 blades and all that kind of stuff. We were doing a lot of combat assaults into sandy and  
25 dusty areas. So we decided that we could figure out a way to set our pitch or power at a  
26 certain level when we started approach and then keep our hands off and go all the way to  
27 the ground without—because if we didn't pull in the power just before we had to push it  
28 back down again, if we didn't do that step what power would you have to be at so that it  
29 would be the right power. So we did this—do you understand what I'm saying?

30 SM: I think so.

1           DF: We wanted to skip the step about the aircraft trying to come to a hover. So  
2 we wanted to set our power so we have a decent and when we got to the point about  
3 twenty feet where the aircraft slowed down on its own and generally it would actually  
4 start flying and start popping up like a cork. We'd have to push the power down a little  
5 bit more, but just before we did that we weren't quite slowed enough yet. So we pulled  
6 in a little bit of power to slow us and then we'd have to take the power off to get past that  
7 hover bump. Anyway, we were practicing for hours on setting our power setting so that  
8 we came in and we didn't have to touch it and we could land all the way to the ground of  
9 the beach. As soon as our skids touched the beach and then we could touch the power  
10 and push it down so we'd stay on the ground. So we worked on that till we perfected it.  
11 There probably aren't ten pilots in the world that could do that today. We were doing  
12 that stuff normally. Anyway, that's what that's about.

13           SM: What about the last two?

14           DF: Iwo Jima?

15           SM: Iwo Jima?

16           DF: Huh?

17           SM: Yes, Iwo Jima and then the patrol.

18           DF: Well, the Iwo Jima that was—I mentioned that earlier. That was the aircraft  
19 carrier. What was kind of interesting about that is the Army aircraft—we were on a C&C  
20 mission. We're taking this colonel out there. We knew we were going out there when we  
21 picked the guy up, but as soon as we climbed up we said, "Where is this thing?" We  
22 were, I think, three or four thousand feet above the ground and we couldn't see the ship  
23 out there. You could see probably twenty or thirty miles from that height, from that  
24 altitude. I said, "Where's the ship?" He says, "It's out there, just head on out there." I  
25 said, "Sir do you realize that we're the only single engine here. The Navy guys have two  
26 engines when they're out over water and we don't have any over water gear. We don't  
27 even have—all we have is a first aid kit. We don't have parachutes. We don't have  
28 flotation devices. We've got nothing in case we go down over the water." He says,  
29 "Well, I need to go talk to this guy on the Iwo Jima." I said, "All right." Being the  
30 twenty year old that I was no challenge is too great. I headed on out to the Iwo Jima and  
31 he gave me some frequencies to call. I was probably four or five miles off shore and I



1 finally saw this black spec out there. He was probably at least twenty-five or thirty more  
2 miles out to sea. I don't know what the heck he was doing that far out there. He said,  
3 "That's it." He gave us the frequencies and I called him on the radio. He didn't answer.  
4 I didn't want to use the Guard frequency, which is an emergency frequency—if it was an  
5 emergency. So by the time I got out to the Iwo Jima it was just this little bitty short  
6 aircraft carrier. Iwo Jima is a helicopter aircraft carrier and they're converted from old  
7 World War landing ship LSTs (landing ship, tank). They put a flat top on them and make  
8 them aircraft carriers. Anyway, I'm coming around the control tower and I'm probably  
9 five or six hundred feet above the water, above the ship. I get this green light from the  
10 tower. So I come around and I shoot approach to the deck. I land on the deck. The  
11 whole time we're thinking about this we're actually discussing it among the two pilots.  
12 We say, "Is this thing gonna be bobbing and weaving? How are we gonna land on this  
13 deck if the ship's moving," and all that stuff. We were wondering about all those things  
14 because unlike the Navy we've never had training on landing on an aircraft carrier. So  
15 anyway, by the time I shot the approach and we came into a hover on the deck as soon as  
16 you're in a hover you're in your own ground cushion and your ground cushion is attached  
17 to the ship. So you're basically going up and down with the ship. So it's just like you're  
18 landing on the ground. There's no dissimilarities of movement between you and the ship.  
19 It just set it on the deck. As soon as I touch down on the deck these two or three sailors, I  
20 don't remember—out of the woodwork and they strapped us to the deck. I wasn't even  
21 got the pitch off the rotor blades yet. I'm still taking a load off the engine and they're  
22 already strapped to the deck. I couldn't have gotten off. I'd have to take that aircraft  
23 carrier with me if I was gonna leave. I shut the engine down and we come out. A Navy  
24 lieutenant commander, which is like a major for us came out and introduced himself to us  
25 as our guides and he was gonna give us a tour of the ship. They were gonna go down to  
26 the PX and open it up for us if we needed cigarettes or if we needed anything. Gonna go  
27 down and get us a meal. It was sort of an odd hour in the day. It wasn't a meal time, but  
28 they knew that we were in the Cav and we lived in a tent. They were gonna treat us as  
29 best they could while we were there and we really appreciated it. They were really nice  
30 to us. The Navy are really great gracious hosts. Anyway, we went on the tour of the ship  
31 and we came up at another place from where we went down and came up on the deck.

1 He was showing us that and the aircraft was gone. I said, “Where’s our aircraft?” “Oh,  
2 they took it below. We can’t leave anything on the deck.” So they actually had moved  
3 my aircraft to the elevator and ran it down below. So we disappeared back down and we  
4 did our meal thing or whatever. It was probably an hour later. The colonel was finally  
5 ready to go. We came back up on deck and the aircraft was sitting there strapped down  
6 just right where we left it. So they brought it up and we fired it up and took off. In the  
7 meantime when the deck was empty we were watching the Marines. They were doing  
8 some training. I don’t remember what kind of aircraft they were right now, but I think  
9 they were CH-46s, the Sea Knights. They were coming to a hover next to the aircraft and  
10 they’d slide sideways onto the deck and set it down. Then when they took off they come  
11 to a hover or they move sideways out over the ocean and then took off over the ocean.  
12 They didn’t take off or land over the deck. I said, “Why did they do that?” He says,  
13 “Well, their procedure for landing helicopters on there we can’t afford to have—the deck  
14 is so small that we can’t afford to have any crashes on the deck. So we want to”—  
15 basically you do your take off and landings over the ocean. So I had unknowingly made  
16 my approach and take off from the deck. Anyway, that’s all that was about, my  
17 experience at landing on the aircraft carrier.

18 SM: Then the—let’s see here—the last one, which is not coming up.

19 DF: The last light recon is a story that I just finished writing and I’m next to the  
20 last version of it now. It’s a little three pager. This one popped in my mind along the  
21 same lines as the soap situation back there. Soap anyone? What the deal on this was this  
22 was late in my tour and I was actually a flight leader at this time. I was yellow one. We  
23 were still at Sharon. It was toward the end of the day we were coming in with a flight of  
24 four and basically checking in with operations. They told us that we had to pull a last  
25 light recon. What the last light recon is that the last ships in the end of the day basically  
26 take a quadrant from Sharon and we do a kind of a semi-low level check for about five  
27 miles out from the LZ. That kept the enemy from setting up rocket launch locations or  
28 mortar locations and mortaring us that night. So we basically cleared the area of enemy.  
29 So we’d go out and make these circular patterns. We had four aircraft so I took the  
30 southeast quadrant. Basically we would make these arcing patterns maybe every quarter  
31 a mile or so until we got five miles out and we were sure the area was clear. We’d do

1 that just before dark. That was called last light recon. This particular one I'm flying out  
2 there and we see this—the other side material is there's a curfew. The native indigenous  
3 people have a curfew and Quang Tri is the village right next to LZ Sharon. So it's Quang  
4 Tri which is one of the areas of the Tet Offensive before. So it kind of gives you an idea  
5 where it's at. Everybody is supposed to be in their village or in their farms off the trails  
6 by dark. If they're basically out after dark they're enemy. They're automatically  
7 considered enemy. They know that and they have to be that. So we do this last light  
8 recon. Theoretically if there's anybody out there by the time we're doing it they're  
9 basically enemy because they wouldn't be close enough to the village to get home by  
10 dark essentially. So we're flying our arcing pattern back and forth. We spot this—one of  
11 the guy's on the crew kind of spot this black pajamas thing that looked like a cross out  
12 there heading our way, coming towards Quang Tri. We divert over there. What brought  
13 this story up, do you remember recently when that transportation unit was ambushed and  
14 Private Jessica was one of the people here in Iraq?

15 SM: Mm-hmm.

16 DF: One of the POWs was a black woman and when they showed her and the  
17 two other guys or something—I don't know if it was the two pilots or whatever on a  
18 different incident, but anyway they showed her on Iraqi TV and she had her—her eyes  
19 were huge white. She was staring. She was extremely untrusting and very, very scared.  
20 It just had fear all over her face. Do you remember that picture of that?

21 SM: I don't believe I saw that. I'm sorry.

22 DF: Anyway, when I saw that picture I had the flash back to this story because  
23 when we got there it was a woman and she had a bar across her shoulders and there was  
24 water on each end of it, a bucket of water on each end of it. From the distance when we  
25 first saw her we didn't know what it was. It could've been something heavy. It could've  
26 been ammunition. It could've been anything. We didn't know if it was a male or female.  
27 We were about five hundred feet high so we'd make these passes about five hundred feet  
28 off the ground and every quarter a mile so we could pretty much see that area pretty well.  
29 When we saw her we basically were in a diving, high speed dive from five hundred feet  
30 down to ground level. If you remember the Huey coming in at the reunion you hear how  
31 the blade noise in a high speed low level kind of fly the blade noise is very loud.

1 SM: Right.

2 DF: So we were just kicking up a ton of this blade noise coming right at this  
3 black figure. We were coming out of the sky and of course we're dark. Everybody in the  
4 aircraft's got these dark helmets on with dark visors and we looked like men from Mars  
5 really. I took control of the aircraft. I may have had it already, but anyway I was flying.  
6 When I got to her I brought her around to the left side of the aircraft and I put it in a  
7 screaming halt, which basically is pull back on the cyclic and then I kicked the tail up so I  
8 didn't dig the tail in the ground. So I was coming to a halt sideways kind of like a skier  
9 does at the end of a downhill when they dig their skis in to keep from going off the end of  
10 a downhill run during the Olympics or something. Anyway, I come to a skidding halt  
11 like that and came right around her. The machine gun from my left door gunner was  
12 pointed right at her. I'm coming to a hover around her. She is getting windblown. She  
13 drops her water on the ground and then she rips her blouse off to show her bare breasts to  
14 show me that she was unarmed. She had this fear in her face. She had her eye on that  
15 machine gun. Her eyes were wide open. She wasn't—she had her hands raised in the air  
16 and she was naked from the waist up showing that she was an unarmed civilian. She  
17 knew that she was too far to make curfew. So she knew she was dead meat if I wanted  
18 her to be. I basically dropped the machine gun and headed off and let her alone. So that  
19 was sort of another situation. This time I actually had my head about me before. As soon  
20 as I saw she was a woman I wasn't playing with her this time like the—so I had learned  
21 from the soap issue.

22 SM: Yes. Well, were there any other events that you wanted to discuss from  
23 your first tour?

24 DF: Well, I look at this list and I think we've pretty much covered everything.

25 SM: Yeah.

26 DF: Plus we've got a couple of different kinds of missions that you asked about  
27 earlier, the last light recon and the SOG missions. It was actually—I got thirty-five  
28 things on my list here and of all those things put together is probably three or four days or  
29 ten days worth of stuff. So the rest of the time was just grunt work.

30 SM: Okay. Well, how did you—?

31 DF: Ordinary missions, long hours.

1 SM: Yeah, yeah. Just to give support and things like that.

2 DF: Tired back, sore butt at the end of the day.

3 SM: Yeah. When you were getting ready to leave, what time frame was that?

4 When did you leave Vietnam?

5 DF: I left in August of '68. August to August. It was late in August. Oh, there

6 is one thing I should add to the list. I quit smoking.

7 SM: Did you?

8 DF: Sort of.

9 SM: Okay. By choice or because you just couldn't get smokes easily enough?

10 DF: Oh, no. No. No. By choice. The cool things about being pilots we could

11 always run to the PX down at the beach. There were benefits to our position in life. One

12 of the—also I didn't talk about the beer runs. I didn't put that on here either. About two

13 months or so before you rotated back to the United States you get sent a questionnaire by

14 the Department of Army where you want to go. You put down three or four choices or

15 whatever and most of us want to go to a unit that's close to our family's home. I mean,

16 we hadn't been with our families for a long time now and when you join the Army you're

17 sent all over the place because flight schools are in certain places. So I applied for Ft.

18 Lewis and I applied for flight school as an instructor pilot cause all of us want to stay

19 flying. I basically put Ft. Lewis as first and I put Ft. Rucker or Ft. Hunter—a lot of

20 people want to go to Ft. Hunter because it was close to the coast on the other coast, but it

21 was a cool place and so forth. So anyway, in about—that might be even three months

22 before you rotate back. Anyway, not too long after that probably sixty days or so you get

23 your orders telling you where you're gonna go stateside. This is good and bad. This is

24 from a philosophical point of view and a war history point of view it's bad because the

25 whole thing about knowing when you're rotating back is bad only because you're always

26 worried about getting killed on your last few days in the military during that theater.

27 You're supposed to be in there for the duration, which everyday is the same. So from a

28 psychological point of view it's bad. Anyway, I got my orders back and then we had this

29 thing called a figmo ribbon. Did you hear about that?

30 SM: Sigmo?

31 DF: Figmo, F-I-G-M-O.

1 SM: Oh, figmo.  
2 DF: Yeah.  
3 SM: Uh, I have heard that. What is it?  
4 DF: Well, the VO bottles, bottles of VO had this little ribbon, this black and  
5 yellow ribbon around the neck of it. A label on it I don't know what it says anymore, but  
6 that was called a figmo ribbon. We went through enough VO bottles so we had enough  
7 figmo ribbons. Anytime that somebody got their orders they would put this ribbon on  
8 their top button of their fatigues. That was their figmo ribbon. Figmo stands for fuck it  
9 I've got my orders, F-I-G-M-O.  
10 SM: Okay.  
11 DF: Okay?  
12 SM: Gotcha. Now—  
13 DF: All right, so—  
14 SM: Pardon?  
15 DF: So that's what it means.  
16 SM: Gotcha.  
17 DF: So now you're not only a senior, but you've got your orders. Okay, so when  
18 I got my figmo ribbon I'm sitting there thinking, you know I have made it through ten  
19 months of Vietnam. I've got sixty days to go or whatever. If I survive the next sixty  
20 days I'm not gonna let cigarettes kill me. So obviously I was concerned about my health  
21 even though I was a young guy still. So I decided to quit smoking. When I got on the  
22 plane to head back to the world I was gonna quit smoking. So for that next sixty days I  
23 thought about it and thought about it and sold myself on the idea of quitting smoking.  
24 Because once I got my mind made up it's made up. So I spent sixty days making my  
25 mind up. Apparently depending on where you're going back in the world depends on  
26 where you leave from. A lot of people left from Cam Ranh Bay. A lot of people left  
27 from Tan Son Nhut. I was one that left from Tan Son Nhut. Most of the guys on my unit  
28 went to Cam Ranh Bay. So I think the Tan Son Nhut flights went to the west coast and  
29 the Cam Ranh Bay flights went to the east coast or something. I don't know. Anyway,  
30 we had thirty days to leave anyway so I was going to the west coast eventually. So I  
31 went down to Tan Son Nhut and Pan American. I came over on a C-141. Some guys

1 came over on commercial air that are MAC, military airlift command contracts, but I  
2 came over on a C-141. I was hoping I'd get a real airliner going back and sure enough it  
3 was a Pan American 707 at Tan Son Nhut. I got on that airliner and we—of course they  
4 don't have concourses and stuff like that. You basically walk out on a tarmac and go up  
5 the steps. They had an ash tray at the bottom of the steps right by the—actually it was  
6 probably coming out of the terminal. So I threw about a half a pack of my cigarettes and  
7 took the last drag of my cigarette when I left the terminal at Tan Son Nhut walking  
8 toward the airplane. That was the worst time in the world to quit smoking because  
9 everybody on the aircraft including the crew were pretty tickled that we were all leaving  
10 Vietnam. Pan Am was buying the drinks and the stewardesses were particularly friendly.  
11 We were having a party on that plane for the next twenty hours and I had quit smoking. I  
12 should've waited at least one more day. So anyway I toughed it out. So that's that.

13 SM: Okay. Where did you enter the U.S.?

14 DF: I entered the U.S. at McGuire, McChord, McChord Air Force Base.

15 SM: Okay. California.

16 DF: No. Seattle.

17 SM: I'm sorry. Oh, okay. Gotcha

18 DF: McChord, Ft. Lewis and I was assigned to Ft. Lewis by the way.

19 SM: Okay. Good to know. All right.

20 DF: Actually, no, actually I was assigned at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Ft. Lewis is  
21 where I assigned my second tour. Anyway, Ft. Benning wasn't even one of my choices.  
22 That's what ticked me off about the whole thing. I was assigned to Ft. Benning, Georgia.

23 SM: Okay. That sounds good. This might be a logical place for us to take a  
24 quick break.