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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Robert Slingluff
Conducted by Dr. Laura Calkins
December 9, 2003; December 10, 2003
Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin**

1 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University. I'm conducting an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Robert
3 Slingluff. The date is ninth of December 2003. I'm in the interview room of the Special
4 Collections Building on the Texas Tech University campus here in Lubbock, Texas. Mr.
5 Slingluff is in Baltimore, Maryland. Is that correct, sir?

6 Robert Slingluff: That's correct.

7 LC: Okay. Let's begin by just discussing some general background information
8 about where you were born and perhaps your early childhood. Can you tell me something
9 about when and where you were born?

10 RS: Well, I haven't moved far from where I was born. I was born in Baltimore.
11 Other than time in the military and then while in college and a couple of years after that
12 I've lived in Baltimore essentially most of my life.

13 LC: Has your family always been in Baltimore, on both sides?

14 RS: Yeah, Baltimore is a weird town. People once they're born here they tend to
15 stay. We just think we have a good thing and we just don't want to leave it. I have two
16 brothers and a sister and they all live here.

17 LC: They were all born in the same house or have you always lived in the same
18 city?

19 RS: Well, actually my older brother was born in England during World War II.
20 My dad had been over there as a company commander and met my mother.

21 LC: Your mother is British?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: Where is she from?

3 RS: She's from Middlesex, England. Actually there's a town I think it's in
4 Ashford—wait a minute, excuse me I think that's Kent. Excuse me. She was born in an
5 estate called—the house was called Dencliffe House. This past summer we actually went
6 back they're trying to look for Dencliffe House. It's now become a shopping mall called
7 Dencliffe Mall. As the planet progresses, but we really knew we wouldn't find the house
8 because her house had been blown up by a German V-1 or V-2 or something or other.

9 LC: Oh, is that right?

10 RS: It no longer existed.

11 LC: Was anyone hurt in that?

12 RS: No, not really. All my mother remembers was that she said you could hear
13 the V-2's coming over because they made a loud racket and you didn't really have to
14 worry about them until the racket stopped because that meant they ran out of gas.

15 LC: And they were falling.

16 RS: And they were falling. They heard one stop and she grabbed my brother at
17 that point and hid under the dining room table.

18 LC: Now was that near American bases?

19 RS: No, not really. It was near London. I think the Germans were doing the blitz
20 on London at that point so it was their attempt to demoralize the British.

21 LC: How far from London actually, do you know, from Central London actually?

22 RS: I would say probably about thirty miles or so. I mean the initial rockets were
23 highly inaccurate.

24 LC: What did your mom's parents do? What was your grandfather's business?

25 RS: Well, my grandmother basically took care of the house. My grandfather was
26 the European Head of Equitable Life Insurance Society so he ran the European Corporate
27 Operations of that Insurance Company.

28 LC: So he must have traveled into London, into the city, quite a bit.

29 RS: Yeah.

30 LC: Did he travel a lot for business, do you know?

1 RS: Well, at that point he was dead. He died early. He had a heart problem so it
2 was just my grandmother was kind of taking care of the house and mom had three
3 brothers and two sisters.

4 LC: She was roughly how old when she met your father?

5 RS: I guess about twenty-five. I mean that was a weird story because dad was
6 over there, obviously, with the American troops. Mom had agreed to go to, I don't know,
7 a dance or something at an Officer's Club. She went to it. She met this guy named Bob
8 Slingsluff who was not my father. They had a conversation and everything was fine. I
9 think Bob was, and I think I have it right, but Bob was going to take my mother out and
10 arranged a date with my father. Somebody else arranged the date because mom when she
11 met dad and his name was Slingsluff, she had actually met two Americans separately and
12 both of them were named Slingsluff.

13 LC: Who are no relations?

14 RS: Oh, yeah, we're related. They were related. They were second cousins. She
15 just thought that everybody from America was named Slingsluff. It's obviously a common
16 name, kind of like Smith and Jones.

17 LC: Yes, yes exactly.

18 RS: She went out with Dad. Dad was kind of confirmed bachelor. He was thirty-
19 five at the time. She was engaged to him on the second date. They were married within
20 six weeks.

21 LC: That's fabulous. Where were they married?

22 RS: They were married at Dancliffe House.

23 LC: So people from the village came?

24 RS: Oh, people from the town came. They had a big thing, which was scandalous
25 because it was wartime. Mom wore white, but she said if she was going to get married
26 she was going to wear a wedding dress.

27 LC: She sounds like an independent thinker.

28 RS: Still is.

29 LC: So they are married and I would like to ask you about your father's career
30 but let's, for a moment, just establish how many children were in your family.

1 RS: I have my two brothers and my sister, an older brother and younger brother
2 and younger sister.

3 LC: I see. When was the oldest of your siblings born?

4 RS: John was born in 1944.

5 LC: Tell me about your father's military career. How did he come into the—he
6 was in the infantry, is that correct?

7 RS: Yeah, he was in the infantry. He enlisted or signed up to be with the 29th
8 Division as an officer I guess back in—he was in the Reserves. I think it's like 1939 or
9 so, 1940. He became a captain and his unit, the 175th Infantry Regiment of the 29th
10 Division, was sent over to England. I think it was like in October of 1942. They went to
11 train in England. So they were there for about a year and a half, I guess, before the
12 invasion.

13 LC: That's quite a long time.

14 RS: Yeah. They did a lot of training for landing off of the—I guess it was the
15 coast of Bristol. They used it as a practice area for landing and they also wanted to weed
16 out the soldiers who were actually going to go in because they needed people whom they
17 could count on. If you had kind of a weak sister you really just didn't want that person
18 there. It's no fault of their own, it's just people's personalities are different. You want to
19 make sure that people who are going in are right and ready for it.

20 LC: Do you know much about his actual training, like weapons training or
21 intelligence training, or reconnaissance training during that time?

22 RS: Not a whole lot. He has always been a good shot, but that wasn't from
23 military training. He loved hunting. So he had been familiar with weapons of various
24 types, rifle, shot guns, hand guns. So evidently he was a pretty good marksmen. He tried
25 to pass that on to us as well.

26 LC: Did he have some impressions, obviously when he met your mom things
27 changed, but did he have impressions about the British people while he was there, that
28 you know about?

29 RS: Other than the fact that he liked them and he liked their ale. He didn't like
30 not having ice.

1 LC: Not having ice, yes, warm beer. In the landings on D-Day could you tell me
2 something about that, what you know about it?

3 RS: Actually he was the second—first landing on the second day. So the troops
4 had gone ashore on the first day and then they came in on I guess what they call the
5 second wave. So the beachhead had not really been established at that point. So they were
6 trying to establish it. He was able to fortunately come in an area that—I don't know
7 whether that he doesn't know whether the machine guns had been knocked out that were
8 covering that part of the beach or whatever it is, but he just said he made it ashore and got
9 his troops grouped evidently. I haven't been over to Omaha Beach to see how it was
10 really set up, but there were some trails or passes that went up the hill. Most of the troops
11 had been concentrated in those areas. That was obviously where the Germans had sighted
12 their weapons. So people were getting chewed up pretty badly at those points. Dad
13 decided with his company that they would go to a place that didn't have a trail and
14 thinking it would take a lot longer to get up, but it may be easier because of the lack of
15 German coverage. They made it to the top of the hill and then they started rolling down
16 on the German machine gun and placements. I guess some of the other company's were
17 doing the same thing at the same time his was.

18 LC: Your father was the company commander?

19 RS: Yeah. He was a captain at that point. A couple of weeks later, I think one of
20 the American objectives was the city of Saint-Lô. They were working towards that and
21 there was a river called Vire. At some town there was a hill that was overlooking the river
22 and there was some bridges. The Americans wanted to be able to take the bridges without
23 them being destroyed because it would be faster to move across them. There was a
24 Colonel Goode who gave Dad the order to take his company and take the German
25 position on one of the hills overlooking the bridges. Colonel Goode's response was, "I
26 can't give you this order without going myself because you probably aren't going to
27 come back." So Colonel Goode actually went with him. They managed to take the hill.
28 The Germans mounted a counter offensive and came back and Dad's company was
29 getting pretty beat up and Dad had been shot a couple of times. Colonel Goode finally
30 instructed Dad to surrender his position and his men. They pushed—

31 LC: Do you know—oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

1 RS: Obviously they couldn't hold this point because they had been at it awhile.

2 LC: Do you know how your father took that order, how he felt about that? Later
3 did he tell you?

4 RS: Well, he knew that it was the right thing to do because at that point there was
5 no sense in getting everybody killed. I mean, he didn't like the fact. He didn't like
6 receiving the order in the first place to go take that thing because he felt that it was a *fait*
7 *accompli* that you would either be killed or captured. I forgot the general's name, but he
8 had very few kind things to say about the general. Obviously, Goode understood the
9 situation that's why he went along. He also became POW (prisoner of war).

10 LC: So your father executed a surrender. Do you know how that happened?

11 RS: No, I don't know exactly how that happened. He just surrendered his men.

12 LC: And he was wounded?

13 RS: Yes.

14 LC: Seriously?

15 RS: He was wounded in the legs a couple of times. He was shot through the thigh
16 and had some other wounds as well. It mainly inhibited his mobility, but it wasn't life
17 threatening.

18 LC: How many men were in his company taken as POW's at this point?

19 RS: At that point, I don't know the number because what the Germans did was
20 they would segregate the enlisted and the officers.

21 LC: So your father was separated from his men really quickly.

22 RS: Yes.

23 LC: Do you know anything about what treatment he might of received, medical
24 treatment?

25 RS: He said that his medical treatment from the Germans was actually very good.
26 They took care of him. He said he only had problems with one German officer who
27 preceded to kick his teeth in. He was reported to War Crimes and evidently the officer
28 was prosecuted.

29 LC: After the war your father kind of followed that?

1 RS: No. It was prosecuted during the war because Dad, when he was being
2 interviewed later on, had the guy's name and rank and everything. This is what he did
3 and it was in violation of the Geneva Convention and the Germans followed through.

4 LC: That's quite remarkable.

5 RS: Yeah. It's remarkable only to the extent that the stories that come out are
6 usually the ones where somebody is abused. You don't see the other end of it, where
7 people actually who are enemies act honorably.

8 LC: Would say that honor was sort of the by word for your father's experiences
9 as a POW in terms of his treatment from the Germans?

10 RS: I think that he felt that overall he was not really abused or mistreated.

11 LC: Where was he taken after he came into German custody?

12 RS: He was taken up into Poland.

13 LC: Do you know how he was transported there?

14 RS: I think it was by train.

15 LC: With other American officers?

16 RS: With other American officers, yeah.

17 LC: Do you know the name of the camp or the number of the camp where he was
18 placed?

19 RS: Well, I've got a huge—I have a narrative. He was taken to one Camp O flag
20 64. His comments were, "We had a library of about ten thousand books. They were pretty
21 much up to date. They got good reading material. We had a sports plot that had a baseball
22 diamond on it. They had baseball gloves, softball bats, and had a baseball league. There
23 was a basketball court. They had a basketball league. There was a theatre group." He said
24 they had a thirty-piece symphony orchestra. The Germans didn't mistreat it sounds from
25 this. They got their Red Cross parcels. We have copies of his letters, some of the letters
26 that he sent out from POW camp. Obviously they were scrutinized by the Germans, but
27 that was the norm. I think that although it was not a pleasant experience and that he tried
28 escaping several times, it was one where he didn't feel that the Germans abused or
29 misused the people.

30 LC: Were there other nationalities, other allied officers?

31 RS: Not to my knowledge.

1 LC: Only Americans. Do you know anything about his escape attempts?

2 RS: Mainly that they occurred when the Russians were beginning to push down
3 through Poland. They were beginning to move pretty quickly and the Germans were
4 becoming rather relaxed or getting a little bit skittish about hanging around so that their
5 guard was down. I don't know the specifics of the escape attempts, but evidently they
6 tried to get out and harass the Germans as much as possible. It was mainly a harassment
7 thing to bother the Germans.

8 LC: Right and sort of keep them tied down and try to focus on the camp. Was
9 your father moved from that camp as a result of the Russian advance?

10 RS: Yes. They moved several times. He said that it became more and more rapid
11 and finally at one point the Germans abandoned the camp and said, "Okay, you guys are
12 on your own," and basically said the Russians are coming. "If you hang around the
13 Russians will pick you up and take care of you." Dad didn't like the sound of being taken
14 care of by Russians. Obviously I think there are rumors that kind of flow around. In a
15 situation that is as fluid as that must have been, people would be coming into the POW
16 camp from other POW camps that had had experience with the Russians. They
17 understood that the Russians viewed any POW as really kind of surplus baggage. That
18 was going to slow their ability to march towards Germany. Evidently a number of the
19 POW's were executed or just taken out and killed.

20 LC: This was you think beginning to be understood by the American POWs?

21 RS: By the Americans, yeah. So rather than hang around for the Russians they
22 tried to work their way back towards Germany or towards France really, staying between
23 the Russians and the Germans because the Germans had obviously said if we see you
24 again we will shoot you because you are now an enemy soldier who is free. They were
25 able to work their way back into France. At some point he ran into an American patrol
26 and kind of surrendered himself to the American patrol. By this point I think the war was
27 over.

28 LC: Had his health improved such that he was mobile and able to get around by
29 the time of, say the spring of 1945?

30 RS: Yeah. Dad was a pretty big man and pretty athletic, for somebody who grew
31 up when he grew up. He was about 6'4" and had been very athletic, All-Maryland

1 Football Player, and All-Maryland Lacrosse Player and all the rest of the stuff and one of
2 top ranked tennis players and amateurs in the state of Maryland

3 LC: Is that right? Had he attended the University of Maryland?

4 RS: No. He started off at Hamilton College up in upstate New York. Then he
5 went to bed one night and left the window open because the radiators were hot. He woke
6 up the next morning and there's six inches of snow on his bed and he said, "No, I'm
7 leaving." He came down to John's Hopkins.

8 LC: I see. He finished his collegiate career there?

9 RS: Yeah.

10 LC: Do you know what year he graduated?

11 RS: No, I don't even know if he graduated. I think he was there for—or at least I
12 don't think he got a degree. I think he ended up working for three or four years, or going
13 to college for three or four years and I'm not really sure. His class would have been I
14 think around 1932.

15 LC: Your sense is that before he entered the military service he was in pretty
16 good shape. When he was a POW, although he was wounded, he had time to recuperate.

17 RS: Right. He had time to recuperate and I think that if you're in decent shape
18 prior to something happening, your recuperative abilities are much better.

19 LC: Did he ever tell you anything about the food that he was given as a POW,
20 what kind of rations they were on or anything like that?

21 RS: Not really. He talked about one time they were, I think this was when they
22 were coming and this wasn't even in the rations, this was after the Germans had left
23 them. He and a bunch of people hid in a barn. He saw some mushrooms. He was pretty
24 hungry so they scavenged the mushrooms and said, "Well, if they're poison we'll find
25 out," but they weren't.

26 LC: You said he sort of made his way back to the west, back towards allied
27 troops on the western perimeter. Was he in company with others who had been in the
28 camp with him? Do you know if he stayed with a group of officers?

29 RS: He stayed with a group, but not a big group. They split up and I think they
30 went in groups of maybe five or six, feeling that if there was a larger group that they
31 would be more easily detected.

1 LC: Do you know anything about what his relationships were with Germans, just
2 civilians that he passed along the way, what reception they gave these Americans?

3 RS: No.

4 LC: When he was rejoined with an American unit, an organized American unit,
5 do you know anything about how he felt or was he debriefed quickly? Do you know
6 anything about that?

7 RS: Evidently he was debriefed and sent over to England for a while. He was
8 reunited with my mother in England, but he had to stay there, in England, for the
9 debriefing. Mom had been scheduled to be on a ship to New York. So she actually
10 arrived back in this country before Dad did.

11 LC: Had she been to the United States before?

12 RS: No. She landed in New York—actually she was on the first ship of war
13 brides that came back. When she got off the ship she was holding my brother and their
14 picture actually ended up in the New York Times.

15 LC: Oh, is that right? Wow. So she went back to Britain to see him?

16 RS: Well, no, she didn't go back. He had been freed and was back in England
17 prior to her leaving, but she had already been scheduled to come to this country. I'm not
18 exactly sure how all of that was working at the end of the war. I think it was all pretty
19 chaotic.

20 LC: I think it was very confusing.

21 RS: By this time, when they made the arrangements she knew that he was alive
22 and she knew that he was eventually going to come back here. So they tried to make
23 arrangements to have her come here as soon as they could not realizing that he was going
24 to be withheld for a while for debriefing.

25 LC: Her family also had members serving in the military in World War II. Can
26 you tell me anything about that?

27 RS: Well, she had three brothers. They were all in the RAF (Royal Air Force).
28 The youngest one I think was about sixteen and he was a navigator on one of their planes.
29 The other two were pilots. Ted was the Navigator and Jack and Dick were pilots in the
30 RAF. Other than that I don't really know a whole lot.

31 LC: How did they fair? Did they survive the war?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: All of them?

3 RS: They survived the war, but since the house had been blown up and there
4 weren't many jobs around after the war and they were still pretty young because Mom
5 was the oldest of the six children. So that they were looking for things to do and how to
6 get jobs. Two of them actually moved to South Africa where jobs were available. I think
7 they were married at the time and they and their wives moved to South Africa and then
8 settled down there. I'm not sure. One of the businesses that they were in had to do with
9 animal skins and leather and things like that.

10 LC: So import/export?

11 RS: Yeah, import/export. Their families still live there.

12 LC: Do you have any contact with them?

13 RS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. As a matter of fact, one of my cousins, Liz, came over and
14 spent a week with us. Her daughter was up in Allegheny College in Pennsylvania and
15 came down here and spent some time with us. We keep in pretty good touch with them
16 right now because the Internet makes it easy.

17 LC: Yes, it helps. When you were very young and growing up as an adolescent,
18 were you aware of this military heritage with your father and your uncles on your
19 mother's side had served in the war?

20 RS: Oh, very much so.

21 LC: Was it something that was talked about quite often?

22 RS: No, not really, it was there. It's something that you knew about, but it wasn't
23 talked about. I mean, most of the time our Halloween costumes had something to do with
24 some paraphernalia that dad had worn as a uniform or something like that. So there was
25 stuff around.

26 LC: It was an influence.

27 RS: Yeah.

28 LC: When you were young, let's say you're moving on towards going to high
29 school, I assume this is still in Baltimore.

30 RS: Mm-hmm.

31 LC: What high school did you go to?

1 RS: Friends School.
2 LC: Is that a Quaker School?
3 RS: Yeah.
4 LC: Okay, I'm just guessing. What year did you graduate?
5 RS: 1966.
6 LC: While you were in high school, did you play sports?
7 RS: Yes.
8 LC: What did you play?
9 RS: Football, basketball, lacrosse, I wrestled for a year.
10 LC: Oh, so you were quite busy with that?
11 RS: Yes.
12 LC: Did you have a job, any kind of job outside of school?
13 RS: No, not really. During summers I just cut lawns, things like that.
14 LC: Did you do well in school?
15 RS: I was horrible. It would be real easy to say, "Oh, yeah I was dyslexic and
16 therefore couldn't figure it all out."
17 LC: Right. We get that a lot.
18 RS: But I think it was just a combination of being lazy and I figured that if I was
19 good in sports I was good enough for anything.
20 LC: So you were very clear that you're interests were not academic, would that
21 be accurate?
22 RS: At that point, yeah.
23 LC: Was sports a social thing for you as well? Was that where your friends were?
24 RS: I don't know if it was social or not, but that's where the people I hung with
25 were. I just enjoyed playing the games.
26 LC: Were you any good?
27 RS: Yeah.
28 LC: Okay. What position did you play, say in football?
29 RS: Football I was an offensive—well, actually we were running a single wing
30 formation, which no longer exists in football. I was a blocking back, which I guess would
31 be the equivalent of a pulling guard now where a guard pulls out and leads the play.

1 LC: You didn't carry the ball a lot?

2 RS: Oh, no, I didn't carry the ball. I have very small hands and it wasn't
3 conducive to holding on.

4 LC: Were you thinking, as you were in high school, were you thinking about the
5 possibility of going to college or was it just didn't appeal to you?

6 RS: Oh, no. I wanted to go to college. Actually, that's how I ended up in the
7 military. At that point the Naval Academy had probably the best lacrosse team in the
8 country. I wanted to play lacrosse there.

9 LC: Really?

10 RS: Yeah. I mean, I was good enough to play there. Academically I wasn't good
11 enough to get in. I had the alternative congressional appointment for I guess 1967 as a
12 plebe year. However, my academics weren't of the caliber that they were looking for. Yet
13 their coach, a guy named Bilber Back wanted me to come and play lacrosse. So he said,
14 "Well, what we'll do is you enlist in the Navy and we'll send you up after boot camp to
15 Bainbridge Prep," which was their prep school in Maryland and they also had a lacrosse
16 team. They said, "We'll beef up your academics and then get you in the next year."

17 LC: Did that sound like a good plan to you?

18 RS: Sounded wonderful to me. So I enlisted in the Navy and went through boot
19 camp. At the end of boot camp I said, "You know this really sucks."

20 LC: The appeal started to fade at that point?

21 RS: Yeah, exactly.

22 LC: Now, enlisting, this would have been when? Do you know the date?

23 RS: It would have been in either October or November of 1966.

24 LC: Well, how did your father feel about this whole idea about you going into the
25 Navy?

26 RS: Well, he thought that it was a good idea, because he said, "If you go into the
27 military the one thing you don't want to do is walk the war."

28 LC: He didn't have any kind of service driven kind of apprehensions that maybe
29 the Navy wasn't where you should go, maybe the Army was best for you?

30 RS: No, as a matter of fact he thought the Navy was probably a pretty good idea
31 because given my propensity for academic achievement he realized that I needed some

1 sort of discipline. I think that he knew that intuitively I was intelligent but was going to
2 be a much-delayed bloomer.

3 LC: The applications thing hadn't quite—

4 RS: Nothing was clicking at that point.

5 LC: Were you eighteen when you graduated from high school?

6 RS: Yes.

7 LC: Okay. When you actually enlisted did you go and talk to a recruiter?

8 RS: Yeah.

9 LC: What was that like?

10 RS: Well, it was interesting. At that point, '66, people were trying to get into the
11 military, those who were going to be drafted. It was much preferred to get into first, the
12 Coast Guard, if you could manage that, other than Reserve units and things. Then, the
13 Navy and then Army and then Marines, I guess, unless you were really driven to be a
14 Marine.

15 LC: Which you didn't feel that drive, at this point?

16 RS: Not at this point. So I went to the recruiter. I knew, at that point, quote
17 "knowing" as well as anybody can know, which ends up being wrong, that my career
18 path at that point had already been determined. That was going to the Naval Academy
19 through Bainbridge Prep. So when I talked with them, they gave me a battery of tests and
20 they said, "Well, you're intelligent." I said, "Thank you very much." They said, "These
21 are the jobs for people of your academic ability," and one of them was a hospital
22 corpsman. They were having trouble filling that MOS which is military occupational
23 specialty. The reason was people who are going into the Navy and if they had done any
24 work on what the jobs were, realization, there was a pretty high probability that if you
25 became a corpsman that you would become a Marine. To me that didn't make any
26 difference since I was going to go to Bainbridge. So they were trying to fill their quotas
27 and so I said, "Sure, I'll become a corpsman," which is what happened.

28 LC: Was there any kind of glimmer in your mind at this time that Vietnam was a
29 likely assignment?

30 RS: I was clueless.

31 LC: Did you know very much about what was happening in Vietnam?

1 RS: I knew what was happening in Vietnam and a lot of that came out of Friends
2 School because Friends, as you're aware I'm sure, that Quakers are the main part of the
3 anti-war at any time, any place movement. One of my teachers, a math teacher, actually
4 in my junior year—I think it was, yeah my junior year, the end of my junior year—went
5 to Washington and burned himself to death.

6 LC: Do you know when that happened?

7 RS: I don't know the date, but it would have been '65.

8 LC: This was a public self-immolation?

9 RS: Yes.

10 LC: He was a teacher at your school?

11 RS: Yes.

12 LC: Did he have any direct kind of contact with the Buddhist movement in
13 Vietnam?

14 RS: No, he was Quaker.

15 LC: You don't think he was in correspondence or had any kind of connections
16 other than his appreciation in general of what was happening in Vietnam?

17 RS: Right.

18 LC: This, to your mind, was a replication of the Buddhist crisis self-immolation?

19 RS: Yes.

20 LC: Of the early '60s?

21 RS: Mm-hmm.

22 LC: What kind of impact did that have on you or other kids at the school?

23 RS: I mean you're pretty appalled by just the concept of burning oneself to death.
24 I'm still pretty appalled by it. It was discussed a lot and we talked about the dedication
25 that somebody must have to a particular ideology or outlook in order to do that, to draw
26 attention to it. As a teacher I always thought that he was pretty weird.

27 LC: How weird?

28 RS: Well, just he was marching to a different beat. He was a good teacher.
29 Everybody seemed to like him, but to me he was a little bit strange. I don't mean strange
30 in a bad way, I mean just—

31 LC: He was different.

1 RS: He was different.

2 LC: So you kind of picked up on that sense of difference. He was maybe
3 operating on another plane or something?

4 RS: Yeah.

5 LC: Did you do any kind of reading? Were you looking at the newspapers and
6 trying to figure out what his, you know, this incredible protest was about? Did it send you
7 on any kind of mission to figure out what was going on?

8 RS: Not really. At that point, the anti-war movement was really confined to a
9 small group of people of which the Quakers were one group. I mean, they were standing
10 out on the streets with signs, no war and all the rest. I mean, they do it today. There was
11 definitely a feeling through the school and conversation. Friends School went every
12 morning—we had what we called assembly, where the entire student body would come
13 into the auditorium by class. You had assigned seats and all the rest of the stuff. The
14 announcements for the day were done and if there were any football games or anything
15 going on those announcements were done. Somebody would give a prayer and somebody
16 would give, basically a thought for the day. The thoughts for the day were done by the
17 students in some of the public speaking classes. Everybody was expected to do it at least
18 once during their ten years at Friends. A lot of the thoughts for the day had to do with war
19 and the things of that nature, you know, the anti-war, why do you fight, the biblical
20 references and all the rest of it. It was there. It was a strong backdrop.

21 LC: That's very interesting. Particularly when you then go to enlist and you're at
22 that point not thinking that Vietnam has much to do with you because you're thinking
23 about going to the Academy.

24 RS: Right. I was focused on lacrosse.

25 LC: Lacrosse.

26 RS: You have to understand that you're a teenager and your focus is pretty
27 narrow.

28 LC: It's up close. After your enlistment how long until you reported for basic?

29 RS: I was on a like six-month delay program and so that I reported to basic in
30 April. I think April 6th of 1967.

31 LC: Where did you report?

1 RS: I reported to Fort Holabird, Maryland, which is inside Baltimore. They
2 gathered the troops all together, put us on an airplane and we went up to Great Lakes,
3 Illinois, for basic training.

4 LC: How long were you there at Great Lakes for your basic?

5 RS: Oh, gee, I guess it was eight weeks, eight, ten weeks, something like that. I
6 don't know what basic is now.

7 LC: Do you remember much about basic?

8 RS: Yeah, I didn't do much. They tell you not to volunteer. So the first thing I
9 did was they were looking for people for this special company. So I volunteered.

10 LC: Did you like the word special company or what was the motivation? Do you
11 remember?

12 RS: Well, I don't know. No, I have no idea. It was just a spur of the moment kind
13 of thing, raise your hand and volunteer.

14 LC: What was the special company?

15 RS: The special company was a company that put on graduations from boot
16 camp. So all we did was march around. We were really good at marching. We avoided,
17 other than the mandatory things for going through basic training, you know fire training
18 and things like that, all we did was march all day and we worked with the band. So the
19 band would be out there playing music and we would be marching around auditoriums. I
20 was athletic or whatever in appearance so they made me the first regimental commander,
21 which is nothing. I got to wear a special uniform and was on graduation day had my
22 sword and was out there saluting with it, doing all this stuff and marching around in front
23 of proud parents.

24 LC: So high ceremony?

25 RS: Oh, yeah. We got to go to the Chicago Bears football game one time and
26 perform in the stadium there.

27 LC: How did that make you feel?

28 RS: I don't know.

29 LC: Did you feel that you shouldn't kind of be there?

30 RS: No.

31 LC: It was kind of a good gig basically.

1 RS: Yeah, I mean it was better than doing what the other people did.

2 LC: Were you aware of the disparity the whole time?

3 RS: Yeah.

4 LC: So did you have drill instructors? Did you have—?

5 RS: Yeah, we had drill instructors. We had the, chief petty officer who was in
6 charge of our company. I mean, it wasn't all fun and games. We had to pull the military
7 routine of folding your socks the right way. I still do that, yeah, right.

8 LC: That sort of worn away over the years. What about weapons training?

9 RS: We really didn't. We went to the firing range one time and fired the
10 weapons. I guess we were doing the M-16 at that point, but there was no qualification or
11 anything like that.

12 LC: Oh, is that right?

13 RS: No, I didn't have to do any of that.

14 LC: How did you get along with the M-16?

15 RS: Well, Dad, I mentioned that he was a hunter, and he passed that on to us. We
16 used to take rifles out and go target shooting I mean just all the time. It wouldn't be
17 strange when I was a teenager to go through about ten or twelve boxes of shells. I was
18 good. I had good hand-eye coordination and could generally hit what I was aiming at.

19 LC: Operating guns was familiar territory. Did the M-16 put itself—?

20 RS: I didn't mean the M-16, the M-15.

21 LC: Oh, M-15, oh, okay. So that was apparently, others have said that was a little
22 bit easier to operate the M-15.

23 RS: Yeah. I mean, it was very typical.

24 LC: Was there anything challenging about basic for you?

25 RS: Yeah, learning to—let's see, how do I put this—control my mouth. By that I
26 mean that I have always been and still am opinionated. Military people, when they're
27 trying to train you, really don't want your opinion. So the most challenging thing was for
28 me to shut up.

29 LC: Did your instructors, the ones that you did actually work with, have anything
30 to say about Vietnam? Do you know if they've been over there?

31 RS: They didn't really say anything or much about Vietnam.

1 LC: Say that basic is eight weeks or so, you knew that you were going to also go
2 into advanced training.

3 RS: Right, then my next station would be the hospital course school.

4 LC: Where was that?

5 RS: Great Lakes also.

6 LC: It was in another part of the camp?

7 RS: Yeah. It was actually just across the street.

8 LC: Okay. Give me a sense of that camp. How big was it and do you have any
9 idea how many people were there?

10 RS: Oh, gee, I have no idea.

11 LC: Was it huge?

12 RS: It was huge. It's a huge place. Great Lakes is one of the major training
13 facilities for the Navy in the country. It has a number of schools there, a very large naval
14 hospital.

15 LC: So did you think that was a good place to do your corpsman training?

16 RS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

17 LC: As it were moved across the street, did you have a different billet?

18 RS: Yeah. We were in a training bunkhouse, really. It was a little bit less
19 structured, a little bit more relaxed. You had much more time to yourself. There was
20 study time. The life was much less regimented. On weekends we could be either grab a
21 train into Chicago or up to Milwaukee or do whatever we wanted.

22 LC: Did you do that? Did you go into the cities and hang around?

23 RS: Sure. Yep.

24 LC: With a group of people or did you go by yourself?

25 RS: Primarily with a group.

26 LC: Were they other people who were in your training unit?

27 RS: Yeah, we went down—there were a couple of guys who played instruments
28 and they would run into some professor down at University of Chicago. The guy, he
29 enjoyed having us around and playing music and things like that. So we would go down
30 to his place and he always had some beer and stuff. We would just kind of all hang out

1 and then make it back to our base. In Chicago they also had a USO (United Services
2 Organization). They had dances on the weekend.

3 LC: Did you go to those?

4 RS: Sure.

5 LC: Was it fun?

6 RS: Yeah, had a decent time and try to pick up some girls or whatever. Most of
7 the time failed.

8 LC: But maybe some success sometimes?

9 RS: Yeah.

10 LC: What was the atmosphere like on the campus there at University of Chicago?
11 Do you have any impression—remember that?

12 RS: Not really.

13 LC: It was during the summer, probably by now.

14 RS: Ah, yes.

15 LC: Summer of '67.

16 RS: Mm-hmm.

17 LC: It's very hot in Chicago in the summer.

18 RS: Yeah.

19 LC: That's about all I know. I just wondered if you saw anything kind of
20 happening out of campus, brewing on the campus. It's a fairly liberal campus.

21 RS: Not really. No.

22 LC: Were you making friends in the unit? Were the guys that you were going
23 through the hospital and treatment training with kind of becoming your buddies?

24 RS: I wouldn't say buddies because I think everybody knew that was pretty
25 transient. You would hang out with some guys and things and there were a couple of
26 guys whom I went through training with and we ended up getting the same duty stations
27 later and we became better friends then.

28 LC: You felt a little bit detached on the training. Can you tell me what an average
29 day was like for your corpsman training in this advanced phase? So you're out of basic?

30 RS: Well, basically we would get up in the morning and they would blow reveille
31 over the lousy speakers in the place. You were required to get up, get dressed, get

1 yourself squared away so that you looked presentable according to the military. Make
2 your bed, make sure that your locker and everything was in proper order. Then we'd go
3 out. We'd stand formation where we would have an inspection. Then we would march as
4 a group up to the chow hall and go get something to eat. After breakfast it was essentially
5 going off to classes. We'd go to classes in the mornings. I think the classes were about
6 forty-five minutes each. We had anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, surgery. We did a
7 lot of studying in the medical area, communicable diseases, et cetera.

8 LC: Was that studying tough for you?

9 RS: For me it was like go back to school again. However at Friends School I
10 probably felt stupider than I was and to explain that we had two kids in my class get
11 sixteen hundred on there boards. One of them was age thirteen. I mean Friends was a
12 very, very academic school. I mean, when I took my college boards I got in the mid
13 thirteen hundreds.

14 LC: Well, that's not bad.

15 RS: No, but yet it was, in that class, it was kind of maybe middle to bottom of the
16 row. So the academics that I was receiving at Friends School and training for studying
17 was probably a heck of a lot better than I realized because when I got into the hospital
18 corps school training it wasn't as tough to perform well.

19 LC: You had the skills to the sort of methodology of studying, sort of had that.

20 RS: Right, exactly. That was there, but it just never really been worth—if you're
21 being graded on a curve system and here you're at the bottom of the bell curve on the left
22 hand side then I think you lose a lot of self respect in terms of academic abilities. I think
23 that's one of the things that happened at Friends. After a while you just kind of throw up
24 your arms and you say I give up.

25 LC: Right, what do I have to do to—?

26 RS: Yeah, exactly. So I think that once I was in corps school and I actually
27 started performing well from an academic standpoint that I began to have a better self
28 respect for my abilities academically. So that in itself tends to help in studying because
29 you're being rewarded for the performance and the effort. Although it wasn't easy, it
30 wasn't tough.

1 LC: What about the subject material? Were you interested in medical sciences,
2 life sciences?

3 RS: Not ahead of time because as I said the reason I wanted to go in, or I went
4 into that, was because the recruiter needed to fill that slot.

5 LC: So initially it was driven by some decision that was kind of—

6 RS: Totally arbitrary.

7 LC: Right. Once you're there actually doing it did you kind of get into it?

8 RS: No, because when I initially saw blood I fainted. When somebody threw up I
9 threw up.

10 LC: That's what I would do.

11 RS: It was one of these things where I would always joke about the military
12 finding the most inappropriate place to put somebody for the job.

13 LC: How long did that kind of queasy stuff last?

14 RS: It's still there.

15 LC: Is it?

16 RS: Oh, it's horrible. It doesn't matter if it's me. If I'm hurt it doesn't matter, but
17 it's watching it somewhere else. The one thing I found out was that if I became involved
18 in it that that went away. It's kind of like fixing a car. You're involved in the thing and
19 you're concentrating on the mechanics rather than on the emotional and physical pain
20 type thing or if imagined or whatever. I found that I could perform pretty well just by
21 getting myself involved immediately. If I step back and started to watch, then
22 somebody's going to have to catch me.

23 LC: So you found a place in your head where you could be okay with this kind of
24 experience that otherwise was pretty distasteful?

25 RS: Right.

26 LC: You found a place?

27 RS: Yep.

28 LC: Do you think that's how you sort of, just kind of fast forwarding a little bit,
29 is that what happened in Vietnam too, that you were just able to go to a certain place in
30 your head?

31 RS: Well, exactly. It's immediately get to work.

1 LC: Right, there's no time to lose really.

2 RS: Right. Exactly. Actually I think that works to the benefit.

3 LC: Why do you think that?

4 RS: Because if I know that I have to get to work then I will and I'll do it faster
5 and better. My level of concentration becomes more acute on what I'm doing.

6 LC: So when there's an expectation or a demand you can fulfill it?

7 RS: Yes.

8 LC: Let's talk about the training just a little bit longer. What was the actual span
9 of time that you were in advanced at the hospital corps school? Do you know how long
10 that lasted?

11 RS: Let me see. It was probably about twelve weeks.

12 LC: You had a lot to cover in twelve weeks. Do you think that you got enough
13 training in twelve weeks?

14 RS: Oh, but that's just the beginning. I mean, you've got the academic part of the
15 training behind you. Then we had a little bit of hands on work in the hospitals where we
16 would go up and go into the hospital and have jobs, which really didn't help me much
17 because I became a chaplain's assistant. The reason was because I was originally
18 Catholic. I could say the mass in Latin as an altar boy. They needed somebody to help
19 them say the mass.

20 LC: So your sort of rounds, I guess in the hospital were—

21 RS: Was in the Chaplain's office, which really didn't do me much good.

22 LC: Whereas other people were going to say orthopedics or—

23 RS: Mm-hmm. To something useful.

24 LC: Did you think this was a really good idea or a really bad idea?

25 RS: I just figured I was marching and doing time.

26 LC: You're still looking forward to doing your academic work and going to the
27 academy?

28 RS: At that point that had faded and I said no. I knew that I was not going to do
29 that.

30 LC: How did that transition occur?

1 RS: At the end of boot camp they have a career counseling day. They say, “Well,
2 what are you going to do?” and all the rest of the stuff. It’s mainly for people who hadn’t
3 enlisted in a specific specialty and they’re trying to match them up. Since I was a
4 corpsman it was a *fait accompli*. When I went into the career councilor he says, “Well,
5 you’re going to be a corpsman.” I said, “Well, no, I think I’m going to apply to
6 Bainbridge.” He didn’t like that at all. At that point you’re a little bit brain whipped at the
7 end of boot camp. So this guy and the disapproval and everything that I received from
8 that person. I think there is a separation between career enlisted people and officers.
9 Career enlisted don’t necessarily like to see people out of enlisted ranks becoming
10 officers. This is just my impression as a retrospective, but that was not good. At that point
11 I said, “No, I’m not going to do this.”

12 LC: He was kind of pushing you toward that?

13 RS: He was pushing me away from going to Bainbridge.

14 LC: Right, because he could see an academic and then officer’s career for you.

15 RS: Right.

16 LC: Somehow you felt that rank hold with him?

17 RS: Yeah, he wasn’t real happy.

18 LC: He let you know that how?

19 RS: There were some disparaging comments about officers and things like that,
20 “What? You don’t want to work for a living?” type thing. I was impressionable at that
21 point.

22 LC: Tell me and explain how he and that encounter with him kind of changed the
23 course of what you were thinking about your future.

24 RS: Well, boot camp wasn’t—I mean, despite the fact that I probably had it
25 easier than most of the people, it wasn’t a fun thing. I had already had second doubts
26 about military as a career, especially having grown up in the Baltimore area, not far from
27 the Naval Academy. Every year the Sun paper does a big spread on the plebe class and
28 the stuff they have to go through. So I was kind of aware of the regiment and I also knew
29 some of the Lacrosse players down there. These were upper classman at the academy.
30 They had talked about the plebe year and the things that you’re expected to do. I guess
31 it’s kind of a hazing, although that’s not politically correct to say at this point. Even

1 though I wanted to go to the academy there was still in the back of my mind a little bit of
2 trepidation about the whole break-in process at, just not the Naval Academy, but any
3 military academy.

4 LC: What was clear was that that was not going to be a cakewalk?

5 RS: Yeah, it was not going to be a cakewalk. So that when this guy got a hold of
6 me, he kind of pushed me over the edge. So I said, "Nah, I'll just do my four years and
7 worry about college later."

8 LC: So you were, at that point, obligated by the enlistment agreement to go for
9 four years.

10 RS: Mm-hmm.

11 LC: Okay. At the corps school did your curriculum include anything like
12 dissections as part of anatomy? Did you have any kind of practicum like that before you
13 actually went up into the hospital wards?

14 RS: You mean on cadavers?

15 LC: Yeah, or kittens or anything like that. Did you do anything like that? So it
16 was mostly books?

17 RS: No, not really. Yeah, it was mostly books. I had that in biology in high
18 school where dissected, actually vivisected a worm.

19 LC: Yes, I do know.

20 RS: And the old frog.

21 LC: Right. That was left decided and your stuff was much more directed toward,
22 was it patient care?

23 RS: Oh, tremendous amount towards patient care, tremendous amount.

24 LC: In traumatic situations, I mean, were they giving you sort of clinical trauma
25 training?

26 RS: There was a little bit of trauma training, but we did a lot of nursing
27 applications, learning how to make a bed. I mean, how do you do the Bishop's Corner
28 and all the rest of the stuff. You know, bounce a quarter off the stupid thing.

29 LC: How would you say that all of that served you once you were actually in
30 your posting in Vietnam? Was any of that useful?

1 RS: I mean the overall training was good. The applications, I mean there were
2 strange applications that you would find. In nursing care, when you're taking care of
3 patients and things, at certain times you want to take the patients focus away from what is
4 going on or what their problem is because you don't want them depressed. An extension
5 of that was, in the field, was that I would try to take the attention of the person away from
6 the grotesqueness of their injuries because if you could get their brain away from it, it
7 helped fight shock.

8 LC: Were the patients that you were working with at Great Lakes, were they all
9 veterans?

10 RS: No.

11 RS: It was basically a hospital ward very much like you'd see. As I said I was
12 with the chaplain's office so I really didn't see the patients that much. I mean, we got
13 practical skills off of the hospitals of giving shots, things of that nature.

14 LC: When you were with the chaplain was that a good relationship? Was it just
15 one person that you were working with primarily or was it a group of chaplains there?

16 RS: There were two chaplains and an assistant.

17 LC: What did you learn from that?

18 RS: From that? Not a whole lot.

19 LC: Not much?

20 RS: No.

21 LC: Nothing about working with families or grief or anything?

22 RS: No.

23 LC: So it was kind of a void?

24 RS: It was—yeah, it was kind of like when I was in grade school learning how to
25 say the mass with the priest in the school

26 LC: It was pretty formulaic.

27 RS: Yeah, I would go in there and I'd answer a phone. Then whenever they were
28 going to have a service, which was once a day, I would assist in the service and say
29 (phrase in Latin) and God bless you all. It was pretty worthless.

30 LC: When that was over, when your rotations in hospital, or rotation in hospital
31 was over what happened next?

1 RS: Well, we all graduated and got our quasi-diplomas and we received our next
2 duty stations.

3 LC: Which was for you where?

4 RS: Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

5 LC: Do you remember the trip down south?

6 RS: Well, not really. I flew from Great Lakes out to home, here. Took a couple of
7 days off and then I think I drove down with a friend of mine who was a Marine captain.
8 He had been to Friends School and he was stationed at Lejeune. We'd come up here and
9 see his girlfriend. He was heading down so I got a lift down with him.

10 LC: How was that couple of days with your family, how did that go?

11 RS: Oh, fine.

12 LC: Were they proud of you at this point or concerned about your future?

13 RS: I don't think there was a huge amount of concern or anything like that. I had
14 my next two duty stations lined up. The first one was Camp Lejeune and then the one
15 after that was Quantico.

16 LC: Let's sort of take them in turn. Can we talk first about Camp Lejeune?

17 RS: Mm-hmm.

18 LC: How long did you stay there?

19 RS: That was about five weeks.

20 LC: And what happened?

21 RS: Well, it was basically an indoctrination into the Marine Corps, which was a
22 mini Marine Corps boot camp without the overt psychological pressure.

23 LC: Can you explain that?

24 RS: Well, the Marines, they have the drill instructors who you see them on TV
25 who are yelling all the time? Well, those guys actually live. We didn't have the people
26 who were in our face yelling at us, but we did go through the regiment of getting up at
27 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning and running three or four miles before breakfast and having
28 breakfast. Then we would go out to the rifle range and we did shoot the rifle and crawl
29 under the barbed wire with the machine guns being shot above your head. Then going on
30 make shift patrols, how you would operate in a patrol situation. They had recreated

1 Vietnamese villages and that sort of thing. That was all geared towards operating with the
2 Marines in Vietnam.

3 LC: This training was completely different from anything that happened to you
4 up until this point. How was it for you? Was it hard? Was it surprising?

5 RS: Not really hard nor surprising. I was still in pretty good physical shape so the
6 physical part of it was not a real big deal. I mean, there are some people who had
7 problems with it. Since they weren't yelling at me that was fine. There wasn't any
8 academic expectations so that was fine. To me it was just getting up and learning,
9 learning when you do it, is that haptic?

10 LC: Uh-huh.

11 RS: Okay. So it was my haptic experience.

12 LC: The live fire, you were familiar with guns and so forth, but when it's sort of
13 coming right over your head did that put you in a different place with regards to what it
14 was you were actually doing?

15 RS: Not really. I mean, it was something I expected so therefore it was something
16 you just did. I also knew that if in the middle of that fire that if I stood up the rounds were
17 still going to be ten feet above my head.

18 LC: So you kind of had an intellectual sort of safety zone there where you knew
19 they weren't really firing at you.

20 RS: Right. They aren't shooting at you. The only ones that were weird was we
21 did have some drill instructors who were pretty strange. We would go out on these patrols
22 and you're in North Carolina and there are a bunch of swamps around. The swamps were
23 getting a little bit chilly because this was the latter part of October or going into
24 November. They seemed to take great pleasure in having us kind of slither through the
25 swamps and then pull out an M-80 Cherry Bomb and chuck it about five or six feet in
26 front of you and watch it explode and splash all over you. They were a little bit weird.

27 LC: Did you think that was appropriate sort of training, testing procedure?

28 RS: Oh, sure.

29 LC: How were the other guys doing with this?

30 RS: Oh, everybody seemed to do pretty well.

31 LC: They were doing pretty well?

1 RS: Mm-hmm.

2 LC: Was there much talk at this point about Vietnam?

3 RS: There was a lot of talk about it.

4 LC: Do you remember any of it or what the kind of tenure of talk was?

5 RS: It was basically the realization that this is probably where all of us were
6 going to go. One of the nurse's back at Great Lakes, her husband had been a Marine and
7 had been killed in Vietnam. So the dawning of the lack of immortality was beginning to
8 take shape. So yeah there was tremendous amount of concern. I think part of what we
9 were trying to do and our attention span when we were in Camp Lejeune was realizing
10 that we better learn it and learn it right because this was important to us.

11 LC: Did you feel while it was going on that the training was actually prepping
12 you appropriately? I mean, I know you can't know that until afterwards really. It felt
13 real?

14 RS: Mm-hmm.

15 LC: You say that there was concern. Were you reading the newspaper at all or
16 looking at the television, kind of following the war?

17 RS: Not really. No, I wasn't following it.

18 LC: At this point what were your impressions about the United States reasons for
19 being militarily committed in South Vietnam?

20 RS: I was very supportive of it.

21 LC: What did you think the purposes were?

22 RS: Basically the stopping of communism and I still feel that today. My opinion
23 of that has not really changed. I knew that communists were not nice people. Stalin only
24 killed about twenty million people. It was not a workable, political ideology or at least I
25 didn't feel it because I had always been brought up in a fairly competitive household. I
26 had to be competitive. I'm 5'11", which is not small, but my younger brother is 6'8" and
27 my older brother is 6'4" and as I told you my dad was 6'4". In order to survive because
28 we were all rough and tumble, I had to be competitive. I knew that communism, because
29 I had done a little bit of studying in history classes and social studies classes at Friends
30 about various political systems. To me it was just an unworkable system because what do
31 you do with people who are competitive? So that in an odd sort of way I just said I

1 couldn't survive in that place under that kind of system. I could see through the
2 implementation of a communist system and that people were killed and those were the
3 people who were going to be competitive. You were denuding a society of those who
4 would lead a society through just eliminating that competition.

5 LC: Did you kind of discuss these sorts of ideas with any of the other guys that
6 you were going through the Marine Corps initial training there?

7 RS: No, not really.

8 LC: Did you hear their comments about Vietnam and kind of bounce them off
9 what you were thinking or were you pretty clear that you had your take on it?

10 RS: I pretty much had my take on it. There is also a tremendous amount of
11 nationalism and patriotism that is involved in it. I think that, especially in your teen years,
12 your late teen years, you tend to either accept the idea of being patriotic where you trust
13 the government or you are skeptical about the leadership in the government. I pretty
14 much had trusted or trusted the politicians since they were elected that they were doing
15 the right thing.

16 LC: Did you have particular feelings about President Kennedy?

17 RS: My family was very much pro Kennedy. I can remember virtually everybody
18 around me at Friends School during his election year, and my family. My family is very,
19 very strongly Democratic and Kennedy kind of walked on water.

20 LC: When he was assassinated, do you remember that?

21 RS: Mm-hmm.

22 LC: Can you tell me about it, what your reaction is?

23 RS: It was on a Friday. It was actually the day of our School Bazaar, a Holiday
24 Bazaar. We got out of school early that day, but we were supposed to hang around
25 because at some point we had various jobs we were supposed to do. I had been down
26 playing football, touch football. As I was coming up from the field somebody came up
27 and said Kennedy had been shot. There was all this discussion about what do we do with
28 the bazaar and all the rest. It was a pretty depressing day.

29 LC: How did you feel when someone came up and told you? Did you believe
30 them?

1 RS: Well, your initial reaction is you've got to be kidding me, but immediately
2 you realize because of the somberness of the whole thing that no, they aren't kidding.

3 LC: Everyone's acting a certain way.

4 RS: Yeah, that this actually happened. Some discussion was, was he still alive?
5 They had rushed him to the hospital. So you just didn't know what the outcome was.

6 LC: Did they end up having the bazaar?

7 RS: Kind of but it was kind of muted. Everything was already set up. It was
8 already in progress.

9 LC: Was already in progress.

10 RS: Yeah. So that it became a—

11 LC: Very upsetting.

12 RS: Yeah.

13 LC: What was your opinion of President Johnson, particularly with regard to
14 Vietnam? You said you were trusting the government, you had kind of fallen on that side
15 of the divide. How did you evaluate his handling of the escalation of forces over there
16 and generally your impressions of him?

17 RS: Well, I think a lot of my impression has been skewed by what I think of him
18 now.

19 LC: Right. These are two different things?

20 RS: Yeah, two different things.

21 LC: Can you kind of surface the things that you thought in 1967?

22 RS: Well, once again, despite the fact that he fell into the presidency in the
23 beginning and it was kind of like a *fait accompli* that he was elected. He was still the
24 leader and at that point he was escalating the war against a force that I thought was an
25 evil force. Therefore, in terms of his Vietnam policy, I supported it. He was doing his
26 great society thing at the time. Once you start talking about it and you're talking about it
27 to impressionable teenagers who are not worried about paying for anything that it all
28 sounds great. Everybody chicken in every pot, the whole type of thing where the reality
29 or the practicality of what is being said and promoted is not there. In retrospect his ideas,
30 although they may have been well meaning at the time, the implementation of them just
31 screwed so many people up that it's just unbelievable.

1 LC: And all that was really left for another day.

2 RS: But that was left for another day. At the time it all sounds great so that
3 you're looking Lyndon Johnson who is promoting all these social agendas and things and
4 you're in a Quaker school where social agenda is a big thing. The only place that I'm
5 disagreeing with the school system is the prosecution of the war. It was Nathaniel Green
6 who was the Quaker General?

7 LC: Mm-hmm, yes.

8 RS: Okay. I'm looking at it and say well even some Quakers believed in fighting
9 for something. I drew comfort in Nathaniel Green.

10 LC: You felt that you were going to be fighting for something. That the United
11 States at large was fighting for something and that it was something worth fighting for.

12 RS: Yes, absolutely.

13 LC: Is there anything else you want to say about Camp Lejeune and your
14 experience there?

15 RS: No. It was just, once again, going through a training regiment. By this point I
16 had been in training for I guess nine months or so.

17 LC: Yes, I think so.

18 RS: It's a continuum of the training, basic training, and then learning something
19 with the medical aspect of what I would be doing and then how to operate in a combat
20 situation.

21 LC: In effect becoming a Marine.

22 RS: Right.

23 LC: Do you remember what your graduation was like from Camp Lejeune?

24 RS: No. I think it was a congratulations, you're out of here.

25 LC: Let's take a break for a second.

26 RS: All righty.

27 LC: Okay Mr. Slingluff, if we could maybe move to talking about your
28 experience, your transition to Quantico. Can you tell me how that happened, when you
29 found out you would be going there?

30 RS: When I received my initial orders out of Great Lakes Corps School it
31 included Quantico being my ultimate duty station once out of Camp Lejeune.

1 LC: This is your initial sort of duty assignments.

2 RS: Yeah, exactly. That's when I'm getting into the working world.

3 LC: What's your rank at this time?

4 RS: I'm—let's see—E-3.

5 LC: Okay. What did you expect? Did you know what to expect when you go to
6 Quantico?

7 RS: Not really. I knew that it was a Marine Corps base and they had a naval
8 hospital.

9 LC: So you figured you would have something to do with the hospital.

10 RS: Right.

11 LC: Did you know anything more than that before you got to the gate at
12 Quantico?

13 RS: No, not really. I was assigned to the hospital. So I went up to the hospital and
14 said here I am. I handed them my orders and they said, "Okay, go on over there and
15 there's where you'll sleep," or whatever.

16 LC: So they did some processing?

17 RS: They processed me in and then they said pick your own buck, which was
18 new because every other place they said this is where you're sleeping.

19 LC: Did that sort of feel like a real job then?

20 RS: Yeah, it did. As I said, there were a couple of other people who had been
21 through corps school with me who followed the same route. So there were really three or
22 four of us who were kind of landing at the same time at that place.

23 LC: Was that helpful in some way?

24 RS: Sure. They were familiar people and all the rest of that. Somebody who the
25 first night there you could say, "Well, let's go get some pizza," and you could run out and
26 kind of explore the town of Quantico and the environment.

27 LC: Now was this, do you recall, around Christmas time of 1967 or perhaps a
28 little after that?

29 RS: It was right around Christmas time, yeah, probably a little bit before
30 Christmas.

1 LC: Did you have Christmas off? Was that kind of a stutter step? Did you go
2 home?

3 RS: Yeah, as far as I recall. At this point, the military, it changes. It becomes a
4 job. Where all of a sudden you're working your eight hours a day the rest of the time
5 unless you're pulling some sort of duty at night. That's rotated through everybody so that
6 it might be twice a month where you're kind of tied down to the place, but the rest of the
7 time it is an eight hour job and you just do your own thing. Quantico is not that far from
8 Baltimore so that it was easy to—a trip on home over the weekend or whatever and visit
9 my girlfriend or take some of the guys who were there, take them back to my house. My
10 parents' house was rather large and had seven bedrooms. So there was enough space for
11 anybody.

12 LC: Did your buddies kind of come along and crash there?

13 RS: On occasion. Yeah, they'd come up and we'd goof around in Baltimore.
14 Then there was a cousin of mine who at the same time was stationed at Ft. Belvoir, which
15 is just up the road. He came on down and I hadn't seen him for years, but he was around.
16 He also was driving a Corvette, which was cool.

17 LC: So you had wheels.

18 RS: Yeah. There was some mobility and I had my Volkswagen.

19 LC: Did you have a bug or what did you have?

20 RS: Yeah, I had a bug.

21 LC: Now you said your cousin was at Ft. Belvoir. Had he enlisted or been
22 drafted?

23 RS: Yeah, he had enlisted also.

24 LC: Okay. You had a brother who was in the service who was in service at this
25 time as well? Was he in the—

26 RS: At this point he may have just been going in because he graduated from
27 Hopkins, let's see, that would have been, '67. I think he graduated '67 or '68.

28 LC: Okay. So it's in this time.

29 RS: About that time he was going into the Air Force.

30 LC: Had he been in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) at Hopkins?

31 RS: Yes.

1 LC: So he was also on an Officer track.
2 RS: Mm-hmm.
3 LC: Did you correspond with him or compare notes at Christmas time or any
4 other time?
5 RS: No.
6 LC: He was kind of doing his own thing?
7 RS: He was doing his thing and I was doing mine.
8 LC: Your cousin, did you get along with him fairly well so that—?
9 RS: At that point, yeah.
10 LC: Were you comparing notes about kind of military lifestyle and how you were
11 adjusting to it and all that?
12 RS: I think it was a little bit less cerebral than that.
13 LC: Okay. Like what?
14 RS: It was like, “What are you doing this weekend?”
15 LC: Got it. Okay. Did you buy any beer?
16 RS: Yeah, what are we going to do? He wanted me to introduce him to some girls
17 up in Baltimore.
18 LC: And you had a girlfriend?
19 RS: Yeah.
20 LC: Was she in Baltimore?
21 RS: Yes.
22 LC: Was this someone you had known for awhile in high school?
23 RS: She went to Saint Paul School for girls, which was another private school in
24 the Baltimore area. She was a couple of years behind me so that I met her—where did I
25 meet her? Oh, I met her at a debutante party.
26 LC: You remember that?
27 RS: The party?
28 LC: Yeah.
29 RS: Yeah, I mean because she was great looking. They used to have summer
30 parties where the parents of the debutante would give a party in honor of the girl and

1 things like that. They'd invite all these people over. So I met her at a party. I also had
2 known of her because I had dated several girls at Saint Paul's before.

3 LC: Was there kind of an alliance sort of relationship between Saint Paul's and
4 Quaker?

5 RS: No.

6 LC: It just happened that way.

7 RS: It just happened that way. The girls at Saint Paul's were better looking than
8 the Quakers. I had met her and we dated and we were still dating.

9 LC: Was your relationship with her becoming kind of—was it important to you
10 to have that anchor outside of your military being on the base?

11 RS: Yeah, very much so.

12 LC: Well, let's talk about what your assignment shaped up as when you first
13 started working at Quantico on the base. What did they assign you to do?

14 RS: They rotated us through the wards, through the emergency room, through the
15 various clinics. Once again it was all part of the training because we would be dealing
16 with orthopedics or working in the operating room or assisting up there. Then
17 occasionally we would be going over to the Marine Corps side of the base and working
18 with the Marines out in the field because they had what they call their PLC (platoon
19 leader's course) program.

20 LC: Which is?

21 RS: Platoon Leadership Company. Those were basically the Marine ROTC guys
22 who were coming in for their summer. They also had their officer candidate school there,
23 their OCS. So they would be doing field activities. We'd be backing them up out in the
24 field and going along with them to make sure people get over stressed and things like
25 that. So we learned, once again, it was reinforced what we were learning down at
26 Quantico. I also got my ambulance driver's license, did a fair amount of work in the
27 emergency room. The doctors also were really good at teaching us. I became pretty
28 proficient at suturing. I think that was part of the fact that the doctors realized that they
29 better get me involved other wise I was going to pass out.

30 LC: You think this was particular to you because they could see you were turning
31 green?

1 RS: I think that they wanted to do it with everybody, but they knew that I enjoyed
2 suturing and did a good job of it. When they would have a psychiatrist on duty in the
3 emergency room, he wasn't really great at suturing.

4 LC: So they let you have a hand in it.

5 RS: They say, "Here, you do this. You're much better than I am."

6 LC: Did you go through several different areas of the hospital?

7 RS: Mm-hmm.

8 LC: Were there others that you remember particularly?

9 RS: I did OBGYN (obstetrics and gynecology), helped deliver babies. I did, well
10 a lot of orthopedic work. We did a lot of just illness, sick officers' quarters, which at
11 Quantico it's every retired general in the world when they are geriatric they end up going
12 there it seems.

13 LC: Because why?

14 RS: It's a bucolic setting. It's nice. It's not as stressed as some place like Walter
15 Reed or Bethesda Naval Hospital, which are really hospital factories. They can get,
16 actually, much better care just because it was smaller and a little bit more intimate.

17 LC: Do you remember how big the hospital was, how many beds?

18 RS: I don't remember. It was one these big ol' brick hospitals that was sitting
19 right on the shore of the river. It was a nice place. I would imagine like the sick officers'
20 quarters ward maybe had twenty-five beds. So we rotated through the entire thing. Once
21 you are in the emergency room, you're handling anything because you've got kids who
22 have fallen off their bike and skinned their knees to the Marines who got drunk on Friday
23 night and you're having to scrap them up off the pavement on I-95.

24 LC: Did you see very many vets from Vietnam who was having continuing
25 rehab?

26 RS: In 1968, the beginning of 1968 when Tet happened, we had a huge, huge
27 influx because they overflowing the hospitals. Bethesda was overflowed so we actually
28 had some patients in beds in the hallways just because for a while there it was just so
29 many casualties.

30 LC: Do you remember some of the cases from that time period or do you
31 remember the crush, the demand of having to meet this—?

1 RS: Well, there were the demands, but there was a captain who had been shot up
2 pretty good in Hue. He came in. He was a—I mean, do I use names?

3 LC: You can say whatever you would like. It's fine.

4 RS: It was Captain Bachelor. His father was an admiral at the time. He was a
5 Princeton grad and a football player up at Princeton and all the rest of this. He left an
6 impression. Basically because of his—he still had such a positive will. He was not in
7 great shape. He had one of these circular beds where it rotates so you can sleep on your
8 stomach or sleep on your back or whatever, but his attitude was just so positive. That
9 made an impression. He was wounded in the legs. I think both of his legs were broken
10 and they had one of these double casts that's connected, yet there weren't many
11 complaints.

12 LC: What rotation were you on when some of these cases from Tet began coming
13 in, do you recall?

14 RS: I was in sick officers' quarters. I spent more of my time up there within the
15 hospital compound than any other. So that's where I was. There was also another case up
16 there. It was a guy who was in OSC, he became sick. It wasn't a Vietnam related thing,
17 he was just ill. He had to be in isolation for a while. We used to go in and talk to him. We
18 were all masked up and all the rest of the stuff, but since he was alone it was easing. His
19 name was John Jackson and I'll get to him later.

20 LC: Was the training that you were getting going through these rotations, were
21 you satisfied with what you were doing or did you kind of feel like you wanted to get
22 onto something else?

23 RS: No, I mean this was my job. There were new things going on so it was fairly
24 challenging. The biggest problem I had with I guess some of the nurses who I at that
25 point felt were a little bit outrageously bossy, but that's the way it goes.

26 LC: Was there tension on staff between the nurses and the corpsmen?

27 RS: I think no greater tension than you would have in any working environment
28 where you have diverse personalities.

29 LC: In your appraisal it was more personality driven?

30 RS: Yes.

31 LC: Was it a problem?

1 RS: At one point it became a problem for me. There was one particular nurse and
2 I confronted her.

3 LC: Can you tell me what happened with that?

4 RS: I had been pulling night duty. You pull it out a week at a time. It was
5 expected that the night corpsman would clean up the place after the day's activities, clean
6 up the galley, clean up the halls, take out the old buffer and get the place nice and shiny
7 and all the rest of the stuff. I had spent particular attention on the galley. I mean, just
8 worked my buns off on the thing. She came in and started pulling a white glove
9 inspection. I just looked at her and I said, "You know something? I've worked my tail off
10 on this place." I said, "You're never going to find it cleaner." I said, "What is your
11 purpose of doing this?"

12 LC: Did she explain?

13 RS: She kind of backed off. No, she said, "Well, I didn't realize you worked so
14 hard." I'm like, rather than trying to find what's wrong just try to find what's right. None
15 of the other corpsmen really got along with her, but after that we got along fine.

16 LC: So you're kind of taking things in hand and saying something to her, sort of
17 change the—

18 RS: Be positive. I mean why beat people up?

19 LC: Were the nurses, where they Marines?

20 RS: They were Navy.

21 LC: Okay. They were Navy. Were they in general career Navy did you think?

22 RS: Some of them were career Navy, some of them had found the Navy as a way
23 of paying for nursing school. So they were in to get their education and they had duty to
24 the Navy. They were all pretty dedicated to the Navy and doing what they're doing. By
25 and large they were just a great group of people.

26 LC: In general were you sensing on the base any tension between the people who
27 were strictly Navy and the Marines? Did you see any of that?

28 RS: No tension, I think there was some polite ribbing.

29 LC: Okay. Do you remember any incidences where that took place?

30 RS: None specifically, but it was always that if you run into a Marine, we were
31 suavey, that kind of stuff.

1 LC: When your rotations were over, did that rotation scheme last the entire year
2 or did they—?

3 RS: Yeah, it was pretty much the entire year.

4 LC: At this time were you very much in communication with your family? I
5 know you said you went home a couple times.

6 RS: Uh-huh. Sure.

7 LC: What was your father's kind of appreciation of your duty assignment? Did he
8 think this was a good thing for you to be doing?

9 RS: I was not in trouble.

10 LC: Okay, you weren't in trouble. I always considered that to be good.

11 RS: Yeah.

12 LC: When did you find out that you were going to actually go out in Vietnam?

13 RS: Probably in October of '68.

14 LC: Do you remember that?

15 RS: Not particularly. I mean I remember receiving the orders, but for me it had
16 always been a *fait accompli*. This was what was next.

17 LC: You had already had some familiarity with the outcomes really of Tet there
18 at the hospital. How were you feeling during the summer and fall of 1968 when you were
19 anticipating that you were going to go over there?

20 RS: When's my next date?

21 LC: So you're still pretty much—?

22 RS: I'm still back here in the States. It's something that I wasn't really going to
23 focus on. It's something that I guess I still do in life and that's you deal with where you
24 are and what happens is going to happen. It's more of a fatalistic attitude. There are
25 certain things that you feel that are just going to happen no matter what happens. So why
26 worry about them? Figure it out once you're there.

27 LC: Were you aware or paying any attention to the escalating protest against the
28 war?

29 RS: Not a whole lot. My girlfriend at this point had gone down to the University
30 of North Carolina. She was in nursing school there. I mean it was a program where she
31 was going to get her bachelor's degree as well as a nursing degree. There were some anti-

1 war protests. I remember receiving a letter from her talking about the war and the
2 negatives of it and how we were the bad guys or whatever it is. I wrote a letter back to
3 her that said, "I think you're wrong." I remember writing the letter and being at that point
4 still very supportive of what we were doing in Vietnam and recognizing that there are
5 people who are not Americans around the world who should have the right to live in a
6 society that allows them freedom. I felt that very strongly so that I thought that we were
7 in fact doing the right thing by supporting the people of Vietnam and not allowing them
8 to become engulfed by a political system that is totally oppressive.

9 LC: So you mailed the letter I take it. How did that work out?

10 RS: She wrote back a letter saying that she was ashamed of herself.

11 LC: Oh, is that right?

12 RS: That she hadn't thought of it in terms of patriotism and the things that we
13 have, that other people have the rights to them as well just by the fact that they are human
14 beings.

15 LC: Did she tell you anything about the level of protest at UNC (University of
16 North Carolina)? Did you know anything about that?

17 RS: No.

18 LC: In the fall of '68 when you got your orders then things began to crystallize in
19 terms with your relationship to going to Vietnam. Did you still sort of feel like well
20 between now and the time I leave I should have a good time?

21 RS: Yeah.

22 LC: And did you?

23 RS: Yes.

24 LC: Did you go out and sort of use your twelve hours off a day to get off base?

25 RS: I mean, we would just do our normal stuff, go into D.C. to some of the clubs,
26 listen to some music, travel up to Baltimore because it was getting towards the holiday
27 season and just enjoy friends and party and things like that.

28 LC: Did you spend Christmas at home that year?

29 RS: Yep.

1 LC: You're going out pretty soon to Vietnam, in January of '69. How did that
2 come about? Did you report for the flight out or did you have to report in San Francisco
3 or do you remember?

4 RS: I flew out of San Bernardino. What happened was my brother who was in the
5 Air Force at that time and had finished his OCS and had been assigned to Flight School
6 near Tempe, Arizona. He was married right around Christmas time of 1968. He and his
7 wife were going to Flagstaff for their honeymoon. John had his car out in Tempe, but she
8 had a car that somehow or another needed to get from Baltimore to Tempe. So I was
9 elected. I think I was supposed to report on January twenty-ninth to San Bernardino. So
10 about a week ahead of that, or no maybe a little bit more, I left Baltimore in her car and
11 drove to Tempe.

12 LC: What did you think about on that drive? Do you remember?

13 RS: Not a lot. I mean, I probably just listened to music. I was just wondering, she
14 had this nice plum colored Camaro so could I get to a hundred?

15 LC: And did you?

16 RS: Oh, yeah. I didn't have any Motel reservations. So I was just kind of looking
17 for a place to stay. It took me three days to drive out there and stay in such huge
18 metropolises as Shamrock, Texas. That had one of the hottest Tex-Mex places I've ever
19 eaten. It was dry so I couldn't get a beer.

20 LC: That's not good.

21 RS: So it took me three days to drive out there and then I spent a couple of days
22 with them. Then they took me down to the bus station and I hopped on a bus and went
23 out to San Bernardino to the air base there.

24 LC: Your brother was doing flight training in Arizona. Was he anticipating that
25 he was going to get orders for Vietnam?

26 RS: I don't think he had any particular anticipation at that point. He was too early
27 in his training.

28 LC: How did he feel about you going? Do you remember?

29 RS: Good luck. I mean, that was very much the attitude of my family. There were
30 no maudlin goodbyes. There were no tears. It's just, do a good job and come back safe
31 type attitude.

1 LC: Did you feel they were proud of you?

2 RS: Yeah, pretty much, not any more so than—I don't think that there's ever
3 been in our family a heightened sense of pride in an individual for doing an individual
4 thing other than the fact that they're just proud of who you are always. I mean, it's a
5 level—there have always been expectations of how you're supposed to behave. As long
6 as you meet those expectations with minor scrapes here and there, which everybody has,
7 then that pride is constant.

8 LC: So their pride in you wasn't conditional on you being in military service or
9 not.

10 RS: Exactly. I mean there were no—exactly, it's unconditional. It's kind of like
11 grace of God.

12 LC: That's nice. You're very lucky. You're getting off the bus at San Bernardino,
13 when you got there, what did you do?

14 RS: Well, I had the choice do I check in or do I not. I decided not to check in
15 because it was my last, I guess, night of freedom or whatever. I found a motel and found
16 a good restaurant, nice steak restaurant, and had a steak and slept off base and next
17 morning I checked in.

18 LC: Did you feel like you're taking care of yourself or kind of giving yourself a
19 last fling sort of thing?

20 RS: Well, it wasn't really a fling it was just a last night of just being myself.

21 LC: And having control.

22 RS: Yeah.

23 LC: When you reported the next morning, tell me what you faced, what you saw.

24 RS: Well, it was pretty much a typical military hurry up and wait thing where
25 you check in with your bags and things like that. They say, "Okay, this is where you're
26 going to spend the night." There is a bunch of paperwork and stuff that we had to go
27 through. I don't really remember all the stuff we had to sign, but there were a bunch of
28 medical release type things in case we were wounded. If you're wounded do you want
29 your relatives contacted depending upon the severity of the wound and all the rest of the
30 stuff. I mean, there was a lot of paper work. So it was like go here, there, everywhere and
31 get yourself squared away.

1 LC: Did you have any inoculations or anything like that to go through as well?
2 RS: I had all of those taken care of at Quantico.
3 LC: Okay. So that was all handled in advance.
4 RS: Yeah. I'd rather have my friends sticking me than somebody else.
5 LC: Right, no strangers with needles. Where were you billeted when you were
6 there?
7 RS: I don't know. It was just a regular military barracks.
8 LC: How many days did you stay there?
9 RS: It was either one or two.
10 LC: And then?
11 RS: And then we hopped a plane and flew over towards—our destination was
12 Okinawa. I think we stopped in Hawaii for refueling. We stopped in the Philippines for
13 refueling and then Continental Airlines landed us softly in Okinawa.
14 LC: What was the mood on the plane say when you were taking off from say
15 Hawaii?
16 RS: It was pretty somber. It was pretty quiet. There were a couple of guys who
17 had guitars. They would play some music and sing. At this point the stewardess's knew
18 what was going on and they were pretty supportive of making us comfortable. It was just
19 a regular flight I guess. It was long.
20 LC: With a lot of stops.
21 RS: With a lot of stops, yeah.
22 LC: Did you get off at all or did you just stay there?
23 RS: No, stayed in the plane.
24 LC: Yeah, that's a long flight. When you arrived in Okinawa what was your first
25 sort of impression?
26 RS: It was wet and chilly. It was probably in the fifties and raining most of the
27 time I was there. We were there probably for about four or five days. Once again they ran
28 us here, there, and everywhere waiting for our flights to get out, but they also gave us a
29 change of uniform. We were given our camouflage uniforms.
30 LC: Were you with other corpsmen?
31 RS: Maybe one or two, but we really didn't know each other.

1 LC: At what point were you outfitted with your kit, with your medical supplies?
2 RS: That wasn't until I got to our battalion.
3 LC: So in Okinawa you were processing again paperwork?
4 RS: Right.
5 LC: Did you do anything while you were there? Did you get off base?
6 RS: No. I didn't get off base. Probably just because I didn't know anybody. I
7 went to the—by that time I was an E-4, and so I could go to the NCO (noncommissioned
8 officer) Club. I would go to the NCO Club, get pizza or hamburger or something like that
9 and play the dime slot machines.
10 LC: What was the mood there in Okinawa amongst the guys that you kind of saw
11 or that were in the club?
12 RS: It was pretty tense. Nobody was making friends really with one another.
13 Guys would drink a fair amount of beer or whatever, but we weren't in an area where
14 there were people who were coming back from Vietnam. We were heading over.
15 Probably by design, I never really thought about it. There was nobody coming back who
16 was socializing with us. We're not getting freaked.
17 LC: Was there quite a bit of drinking going on?
18 RS: Probably not anymore than in D.C. on Friday evening. It wasn't an unhealthy
19 maudlin let me just get absolutely blasted out of my mind.
20 LC: More kind of time passing way to make it go by. Was there music in the club
21 there? Do you remember?
22 RS: Yeah. I mean, it was a jukebox.
23 LC: Do you recall any music from this time period that was particularly
24 important to you?
25 RS: Well, I was into soul music.
26 LC: You were listening to soul?
27 RS: Yeah.
28 LC: Like who?
29 RS: Oh, I don't know, Smoky Robinson, The Temptations. I don't think that Otis
30 Redding was real big at that time yet, but I liked Otis Redding. I had a bunch of his
31 earlier albums and things like that.

1 LC: This is just kind of on the same track. When you had gone to some of the
2 clubs up in D.C. in Baltimore, was that what you were listening to? Were you looking for
3 blues or soul?

4 RS: Well, disco was in at that point. I mean it was pretty ugly. It made a lot of
5 noise.

6 LC: There's a lot of blues clubs though up that way. I was wondering if you were
7 listening to blues.

8 RS: No, I listened to blues later on.

9 LC: Music is just such an important part of a number of people's experience in
10 the war. I thought I would just ask about it. How did it happen that you got on a plane in
11 Okinawa to go in-country?

12 RS: I think that all of a sudden somebody came in and said, "Okay, you're on this
13 manifest. Go out and get on the plane. Get your stuff, your gear." We just got on a plane.

14 LC: So you had some camo now. You had some different uniforms. What else
15 had they given you there? What else had they issued you with?

16 RS: A couple pairs of socks. They gave us underwear. A couple pairs of boots. I
17 think it was only one pair of boots, two pair of pants, couple shirts.

18 LC: So you had a big kit really of clothing.

19 RS: Yeah.

20 LC: What was the plane flight to Vietnam like and where did you land?

21 RS: I landed in Da Nang. The flight was pretty good. We had to fly off the coast
22 of it a little bit because it was nighttime. So we were going to land really at dawn. When
23 we were flying off of the coast, it was interesting because you could look out and you
24 could see the tracer bullets going off occasionally, these red lines going up into the sky.
25 They had these illumination parachutes. You'd occasionally see one of those pop out and
26 swing lazily back and forth as it was descending, shedding some light on things. Then we
27 kind of landed when it got light.

28 LC: Do you remember the mood on that plane at all?

29 RS: Not really. I think it was pretty much the same as the other. I don't think
30 there was a lot of conversation.

31 LC: When you saw the tracer fire what did you think?

1 RS: It was really kind of like holy shit here it is.
2 LC: Like now I'm in a war zone.
3 RS: I don't think it was that deep of thought. It was more, well, this is Vietnam.
4 Yeah, it's going on.
5 LC: The plane landed very early in the morning, was it still dark?
6 RS: No, it was just light.
7 LC: When you stepped off the plane what was your first impression?
8 RS: Dust, red dust.
9 LC: Everywhere?
10 RS: Everywhere. Everybody was just dusty and kind of grimy looking. The
11 people who had been there, nobody had polished shoes. I mean, it was dusty. That was
12 my first impression of the place. We got off the plane and then we had to check in.
13 Everybody stood in line and you said who you were and you gave them your orders.
14 When I gave them mine they said, "Well, somebody will be coming down from Division
15 Medical sometime today. They will send down a jeep so go over there and sit and wait." I
16 went over to where I was pointed. There were about three or four other corpsmen who
17 were on the plane. So we just kind of sat down and waited for somebody from division to
18 show up with a jeep and say, "Anybody heading this way?" It was far less formal than I
19 thought it would be.
20 LC: Were the guys that were sitting there waiting, did you recognize any of
21 them?
22 RS: Nope.
23 LC: Did you find out where they were coming from?
24 RS: Not really. There was one guy, I don't know where in the world he came
25 from, but he was still wearing his Navy uniform, his dress Navy uniform. I was like, how
26 in the world did you get by with that?
27 LC: He was probably the only one within sight.
28 RS: Right, exactly. He was a sore thumb, but at any rate. So we waited there for
29 about several hours and saw people come and go. It was still dusty. Then finally a jeep
30 came down and said, "Anybody going up to Division Medical?" So all of us kind of
31 loaded our stuff onboard and hopped into the jeep and we took off towards Division

1 Medical. They drove us—I had no clue where we were. I still try to figure out the route
2 that was taken and all the rest of this. I don't know whether they were trying to show us,
3 give us a tour of the area or whatever it was, but it seemed to be it would be a round
4 about way to get to division. I didn't know it at the time, but later on—I said I had my
5 ambulance driver's license. Later on from battalion I used to drive into Da Nang quite a
6 bit. There were easier ways to get from point A to point B.

7 LC: Do you think that kind of circuitous route had anything to do with security?

8 RS: No, I think they were just kind of showing us around. Maybe they didn't
9 want to get back to division quite as fast as that and driving around in a jeep is a little bit
10 of freedom.

11 LC: Did you talk to the guy that was driving?

12 RS: No, not really.

13 LC: Were there a couple of people that picked you up or just one?

14 RS: There were two.

15 LC: Were they talking to each other?

16 RS: Yeah and they kind of point out things as we went by. They'd say, "That's a
17 village where you can get laid," or something like that. Pardon my language.

18 LC: No, that's fine.

19 RS: We'll get colorful.

20 LC: That's fine. Did you go, "Okay, I'd better know that."

21 RS: Well, no, I wasn't really concerned about that.

22 LC: Did the things that they were telling you seem to be in any way important?

23 RS: No.

24 LC: It was kind of like a city tour.

25 RS: Yeah.

26 LC: Where were they taking you?

27 RS: They were taking us to the Division Medical, which was the—they had 1st
28 Medical Battalion which was really where Marines would be taken who were going to
29 stay in-country who had been wounded and you were going to send them back out or they
30 were wounded so badly they couldn't move them somewhere. It was right next to graves
31 registration. That was 1st Med Battalion, but then really the 1st Medical Division was the

1 operational headquarters where they coordinated all of the medical units of the various
2 battalions and things and also the 1st Med Battalion hospital area. So this was more an
3 administrative area.

4 LC: Was your sort of chain of command as a corpsman, was that through this
5 admin group or was it through the commanders in the field?

6 RS: Eventually it would go through admin. I only had contact with 1st Medical
7 Division twice in my stay there. This was the first time. So I was there. I checked in and
8 they just had, I guess it was a sheet of paper. It was really just totally informal of saying,
9 “Okay, this battalion needs a corpsman, this battalion needs a Corpsman, this battalion
10 needs a corpsman,” and it’s like, “You go there. You go there. You go there. You go
11 there,” totally random.

12 LC: Was it really seemed that simple to you?

13 RS: Yeah.

14 LC: Did you have any thoughts as to why this or that unit needed a corpsman?

15 RS: No. I figured that somebody had either survived and rotated back to the
16 States or somebody was wounded or killed.

17 LC: Did you even think about it or was it just, okay, this is my assignment.

18 RS: Yeah, that was non productive.

19 LC: So what did they assign you to?

20 RS: They assigned me to the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment.

21 LC: Did you know where that was?

22 RS: Had no clue.

23 LC: Or anything about them other than that’s who you were now?

24 RS: No. I had no clue whatsoever. They said, “Somebody is going to be down
25 here some time today and they’ll pick you up.”

26 LC: So not dissimilar from what had happened when you landed? “Just wait here
27 until someone comes and gets you.”

28 RS: Right.

29 LC: Did you even know where Da Nang was in Vietnam?

30 RS: Yeah.

31 LC: You had kind of a mental map.

1 RS: I mean, geographically I knew where it was. I mean, I knew that it was south
2 of Hue, north of Saigon, up in the I Corps area and obviously below the 17th parallel.

3 LC: Right, and that that was where the Marines were.

4 RS: Yes.

5 LC: So you're sitting there waiting. What happened next?

6 RS: Eventually somebody came down. This didn't take long. It was probably
7 only about half an hour or so and a couple of guys came down in a jeep and they said,
8 "You going up to 3rd Battalion?" I said, "Here I am." So I jumped in the jeep and took off
9 towards 3rd Battalion.

10 LC: When you got to 3rd Battalion what did it look like?

11 RS: It was dusty. The color of the dust was a little bit more brown at this point.
12 The battalion aid station is where they dropped me off. The main road ran right through
13 the middle of the battalion area. Actually the 3rd Battalion was stationed right at the
14 regimental headquarters, right at that point. So it was a fairly large compound area. On
15 the left hand side of the road as it went through was the chow hall and on the right hand
16 side was the battalion aid station. It had a nice little Marine Corps sign up there saying
17 Battalion Aid Station. Pulled in there were a couple of hooches for where the guys would
18 sleep. There was an administrative building. There was a sick call area, supply tent, and a
19 couple of shitters. That was pretty much it.

20 LC: What was your first impression of battalion aid?

21 RS: MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) didn't exist at that point, but if you
22 could transport yourself into a MASH unit without the personalities.

23 LC: Okay, so you're speaking of the television show.

24 RS: Yeah the television show. I mean, that's what it looked like, kind of. So that
25 was kind of my impression if you can take yourself mentally into that.

26 LC: Was it basically tent construction?

27 RS: Yeah, it was tent construction on top of plywood. They would elevate the
28 tents. You'd have plywood and then you may have on some of them, plywood up about
29 four feet where they would use a sheet of plywood. Then there would be a screen area
30 and the tent flap could either go up or down to let air go through.

31 LC: About how big was it?

1 RS: The sick call was probably I guess about twelve feet wide, maybe sixteen
2 feet wide, and then about two in a half times as long.

3 LC: What was contained within? Can you kind of walk us through? So there's an
4 area that's sick call.

5 RS: Okay, the sick call area—since the platform was elevated, I guess a platform
6 tent is how you'd describe it. You go up the steps and there was a sitting area and a
7 check-in desk. Then you would go through a, let's see, a doorway. There would be
8 stations on either side of the aid's station itself where they would have cots, military cots
9 that were up on stands so that they were up higher so that if a doctor needed to work he
10 would be working at waist or above level. There may have been about three or four on
11 either side of the center aisle. Behind each one you would have IV bottles, anything
12 necessary for emergency medical care, hypodermic needles, things to clean wounds,
13 normal—not unlike an emergency room situation.

14 LC: Like prep trays?

15 RS: Yeah, prep trays, things like that. You go to the back of it, there was a kind
16 of a lab that just did the—if you were checking for malaria you would have a microscope.
17 You could look in and see if somebody had malaria or various social diseases et cetera.

18 LC: Was there more? Was there a sort of trauma room?

19 RS: All these stations were all set up for trauma.

20 LC: Okay. So this was to handle—?

21 RS: Yeah, it would handle anything. Behind that there was the supply tent where
22 some of the drugs were kept, morphine, that sort of stuff where it was locked up and
23 away from the normal traffic of people. Battle dressings, pads, gauze pads, whatever was
24 necessary. Your excess supply of IV drips and things like that.

25 LC: Before we talk about you actually sort of beginning work and who greeted
26 you, can you tell me what the standard compliments of people assigned to BAS (battalion
27 aid station) was at that time? Were there two doctors?

28 RS: It depended upon the thing. We had a doctor named Vosh. He was the only
29 doctor. Then we had a chief. At that particular place we also had a dentist, but that was
30 more because it was regiment. So that a dentist was there, but when we would move he

1 would not go with us. There was a chief petty officer who was in charge of assigning
2 details and things of that nature.

3 LC: Administrative things.

4 RS: Administrative. Then there was an administrative staff, which was usually
5 two or three people. They were also corpsmen. So their side job—you had various jobs
6 that were beside being the medical—you just didn't wait for people to get sick and then
7 have a job. There were things that had to be accomplished in order for the thing to move
8 smoothly. There were people who were in charge of the supply tent, people who were in
9 charge of taking care of the outhouses, the shitters as we called them. It depended. The
10 duties would rotate around depending upon the people, who you had doing what. There
11 was generally an ambulance driver and that was about it.

12 LC: Do you remember in the medical lab what kind of equipment there was?

13 RS: It was mainly microscopes slides and then the ability to do slides. I mean this
14 was mainly for diagnoses of malaria and gonorrhea.

15 LC: Did the Corpsman do that?

16 RS: Yes.

17 LC: Had you been trained to read slides?

18 RS: Yes.

19 LC: Did the position with the doctor come back and work in medical lab at all?

20 RS: If he had a question, but by this point we were pretty darn good.

21 LC: Medical lab had been one of your rotations?

22 RS: Mm-hmm.

23 LC: So most corpsmen had qualified in some way as med techs in some degree?

24 RS: Right, to some degree.

25 LC: For the basic things you were likely to see, would likely be asked to look at?

26 RS: Exactly. I mean, we were trained in specific things or with specific things to
27 look for. If it got beyond that we would send the people back to either the hospital of Da
28 Nang or 1st Med.

29 LC: 1st Med being the regimental?

30 RS: No, 1st Med was 1st Med Battalion. They have their own separate battalion
31 within the division structure.

1 LC: Okay, got it. So the day you arrived up there at the BAS, actually at the
2 battalion, who do you talk to first?

3 RS: I checked in with one of the corpsmen who was there. I don't remember his
4 name. He was a blond guy.

5 LC: Did he sort of tell you, here, you need to go here?

6 RS: Yeah he said, "The places is over there. Find yourself a bunk, put your stuff
7 down." Processed my paperwork in, letting people know that I arrived.

8 LC: What were your quarters like?

9 RS: It was pretty much an open platform tent with cots.

10 LC: Were you with other corpsmen?

11 RS: Yeah.

12 LC: So everybody was kind of housed together?

13 RS: Yeah.

14 LC: Some of the preliminary paperwork and getting organized happens. How did
15 you find out what your assignment was going to be?

16 RS: Well, it took a couple of days because what they did is they had about five
17 days of what they called in-country training and that was going out. You would go out on
18 these patrols, but they were basically mine sweeps up and down the roads. You learned
19 where you were going to be in the scheme of a patrol. You learned spacing. We are given
20 our weapons, which was the .45, a useless piece of garbage.

21 LC: Why was it useless?

22 RS: Well, my barrel would roll around inside the barrel casing it was so old.

23 LC: How old did you think it was?

24 RS: I have no idea. It had to of been Korean War.

25 LC: Was it like new Korean War, in other words it had never been issued or had
26 it been around?

27 RS: No, it had been around.

28 LC: It was all nicked up.

29 RS: Yeah, it was pretty useless. The purpose of a .45 with a corpsman is if you're
30 being overrun and somebody is going to kill you and your patient and they are three feet
31 away from them, you can put a pretty good hole in them. I mean, that's the purpose of it.

1 LC: Did you understand that at the time they gave it to you?
2 RS: Yeah.
3 LC: They didn't issue you with any other weapons?
4 RS: No, I mean I had a KaBar, which was a knife.
5 LC: Can you describe it?
6 RS: Yeah. The handle would—if you grabbed it by the handle, it would fit in
7 your hand and maybe extend a quarter of an inch beyond each end. It was a wooden
8 handle, but a strong wooden handle. The tine of the blade went all the way back up to the
9 buck. The buck was a little bit larger than the handle itself. The blade, I guess, would
10 have been about five inches, six inches long. You had a leather sheath.
11 LC: Was this standard issue?
12 RS: Yeah, pretty much, yeah.
13 LC: What do you think that was for, just general purpose?
14 RS: General purpose.
15 LC: Digging, you know, foliage?
16 RS: You know whatever you needed, I mean it was there.
17 LC: Did you think that was a defensive weapon?
18 RS: I mean, I knew that it could be.
19 LC: Was your sense that that was why it was issued or was it more that it was—?
20 RS: I really never gave it that much of a thought. They gave it to me and I put it
21 on. It looked cool.
22 LC: So the mine sweeping training thing sort of lasted for five days or so?
23 RS: Four or five days. Also during the course of things since I was new man,
24 instantly my job was to burn the shitters.
25 LC: That was fairly unpleasant, I'm sure.
26 RS: Well, it wasn't real great.
27 LC: Can you describe how that happened? If you don't care to, that's fine.
28 RS: No, it's fine. The outhouses were—some of them were one holers or two
29 holers or whatever it is. Some of them were multi holers. You crap into a fifty-five-gallon
30 drum that had been cut in half so that the flat ends would be down. It was a circular thing.
31 Once a day you drag these things off the backside of the shitter. They had a hatch. You'd

1 open that up, pull them out, drag them ten or twenty yards away from the thing and then
2 you'd pour diesel fuel into them. Diesel fuel doesn't ignite real readily so that you would
3 have to ignite some paper and throw it in on top of the thing. You put a fair amount of
4 diesel fuel in it and stirred it up. Then it would burn it out. Occasionally during the
5 process of it burning, you would stir it again and it would turn everything to ash. Then
6 you would dump the ash out once it was fully burned and take it back to the shitter.

7 LC: This is what new guys got to do?

8 RS: Yeah.

9 LC: Did you see other guy, as your tour went on, see that they also got to do this?

10 RS: Sure. I mean, I didn't feel put upon.

11 LC: Right. Was it kind of, this is who we can get to do this kind of thing?

12 RS: It was kind of like hey, guess what, you're new. I accept that.

13 LC: Was that sense of newness also a factor in these training exercises in the first
14 couple three days?

15 RS: Yeah, it was just to make sure that you didn't go out there and get yourself
16 blown away on the first day.

17 LC: Did guys tell you that, that that's why we're taking you?

18 RS: Yeah, I mean, they would say there are certain things you need to know
19 before you go out there. Now you may have been trained in Lejeune or wherever you did
20 your 8404 training. That's what a Marine corpsman is an 8404. You may have had that
21 and you may have retained it or you may never have had it. We don't know what your
22 training is, but we just want to make sure that you know how to operate and you don't get
23 yourself in trouble.

24 LC: What did you learn on those sweeps, in addition to I think you said spacing
25 and kind of keeping your eyes open and that sort of thing? What else did you actually
26 learn?

27 RS: Not a whole lot. It was pretty much as I had remembered it.

28 LC: From Lejeune?

29 RS: Yeah, from Lejeune. Also I had watched the Marines go through Quantico
30 and so it wasn't much different from what they were doing.

31 LC: Dev, can we take a break here for just a moment?

1 RS: Sure.

2 LC: Okay. We were talking about your first training days and when you were
3 initially being taught sweeps and reviewing some things from Lejeune. What happened
4 after those four or five days? Were you moved from the BAS area?

5 RS: Yeah. I was assigned to a company. They assigned me to Lima Company.
6 Lima was just a regular field company with the Marines.

7 LC: Where were they?

8 RS: They were just south of the battalion position by maybe a mile and a half,
9 two miles. There was a bridge, a train bridge and an auto bridge that went over a river.
10 The company was stationed there. Once I got to the company I was further placed with a
11 platoon. I was placed with the 1st Platoon, which was perhaps ¾ of a mile to the west of
12 the company position.

13 LC: Was the platoon on what you recognized as a base?

14 RS: Well, what we called a platoon controlled base. We called it Fort Apache.

15 LC: Can you describe it?

16 RS: Fort Apache. I'll start back at the bridge. As you would walk west across
17 some rice paddies there was an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) compound.
18 There was a lot of concertina wire so that anybody who was going north from that point
19 would either have to go through the concertina wire or around it to the west, fairly far, or
20 come up the bridge position. It was a way of funneling people, I guess, onto the roads so
21 that you could monitor who was going where. Now if people were going to go around the
22 concertina wire to the west, they were either farmers who were farming their land or they
23 were up to no good. So you'd follow the concertina wire passed the ARVN Compound,
24 which had a tower. Then you would go perhaps another three hundred, four hundred
25 yards beyond that and that's where Fort Apache was. Now Fort Apache was a rise in the
26 ground so that you had from within Fort Apache you had a fairly good field of vision to
27 the south. To the back of Fort Apache you had maybe two hundred yards and then there
28 was a tree line back there. So it was pretty much out in the open. Fort Apache itself had
29 numerous rolls of concertina wire. They were spaced by maybe twenty feet apart and in
30 between the spaces there were mine fields. There were perhaps three or four rolls of
31 concertina wire. The entrance to it, there was one entrance and it was a trail that you

1 could see. I mean, people were going in and out of it constantly on patrol and coming in
2 from patrol, but it would weave back and forth so it was not a straight line into the
3 compound. At the entrance to it there was a listening post at night where they might take
4 a squad of men or less, two or three men, to go out there to make sure that nobody was
5 coming in. They would have radio contact with the people back within the fort itself.
6 Now the fort itself had sandbags around. It was basically a round or oval base that was
7 perhaps forty, I think forty, I'd say maybe thirty yards wide and maybe twenty yards
8 deep. There was a tent that was not a platform tent, but a tent. It had a radio station for—
9 that's where the lieutenant would be running his operations. That tent would sleep the
10 radio operator, the lieutenant, the sergeant, corporals, two corporals and then one other
11 person so about six people would sleep there, but it also had the components for the radio
12 and command and control center.

13 LC: Did Fort Apache have only Lima Company?

14 RS: It was just one platoon from Lima Company.

15 LC: So the plus—

16 RS: Just—

17 LC: Okay, go ahead.

18 RS: We would also have some machine gunners and at one point we had a mortar
19 crew. Now there was a mortar pit in the middle of it, which was basically an indentation
20 surrounded by sand bags within it.

21 LC: The purpose of that was?

22 RS: In case we were taking some incoming. One of the obvious targets would be
23 to knock out the mortar. So you wanted to protect that. Around the outside of the sand
24 bags that did the perimeter of the interior of the fort, there were bunkers, I guess perhaps
25 every twenty feet, thirty feet or so, that had sand bag routes and enough space so that you
26 could look out at the fields in front of you.

27 LC: You would run to those bunkers if and when some attack occurred?

28 RS: Correct.

29 LC: If you believed an attack was coming?

30 RS: Mm-hmm. Now those bunkers were usually manned at night. Actually they
31 were manned at all time. You would have people in there just looking out at the fields.

1 LC: So keeping up kind of visual—?

2 RS: Right, there was a visual reconnaissance of the area at all times. At night you
3 would have people in the bunkers. They'd probably do three people in each bunker and
4 they would go one awake, two asleep and then they would rotate through the night.

5 LC: You said that Fort Apache was not too far from an ARVN compound that had
6 a watch tower. Did you know of exchange of information between Fort Apache and this
7 ARVN compound?

8 RS: No. The only time they exchanged anything is when they shot at us.

9 LC: They shot at you?

10 RS: Well, they were a little bit trigger happy. We would go out on night
11 ambushes and we'd try to communicate with them that we were going to be going out,
12 but occasionally somebody would see some movement out there and they would pop at
13 us occasionally, but it wasn't any big deal. It wasn't evil intent.

14 LC: Right. The relationship between the two compounds which were a few
15 hundred yards apart or maybe it's a little more was what would you say?

16 RS: It's kind of like having a girl who lives three blocks from you and you don't
17 know her. They're there, but we really didn't do anything coordinated with them.

18 LC: Okay. What was your impression of the ARVN soldiers?

19 RS: We just didn't really have any contact with them at that point.

20 LC: Okay. You mentioned that at Fort Apache there were supposed to be a
21 couple of corpsmen. Were you the second corpsman coming in? There was someone
22 already there?

23 RS: Yeah, I was the second corpsman.

24 LC: Did the Corpsman who was there kind of take you under wing? What
25 happened?

26 RS: I think that they just assumed that I knew what I was or I was supposed to
27 know what I was doing. I got there in the late afternoon one day. The other corpsman was
28 out on patrol with one of the squads. When that squad came in they said, "Well, there's a
29 night ambush tonight, you're going out on that. "

30 LC: Just like that.

1 RS: Yeah. That evening we all got our stuff together and by then the aid station
2 had given me my helmet, as I said my .45 and also my medical equipment and things like
3 that. I had taken over, actually a fly fishing jacket because it had so many pockets.
4 Somebody had told me before I went over that it might be a good idea, because you need
5 to carry a lot of stuff. So I had packed the jacket with battle dressings and things like that
6 that I would need.

7 LC: You got most of that equipment aside obviously from the jacket up at the
8 BAS before they sent out?

9 RS: Yeah.

10 LC: Let's just establish that this is probably, when would you say? The middle of
11 February 196—?

12 RS: Yeah, I would say it was the middle of February.

13 LC: Your first day at Fort Apache, you find out that that evening it's your turn to
14 go out on patrol.

15 RS: Right.

16 LC: How did you take that? Was that just like the next thing that was going to
17 happen?

18 RS: That was the next thing that was going to happen. Once again, my whole trip
19 was pragmatic. It's, you're here, there's no sense in arguing. That's not going to do any
20 good so that you do what you're supposed to do

21 LC: Do you remember that first night?

22 RS: Yeah. I mean, we went out. We sat up at a place where we were supposed to
23 go. It wasn't too far off the village that was, oh, maybe eight hundred yards to a thousand
24 yards in front of us. We went off to the west side of that. That was also not too far from
25 Hill 55 and that's where Charles Rob was shot. Hill 55 was kind of the dominant
26 topographical feature in the area. Although we weren't really that close, it just seemed
27 that we were close. We thought that if anything was, I guess, moving in and out of that
28 village, that it would be moving to the west because if it was to the east of us then it was
29 on the road. We were trying to see if there was anything moving in and out of the village
30 primarily because there had been a significant number of booby trap incidents in that area
31 within the previous couple of weeks.

1 LC: When did they tell you that? When did you find out about the last couple of
2 weeks experiencing—?

3 RS: The next day. We went off and we set up. I guess my eyes were as big as
4 saucers. I kept on seeing things move and it was the trees, but I wasn't used to looking at
5 the palm trees and the banana trees, which catch wind in a very odd way and they sway in
6 a different way. At any rate, I saw trees moving. Then the next morning we got up before
7 light because we wanted to move out of the position. We didn't want to let anybody
8 know where we had been and then moved back in towards Fort Apache. You'd use your
9 hand set on a radio to let people know that you're coming in. You'd preset a signal that
10 you're coming back into the fort. The listening post would have a radio and you would
11 squeeze off one, two, or three signs. They would respond and then you would respond to
12 them. To let them know exactly where we were we would fire a green flare and then go
13 on in because they would be looking for us coming from the green flare.

14 LC: How many people went out on that first night? Do you remember how many
15 people? Was it the entire platoon?

16 RS: No, it's just a squad. The rotation was that there was a squad that was
17 sleeping, there was a squad that—at night—a squad that would have watch duty, and then
18 a squad that was out on ambush. That was what happened every night and it would rotate
19 through. The squad that was out on ambush would come in and they would be able to rest
20 and sleep. Then one of the other squads would go back out on daytime morning patrol.
21 They would do an afternoon patrol, and they would rotate that one.

22 LC: The corpsmen had to go out on each one of these?

23 RS: Yes. I mean you had two corpsmen that were covering three squads. So the
24 corpsmen really didn't get a lot of rest.

25 LC: Yes, that's what I'm wondering. When did you sleep or did it just depend on
26 when you were—?

27 RS: It just depended upon—when I came in from night ambush I had a chance to
28 sleep. So you'd sleep in the morning. You learned to sleep at odd times and you learned
29 to sleep immediately. The next day I came in and that meant that I had the afternoon
30 patrol. So the next day I went out an afternoon patrol.

1 LC: Did you understand what it was the patrols were supposed to be
2 accomplishing?

3 RS: Um, yeah, pretty much.

4 LC: What was it?

5 RS: Basically we were trying to monitor what was going on in the area, the
6 movement of people to see if any Viet Cong were moving into the area, actually North
7 Vietnamese because as I later found out there weren't many Viet Cong left. Tet took care
8 of a lot of them. Just to see, monitor what was going on in the villages. The patrols, we
9 could go into the villages. We would see if there was anything askew. We were actually
10 beginning to develop a decent relationship with the people. When I went into a village
11 and we would set up in the village and sit down to take a break, the first thing I would do
12 was start a clinic where anybody who was sick or not feeling well, if they had any
13 medical problems we would let them know that I was there and I could help them.

14 LC: Did you do that with frequency?

15 RS: Every patrol where we went into a village.

16 LC: During the day or also at night?

17 RS: Not at night, oh, no. At night we were hidden, but during the day it was part
18 of a program of trying to get the people to understand that we were not evil bad guys who
19 are coming in there to blow everybody away.

20 LC: How did you feel about that part of the work?

21 RS: I thought it was great. I enjoyed meeting some of the people. You could also
22 tell by their reaction to us if something was askew within the village itself.

23 LC: How?

24 RS: Because if they were open and friendly and coming towards you everything
25 was fine, but if they were standoffish then they were being watched.

26 LC: So you were able to begin to read some of these kinds of cues as to what the
27 actual situation was in the village?

28 RS: Yeah.

29 LC: In this first part of your assignment there, did you visit the same villages
30 over and over so that you begin to see some of the same people?

1 RS: Yeah, but not with regularity. I mean you wouldn't develop a pattern of
2 visiting a village, but you'd see the same people over and over. They would get used to
3 seeing you. The Vietnamese word for doctor is bác sĩ. So you'd identify yourself as the
4 bác sĩ. They understood that and they'd come to you.

5 LC: What kinds of things did you see when people presented themselves?

6 RS: Somebody would scrap themselves and they'd have an infection. If
7 somebody had a fever, I mean, there wasn't a whole lot you could do besides give them
8 aspirin, but you could clean out wounds, you could give them antibiotics. You could give
9 them a supply of dressings so that they could change it and also maybe some peroxide or
10 something like that so they could clean it, because they couldn't clean it with the water
11 they had unless they boiled it. You try to explain to them that's how you just wanted to
12 keep it clean and not let the wound close up because if it closed up then it abscesses and
13 all sorts of ugly stuff happens.

14 LC: Were you able to communicate that kind of, what we think of as fairly basic
15 wound hygiene, that kind of thing? Were you able to communicate that to them?

16 RS: Yes. I mean I did take, back in Quantico, I took a little bit of Vietnamese
17 lessons.

18 LC: Oh, you did. Was that on your own?

19 RS: Yeah.

20 LC: How did you arrange that?

21 RS: It was through the base. They had it available. I took that and gourmet
22 cooking.

23 LC: So you could sign up for a couple of classes, which were sort of enrichment
24 classes in a way?

25 RS: Some of them were enrichment; some of them were very utilitarian, like
26 learning how to speak Vietnamese.

27 LC: How much did you actually pick up?

28 RS: I picked up a fair amount. I can't do any of it now. I mean, I tried. I went to
29 China last year and also a couple of years ago. All of a sudden my Chinese started getting
30 mixed up with Vietnamese and I didn't know what was going on.

31 LC: When did you learn Chinese?

1 RS: Down at University of North Carolina.

2 LC: I would like to ask you about that a little bit later on.

3 RS: Sure.

4 LC: So you had taken some Vietnamese. Was it kind of programmed to—?

5 RS: Very much so.

6 LC: Can you tell me about that?

7 RS: They gave us books that were really kind of stapled together. I mean, they

8 weren't formal books. We just went through the various words. It was basically a word

9 recognition. Rather than creating sentences and having to worry about structure and

10 things like that because we found if you could get a few key words you could begin to

11 communicate your idea, because it was more of communicating ideas than

12 communicating sentences.

13 LC: Who was the teacher?

14 RS: I have no idea.

15 LC: Was it a Vietnamese?

16 RS: No, it was a Marine.

17 LC: Okay, it was a Marine. You found that that was actually quite helpful to you

18 when you were in the villages and working with individuals?

19 RS: Right and also once I was in the villages and started trying to talk with

20 people, they're people like anybody else. You see somebody struggling with English and

21 you say, "Okay, maybe I can help them." They're the same. They're people. So they

22 would try to help me say what I wanted to say.

23 LC: You learned even more that way. As the bác sĩ you had people coming to

24 you with also diseases as well, not just wounds.

25 RS: With diseases if something really looked serious we could arrange a

26 Medevac.

27 LC: Did that ever happen?

28 RS: Mm-hmm.

29 LC: Under what circumstances?

30 RS: We were in a village once. I mean, some women, she was burning up with

31 fever and obviously wasn't through a secondary infection or something like that. We

1 didn't know if it was malaria or what it was. We obviously didn't have our equipment out
2 there to determine what it was. We called in for a Medevac. Now they didn't fly in the
3 helicopters, but they said okay have their people bring her out to the road and we'll meet
4 her there with an ambulance and take her into the aid station where they could do better
5 tests and the doctor is there. Then if she needs to go back to Da Nang, to the hospital
6 there, we can do that.

7 LC: You were at liberty to make that kind of call?

8 RS: Absolutely.

9 LC: How did you find out that you had the authority to, or that you were allowed
10 to treat Vietnamese? Who told you that?

11 RS: Basically the other corpsman, they've been doing it. I don't think there was
12 any direct order or anything like that for it, but it was just part of kind of a civic action
13 type deal. There were times later on where the doctor would actually go out in the field to
14 various villages and hold a clinic and stay there for a couple of days and treat the various
15 illnesses. We also had a sick call for local residents at the aid station where people would
16 come in if they were not feeling well. They were free to come in and receive medical
17 treatment.

18 LC: How did that make you feel being able to extend some of what you had
19 learned? Obviously your training was programmed for treating Marines and U.S.
20 personnel, but how did it make you feel to actually treat Vietnamese also?

21 RS: It was good. I mean, you feel good.

22 LC: Feel like you're doing something important?

23 RS: Sure. Well, we were

24 LC: The medical kind of civic action stuff was a part of—you saw that as part of
25 a bigger picture?

26 RS: Oh much, yes.

27 LC: How did the Vietnamese respond to you? Were they very respectful or were
28 they leery? How did you find that?

29 RS: They were very respectful. There was one village where they were having a
30 celebration. Lieutenant and I were invited into have dinner with them.

31 LC: How did that come about?

1 RS: I don't know. They went to the lieutenant and they asked him if he wanted to
2 come for dinner and to bring me along.

3 LC: Had you treated some of them?

4 RS: Yeah.

5 LC: So what happened at that dinner?

6 RS: Well, it was in a place, I mean, they didn't have silverware. They didn't have
7 a table, but they had various foods that they bought out. We ate. I don't know what we
8 ate. I didn't want to ask. There was a lot of rice. There were some meats and fish and a
9 lot of nuoc mam.

10 LC: What was the atmosphere like? Was it some kind of celebration or a family?

11 RS: It was more of a family celebration. The whole village was there. Everybody
12 came in.

13 LC: Did you ever find out with the occasion was?

14 RS: No, not really.

15 LC: Maybe just being grateful.

16 RS: Maybe just thank you, who knows?

17 LC: That sounds like it was a pretty important event. It would seem you're sort of
18 named as the guest in a way

19 RS: Oh, we were honored I mean by the whole thing. It was neat.

20 LC: And your lieutenant felt the same way?

21 RS: Sure.

22 LC: Who was that? Do you remember his name?

23 RS: I think it was—it was after John Jackson was wounded.

24 LC: So was this when you were at BAS station?

25 RS: Yes, it was Doc—I think Surry. I think that may have been it. No, it was the
26 Doctor with Surry and then—

27 LC: It's okay. It might come to you.

28 RS: Names are my big bugaboo.

29 LC: Okay. Well, the event is actually just as important if not more so. It's
30 interesting to hear the way in which you were invited into a family's home and made this
31 sort of center, or at least an important part of a celebration.

1 RS: The relationship, once I got back to the battalion aid station after being out in
2 the bush, we have these people from the village who would come in and they would clean
3 our hooch's and all the rest. There was this one women who we just called her mama san.
4 Well, shoot she brought me a dozen fresh eggs every morning.

5 LC: Really?

6 RS: Yeah. I didn't ask for this and also you know those little packets of oriental
7 noodles that cost twelve cents that you can have a lunch out of?

8 LC: Yes.

9 RS: She would bring me packages of those. It's just out of gratitude and just
10 being a person.

11 LC: She was the mama san in your hooch?

12 RS: Yeah. She was the one lady who would clean up the hooch and things like
13 this.

14 LC: Did you pay her a little wage?

15 RS: Yeah, we paid her, I don't know what it was a month, but everybody was—
16 there may have been ten people in our hooch, maybe twelve. We'd each pay her five
17 dollars a month or something like that, but for them that was a lot of money.

18 LC: Oh yes, absolutely. How did she come to be—was she already employed
19 there when you moved into the hooch?

20 RS: She was already employed when we moved in.

21 LC: Did you have any kind of special communication with her such that she
22 brought you these presents?

23 RS: Well, she used to tease me about the picture of my girlfriend.

24 LC: What did she say?

25 RS: “Is that your mama san?”

26 LC: Is that what she said?

27 RS: Yeah. I said, “It's my girlfriend.” “Your mama san.”

28 LC: How old was she would you guess?

29 RS: Oh, it was difficult to say because she had a very bad facial wound, but I
30 would guess that she was in her forties, upper forties, maybe early fifties.

31 LC: Do you know anything about that wound?

1 RS: No. Somebody had said, and it's purely secondhand rumor, speculation,
2 whatever that she had been shot in the face.

3 LC: Nobody knew the circumstances or anything or when it had happened?

4 RS: No. The impression was that it was by the Viet Cong.

5 LC: Was it your impression as a medical person that that had been sometime
6 ago?

7 RS: Yes.

8 LC: What happened to her, do you know?

9 RS: I don't know. I'd like to know.

10 LC: Do you know her name?

11 RS: No. I have a picture.

12 LC: You do. Okay. Let's go back to your early days at Fort Apache. You went
13 out on patrols on this kind of staggered schedule. You were living in this sort of central
14 tent with some of the other, with another corpsman and some of the other people, some of
15 the the other kind of command people.

16 RS: Right.

17 LC: What was your relationship like with some of the other guys in the platoon
18 and in the company? How did they take to you?

19 RS: I was with 1st Platoon at that point. I forget the lieutenants name but the—I
20 think I can do this chronologically. The second day I went out on patrol. I had mentioned
21 earlier that I found out that there had been a significant number of booby trap incidents
22 the next day. This was the next day. We're coming in from patrol. The person in front of
23 me steps on a booby trap, blows off his foot and hits the person behind me as well. So I
24 go up and I treat the guy. We call in for a Medevac helicopter. He comes in. I treat both
25 of them, but we were close enough to Fort Apache that they saw what was coming in and
26 the other corpsman and another squad came out to set up a perimeter. So the other
27 corpsman and I, we put them on the helicopters and Medevaced them out. That's when I
28 found out there were booby traps and a fair number of them.

29 LC: What kind of a trap was it?

30 RS: You know, I don't know. I have no idea.

31 LC: What did you do? What did you see and what did you do?

1 RS: Well, the guy who stepped on it was the radio man. So the first thing I did
2 was try to run to him, not knowing what the heck I was going to do. I mean, this is a
3 different experience. So I get there and I start to tie a tourniquet around the leg. The guy
4 behind me is saying, “Forget about him, he’s dead. I need help.” I’m going wait a minute.
5 So I said, “I’ll get to you.” I tied the tourniquet off and put a battle dressing on the leg
6 and then went back to the guy behind me who had been hit by shrapnel in the lower part
7 of his body.

8 LC: Was he an infantry?

9 RS: Yeah, he was an infantry.

10 LC: Rifleman I mean.

11 RS: Yeah. By that time the other corpsman was out there. He was applying battle
12 dressing, pressure dressings on that guy.

13 LC: How long did it take for the other corpsman to get out there? Do you
14 remember or did time kind of—?

15 RS: Time just went berserk. We weren’t anymore than four hundred yards off of
16 being in.

17 LC: You’re doing your best, obviously, to stop blood loss there. Did you feel that
18 feeling that you had described before about having a job to do?

19 RS: I had to. Yes.

20 LC: Can you tell me anything about that?

21 RS: Well, it’s—I think it goes a little bit haywire when something like that
22 happens because it’s instantaneous. If you’re in a fire fight or if you’re doing a helicopter
23 assault or something of that nature where there is obvious fire going on, you can
24 anticipate that something is going to happen. With the booby traps, part of the insidious
25 nature of them is that it comes out of the blue. It just all of a sudden happens. It wears on
26 people psychologically as much as it does I think physically at times. Just the suddenness
27 of it and not knowing how to react because I had never had to react to something like
28 that, it probably took me a few seconds to kind of gather my thoughts, but I knew I had to
29 go to the person.

30 LC: Right, you’re the one who has to go.

1 RS: Yes. That this is me and this is what I am supposed to do. Now I had seen
2 enough wounds in hospital setting to say okay—and I know the three major things for the
3 corpsman is to stop bleeding, maintain airway, and prevent shock. I mean, those are the
4 three critical elements in emergency medicine. I mean, that's what Medevac crews
5 around cities use here. These are the things that you have to do. So at this point there was
6 no question about airway. The guy had an airway. So it was basically bleeding and shock.
7 The first thing you have to do is stop the bleeding. It was purely a once you get through
8 the initial what am I going to do stage, which doesn't take very long. It may seem like it
9 takes an hour, but it doesn't. Then you start to work on it. The tourniquets are fairly easy
10 to take care of. The guy obviously had other wounds around him. Part of the booby trap
11 had lodged between his radio and his flak jacket, which wasn't doing a whole lot of
12 damage to him, but it was burning. So you had to get the radio off the guy and the flak
13 jacket off and things like that and check him for other wounds. Once I got through the
14 basic stopping the major bleeding I was, at that point, looking to get back to the other
15 guy, but at that time that's when the other corpsman, he was actually arriving at that
16 point. So I just went back to the guy I was working on.

17 LC: So you're going through your decision tree of these are the things I have to
18 check and now I'm doing them.

19 RS: Right.

20 LC: Was it the arrival of the other group that allowed the call to be made for
21 Medevac?

22 RS: Since they had seen it happen they had already done that from Fort Apache.

23 LC: Okay. What happened next?

24 RS: The chopper came in, took out the wounded.

25 LC: Where did the chopper actually come to? Did it come to you in the field?

26 RS: Yeah, came to us in the field. It was kind of a rice paddy area. The rice
27 paddies were not filled with water at that point.

28 LC: Did both of the two men that you talked about get evac'ed?

29 RS: Yes.

30 LC: Was anyone else hurt?

31 RS: No.

1 LC: You were walking in-between these two men, is that correct?
2 RS: Mm-hmm.
3 LC: How do you think you didn't get hurt?
4 RS: I don't know. Divine providence. I believe in God.
5 LC: Okay. So that morning, did this happen in the morning, did you say?
6 RS: Ah, yes, or it was really early afternoon.
7 LC: So that afternoon you're talking to the other guys who were out on the squad
8 probably and they told you about the fact that this has been going on?
9 RS: Well, I mean it wasn't really me talking. It was just comments that you'd
10 pick up. These damn things, they're always going off. So and so got hit last week. This
11 area's just a bitch to work in.
12 LC: So you're acquiring information about what's going on with your group?
13 RS: Right.
14 LC: Did that incident kind of cement you into the squad in some way or was it
15 just another thing that happened, these guys have been here for a while and they've seen
16 it all probably?
17 RS: It was just another thing that happened. I was never cemented into 1st
18 Platoon.
19 LC: Why do you think that is?
20 RS: Okay. That was actually the afternoon of the second day. The morning of the
21 next day, we're out and a guy in front of me steps on a bouncing betty.
22 LC: Would you just describe what that is?
23 RS: It's a mine that has an initial explosion. The only purpose of it is to throw a
24 canister, an explosive canister into the air. Then there is a timing device on the canister.
25 Once it's about chest high, it explodes. It has a very broad killing radius.
26 LC: It explodes with—?
27 RS: All sorts of shrapnel and garbage in it. It was a dud.
28 LC: This one that you're describing?
29 RS: Yep.
30 LC: It was a dud.

1 RS: Yeah, so the thing popped up. The guy was not hurt who stepped on it. The
2 thing did not explode. It seemed like at that point every time I was going out on patrols,
3 somebody was stepping on a booby trap. I don't know whatever it is, but I became really,
4 really sick within that third day or fourth day and was running a fever. What they did it
5 they pulled a swap from the company headquarters. They brought a corpsman out to take
6 my place at 1st Platoon. Then I went back into the company area where I could be treated
7 for whatever my illness was. Then I was going to go back out to 1st Platoon and swap
8 back. What happened was 3rd Platoon was at that point staying at the bridge position. The
9 lieutenant of the 3rd Platoon walks in. It's John Jackson, they guy I knew back at
10 Quantico.

11 LC: Right, whom you had known.

12 RS: Right. So he asks if I want to stay with his platoon. I said sure. I mean, it's
13 the first person I'd known. Also I had gathered—in the 1st Platoon I was not really, really
14 comfortable with the people there because I felt that there was a little bit of racial tension
15 going on. It just didn't sit well with me.

16 LC: Can you describe that at all, with outlines of it?

17 RS: Well, basically whoever was the lieutenant had allowed of the three squads,
18 one of them to be a squad of brothers.

19 LC: By that you mean?

20 RS: Black.

21 LC: So an entire squad was—

22 RS: Was of color. That didn't rest well with either themselves nor did it rest well
23 with the other squads. There was the fact of segregation that had been allowed to take
24 place by not saying, "No, we are not going to do this." I think it created tensions that
25 need not exist.

26 LC: So it kind of set up some kind of problems amongst the squads?

27 RS: Yeah, it set it up. I was just not super comfortable with that.

28 LC: You went out on patrol with that squad?

29 RS: Sure.

30 LC: Did you have any problems or did you sense something towards you, tension
31 there?

1 RS: Not specifically towards me.

2 LC: In general, this dynamic you felt this wasn't a very good idea.

3 RS: Yeah, I mean it was something that I just didn't want to have to deal with. So

4 the invitation to stay with 3rd Platoon was welcomed.

5 LC: What was John Jackson's rank, do you remember?

6 RS: Lieutenant.

7 LC: He was a lieutenant.

8 RS: He was a first lieutenant.

9 LC: So his offer was a welcome one and what happened then?

10 RS: Well, we stayed at the bridge position for about two days. Then it was our

11 turn, 3rd Platoon to go out to Fort Apache.

12 LC: So you've recuperated at this point?

13 RS: Yeah. It took me a couple of days to do it, to feel better.

14 LC: So you went back to Fort Apache?

15 RS: Mm-hmm.

16 LC: The new assignment, did you stay with that?

17 RS: Yes.

18 LC: How did that work out?

19 RS: Fine.

20 LC: Was there racial tension within the new unit at all?

21 RS: No.

22 LC: It was of different flavor but still there?

23 RS: No. I wouldn't say it was racial tension because I think Jackson did a great

24 job. He saw everybody as Marines. He was concerned about everybody. I think that

25 concern, everybody knew it was there, whether it was said or not how it was felt.

26 LC: Do you think in general that the men respond well when they sense from

27 their commander that there is some caring about their position?

28 RS: Mm-hmm.

29 LC: Did you experience the opposite of that at any time?

30 RS: Not really.

31 LC: So tell me about the new group that you're with. How did that gel?

1 RS: It worked pretty well. The people whom I was with, they were a good bunch
2 of people. I enjoyed their company. I enjoyed working with them

3 LC: Which platoon were you assigned to now?

4 RS: It's 3rd Platoon.

5 LC: Still Lima Company?

6 RS: Mm-hmm.

7 LC: Moving kind of into the next month, say March, April, well, March let's say
8 of 1969, were you becoming more comfortable with the job that you had to do?

9 RS: Yes.

10 LC: Did it ever become kind of routine at any point?

11 RS: Oh, very much.

12 LC: Can you tell me something about that?

13 RS: I mean, after the initial foray into booby traps that tended to die off. It was
14 coinciding with Tet of '69. So that Tet of '69 there were some I think very feeble
15 attempts to increase the level of violence throughout Vietnam. I think that's why the
16 booby traps were there. When we were with 3rd Platoon we went out on a platoon sized
17 patrol into an area because all of a sudden these North Vietnamese flags had started
18 showing up where there were booby trap incidents. They were small flags and they were
19 just kind of indicating so we had this, what we call, our mini op of Betsy Ross. Is that
20 obvious?

21 LC: Well, go ahead and explain it.

22 RS: Well, we had to find the flag maker. We went towards this one village. I
23 think it was Le Son Five. When we got into Le Son Five, although we never really found
24 the flag maker, we did find a sewing machine. We found a whole bunch of flags that
25 were buried in one of the dikes just outside it. As we were approaching the village, we
26 saw some people kind of tooling on out the backside of it. This was also a village that
27 was pretty unfriendly towards us.

28 LC: So you kind of busted the flag making operation?

29 RS: Yeah. We busted the flag making operation.

30 LC: What happened to the sewing machine?

1 RS: They took it back to Da Nang and, I guess, put it on E-Bay. So once we got
2 rid of the sewing machine and the flags—

3 LC: That was the end of that.

4 RS: That was kind of the end of that.

5 LC: Did that feel like an accomplishment?

6 RS: Yeah. Obviously there was something that was out there for whatever
7 purpose. We wanted to find it and do away with it and we did.

8 LC: Where did the impetus to do this come from? Was it you? Did you suggest
9 it? Where did it come from, do you remember? Was it just kind of guys talking, look we
10 need to—?

11 RS: No, I think it was probably from Captain Weeks. Captain Weeks was the
12 head of Lima Company at that point.

13 LC: Can you spell his last name? How do you spell that?

14 RS: I think W-E-E-K-S. Once these flags started showing up he was just saying
15 we've got to do something. It's obviously coming from one of these villages around here.
16 It seemed like the most obvious to somebody was Le Son Five so that's where we were.

17 LC: Because that village had a reputation for unfriendly behavior?

18 RS: Yeah.

19 LC: Was that often, with that area around that village, often one of the targets of
20 your patrols?

21 RS: Pretty much, yeah.

22 LC: You said you tried to avoid or the platoons and squads avoided kind of
23 repetitive tracking around Fort Apache. Who planned these operations, the patrols that
24 you would go out on?

25 RS: They would come from the company level. What we did not want to do—if
26 you've got a certain area of operation, you don't want to have too many people drawing
27 plans up within that area because you're going to run a foul of each other. So the
28 coordination of just about everything came out of the company level because we were
29 given our area of operation. They would tell the various platoons what they were
30 supposed to do on any given day. The only time we would deviate from that is if
31 something came down from either battalion or division saying that we were going to be

1 involved in something much larger. Therefore we would get out of our daily routine and
2 do what we were supposed to do based upon that. As long as we were in within a certain
3 area of operation everything would come out of company because they were the ones
4 who were in charge of that area of operation. It was basically semi search and destroy
5 missions, but really just looking over the area. At this point it also was at a point when
6 Nixon had come in. The emphasis on our operations was beginning to change. Rather
7 than being out front which we still were when I got into country, we were beginning to
8 back off. On the daily routine patrols it was more the ARVNs were taking over and
9 beginning to assume the responsibility.

10 LC: Was that actually happening around Fort Apache?

11 RS: Not around Fort Apache. It was too early when I was there. I was only there
12 for about another two weeks.

13 LC: When you move out with your entire battalion on a large operation and we'll
14 talk about that in a second, I was just wondering about the ARVN compound which again
15 is not far away. Were they running patrols at any point while you were there?

16 RS: I don't know what they did. All I knew is that occasionally they would shoot
17 at us and we'd have to pop our green flares.

18 LC: Was that successful in stopping the shooting?

19 RS: Pretty much. They weren't going to hit anything anyway.

20 LC: The implication there being that they weren't all that committed to hitting
21 anything?

22 RS: Well, I'm not going to go into another person's head and say what they're
23 committed to or not. I ran into some very committed ARVN soldiers who are extremely
24 good at times. The implication is also that there are some American soldiers out there
25 who couldn't hit the broad side of a barn either. They just get too excited. The ARVNs
26 didn't have the M-16s. They had—I forget what weapon they had. Sounded like a
27 peashooter. It was the M-1 carbine or something, I don't know what it was.

28 LC: It was distinctive?

29 RS: It was distinctive, yeah.

30 LC: The sound of it, you knew who it was that was firing.

1 RS: You could tell the sounds of different weapons. You got use to identifying an
2 AK-47 versus an M-16.

3 LC: How long did it take you to get that familiar with the sounds of different
4 gunfire?

5 RS: Well, the first firefight I guess.

6 LC: And when was that first firefight?

7 RS: When was the first firefight?

8 LC: Was it after Fort Apache?

9 RS: Oh, yeah, it was after Fort Apache. We did an assault into an area called
10 Dodge City, which was south of Hill 37. We ran into a fair amount of shooting at us in
11 that area.

12 LC: Would this have been as part of Oklahoma Hills?

13 RS: It was probably part of the Oklahoma Hills mop up. Oklahoma Hills, we
14 were really trying to act as a, not really a blocking force, but a sweeping force that if
15 anything was shaken out of the mountains, and there were any troop movements away
16 from it, that we would go after that. I think this was probably part of that.

17 LC: That all takes place after you leave Fort Apache in part of a broader
18 mobilization of the battalion as well as the division?

19 RS: It was a broader mobilization of the battalion. I think though that in
20 Oklahoma Hills it may have only been two of the companies. I don't know whether it
21 was Mike Company and Lima or Lima and Kilo. I just don't know at that point. I don't
22 know the involvement, the extent of the involvement of the other company's in the
23 battalion. For all I know all of them could have been involved.

24 LC: Well, what happened to you? What did you do?

25 RS: During that we just ran, really company sized patrols and sweeps into the
26 low lands at the base of the mountains.

27 LC: So you moved out of Fort Apache by truck?

28 RS: No. Very seldom did you ever do anything with truck when you have two
29 good feet. We moved from there and actually followed the regiment. The regiment
30 moved out of the place where we had been before down into an area that was—I just
31 don't even know where it was. I had always thought that it—I know that it was south of

1 Fort Apache by maybe five miles, six miles. It must have been also to the east because
2 we weren't as far west as Hill 55 at that point. We couldn't see Hill 37, which would
3 have been further west so it must have been east. It was an area where there is not a
4 tremendous number of tree lines and things like that. The topography was a little bit
5 different.

6 LC: Can you describe the ways things were different? It's not rice growing.

7 RS: It wasn't rice growing because I think in that area they had really declared it
8 a free fire zone.

9 LC: If you had to explain that to someone you would say that meant what?

10 RS: That meant there's not supposed to be anybody in that area, that any local
11 people had been relocated out of it because at some point there was a significant amount
12 of enemy activity in that area.

13 LC: So local people had been relocated in some way.

14 RS: They had been relocated. There just weren't many people around that area.
15 This is one place where it gets real fuzzy for me. Because our company, we were
16 stationed at the regiment. We would run patrols out of the regimental area. Our company
17 was essentially in reserve so that in case any of the other companies had significant
18 contact with the enemy they would load us into helicopters. We would fly into that area.

19 LC: As a kind of reinforcement?

20 RS: As a reinforcement or a flanking operation or something like that of that
21 nature. I mean, the time that we were there which may have been about another four
22 weeks or so, we did the helicopter assaults I think twice.

23 LC: Do you remember those or either one of them?

24 RS: Well, I don't remember—yeah, there was one. I don't remember where we
25 flew into. We were coming in and there was some fire that was coming up at us. We were
26 sitting on our helmets because we really didn't want to have hemorrhoidectomy. The
27 helicopter, I mean it kind of landed pretty hard. You're trained that once you get off the
28 helicopter, if there is any fire going on, you move into the fire and you put your own field
29 of fire out because if you run away from it they're just going to get you. You've got to
30 move into it and get them to have their heads down. So we did that and we kept on
31 moving into the fire and obviously they were retreating as we went along. We didn't see

1 many of them. This was an area that had also been a free drop zone. That means that
2 planes who are returning or that were returning to air base in Da Nang had the ability to
3 fly over this area. Whatever excess ordinance they had they could drop it. So there were
4 bomb craters all over the place in this thing. They were filled with rainwater and stuff
5 like that. I mean, I can remember being shot at and seeing the grass go over. I dove into
6 one of these things and man it smelled bad.

7 LC: Yeah, the water setting there and heat.

8 RS: The water was just—I mean, it was horrible. So I kind of snuck up the edge
9 of the other side and figured if I stuck my head out I was going to get it blown off, but I
10 got my head up and it wasn't. Then I all of a sudden realized I was perhaps twenty yards
11 behind the rest of the people. So I figured well I better catch up with them.

12 LC: So you jumped up and scooted on as fast as you could to get up there?

13 RS: Yeah. I got up there and the call for a corpsman up came. There was a guy
14 named Murphy and he had been shot. Well, actually he had been shot, but he hadn't been
15 shot.

16 LC: How's that?

17 RS: That's that somebody shot him and the round hit his bandolier of bullets in
18 front of him. The impact broke his ribs, but the bullet lodged in the casing or the clip. So
19 the bandolier saved his life on the thing. It was pretty weird.

20 LC: How did you diagnosis it as ribs were broken?

21 RS: Well, you couldn't see any wounds, but you could see that he was a hurting
22 cowboy.

23 LC: Was he struggling to breath?

24 RS: Not really, but he couldn't move. So we just wrapped him up to try and
25 immobilize him, the chest area and then got the helicopter in there to evac him.

26 LC: Was this injury like a source of remark later that he'd been saved by this
27 bandolier?

28 RS: Yeah. We gave him his bandolier to take back to the hospital with him when
29 he got on the helicopter. Then some jackass stole it from him in the hospital.

30 LC: Did you hear that later?

31 RS: Yeah. He came back out.

1 LC: Dev, what weapons were carrying when you landed off the helicopter in one
2 of these excursions?

3 RS: A camera and a .45.

4 LC: Tell me about having the camera. Had you brought that with you?

5 RS: Yes. Later on I bought one, because that one didn't last long. I bought
6 another one and everything

7 LC: How did it not last long? Did it get hurt?

8 RS: Yeah, it got pretty crunched.

9 LC: Oh, okay. What kind of camera was it? Do you remember?

10 RS: That one was—I think it was a Kodak. The one I bought later on was, I think
11 it was a Cannon. I still got it somewhere. It's pretty dented up.

12 LC: How long did the first one last you?

13 RS: About two or three weeks.

14 LC: Is that all?

15 RS: Yeah. I was a little bit skittish early. So anytime something happened I was
16 hitting the dirt. Later on you got to learn that you didn't have to hit the dirt every time
17 something happened.

18 LC: What motivated you to have a camera on your missions?

19 RS: I have no idea.

20 LC: You don't know where that came from?

21 RS: No.

22 LC: Had you been kind of a camera bug before?

23 RS: A little bit, but not a huge thing. I just thought it would be good to have
24 pictures.

25 LC: How did you go about getting film and developing it? How does all that
26 happen?

27 RS: A lot of the film that I had developed I would send back to the States. They
28 did have—if you were able to get to a battalion area, you could go to the PXs (post
29 exchange). They had a thing where you could take your film in and they would get it
30 developed for you and then you would pick it up in a week or so.

1 LC: Were there ever any concerns that you were taking pictures of—anything
2 that you were taking pictures of, were there ever any concerns because you were having it
3 developed at the PX?

4 RS: Nobody—

5 LC: No one said anything?

6 RS: I mean, there was very little that would have been of strategic value.

7 LC: Right, or political value?

8 RS: Um, political value. In retrospect, possibly.

9 LC: But it didn't come up at that time?

10 RS: It just didn't come up that time.

11 LC: How much film did you shoot?

12 RS: I don't know, probably thirty, forty rolls, maybe more.

13 LC: On the particular operation that you were describing where Murphy got his
14 ribs broken, how did that whole operation kind of evolve? What else happened?

15 RS: Well, let's see, other than the bomb craters that had water in it, the area
16 around there was pretty dry. Somehow or another, the grass behind us caught on fire. So
17 we were kind of caught between people shooting at us in the front and the fire in the
18 back. They also called in some air strikes with napalm and that was in front of us.

19 LC: Would that have been the first time you'd seen that?

20 RS: Yeah ,that was the first time I'd seen that. They came in with the napalm.
21 The day all of a sudden got real, real hot. One of my jobs was to make sure that people,
22 when they drank water, they put their heliozoan tablets in their canteens and shook them
23 up and waited for thirty minutes or whatever it is. Well, we had gone through a fair
24 amount of water that day. The only water that was available was that which was in the
25 bomb craters. I mean, it's interesting to try to fill a canteen when there's maybe a quarter
26 of an inch of water on top of the mud.

27 LC: Not an easy operation.

28 RS: No, especially not under stress. So everybody is running back there. After
29 awhile you're kind of just drinking the water through your teeth, using your teeth as a
30 filter. I don't know why people didn't die from that stuff. Any rate because obviously the

1 heliozoan. I mean I'm walking around saying, "Did you put your heliozoan tablet in?"
2 They're looking at me like, are you nuts?

3 LC: Did this actually come up that there wasn't enough water on operations? Did
4 that come up?

5 RS: Well, generally, I mean that was really the only time that there wasn't. That
6 was an extraordinary circumstance.

7 LC: Because you had been air mobile into this fire zone. You didn't know how
8 long you were going to be there. How long were you actually there?

9 RS: Probably about three days. We went in that one day and then we set up
10 perimeters at night, spent the night there. Then the next day we went on a sweep and
11 seeing if we could find anything or find any tunnels or anything else and really found
12 nothing. We spent the whole day digging around. I think we spent the second night there.
13 The morning of the next day we were lifted back out. No we weren't lifted back out. We
14 were never lifted back out. We walked out.

15 LC: What did you think the purpose of this operation was? Did you have any
16 idea?

17 RS: It was obvious. We thought that there had been some troop consolidations of
18 the North Vietnamese in this area and that perhaps it was because of what was going on
19 in Oklahoma Hills and driving people out of the mountainous area and into the low lands.
20 For whatever reason they thought there was a concentration there. From the reaction that
21 we got there was of some size, we don't know what size it was though.

22 LC: By reaction you mean when you first were called in?

23 RS: When we were first getting in there and the amount of fire that we took.

24 LC: The fact that you found nothing on days two and on the morning of day
25 three, what did that make you think, or you and the guys that you were with?

26 RS: Well, it's a little bit frustrating when you are starting to look for something.
27 Your adrenaline runs pretty high so there's a certain let down.

28 LC: When you *didi*'ed out of there to—where did you go? Back to—?

29 RS: We swept all the way back to the battalion.

30 LC: All the way back to the battalion?

31 RS: Yeah.

1 LC: Can you give a guess as to roughly when this was? Oklahoma started at the
2 end of April.

3 RS: That was the end of April?

4 LC: It began and then it really started in of course I guess on the first of May.

5 RS: That would have been the latter part of April because around early middle
6 May we were in the Sand Dunes area. We had moved again.

7 LC: Tell me about that. How did you move and how did that set up?

8 RS: Actually we did take trucks this time. We had moved. We were still at that
9 one area where regiment had moved. The trucks came and got us. They took us into an
10 area that we just call the Sand Dunes, which was perhaps five miles south of Marble
11 Mountain and over towards the coast. There was a village that was near the sand dunes.
12 There were also a bunch of rice paddies. It was a village that was pretty up to speed in
13 terms of aid that we had given because it had pumps to move water out of the river and
14 up a hill so that they could flood the rice paddies. They had also built a canal of sorts that
15 circled part of the village. So they could open these water slues. They pump water into
16 this canal and they could open the slues into the rice paddies.

17 LC: Your sense was this was an American irrigation project essentially?

18 RS: Yeah, it sure looked like it. Evidently the division had been taking some
19 mortar fire at that point. Let's see. Whoever had the intelligence felt that there was a
20 North Vietnamese regiment that was holding up in this village. It was a pretty large
21 village. So we, with an ARVN company, went on line. We were dropped off perhaps
22 about eight hundred yards. We were by a road and that may have been eight hundred to a
23 thousand yards from the village. We were to get on line and then sweep over towards the
24 village. We also had, I think, Kilo Company, was to our right and Mike Company was
25 acting as a blocking force on the other side of the river that went through the village. We
26 were sweeping towards that. I remember we had a guy named David Aguliar. He was
27 with our platoon at this point. He later became a scout, but he was acting as kind of a
28 scout for us. He and a squad actually went into the village to see if there was anything
29 there. They went in and they came back out. They said they didn't see anything. So we
30 were supposed to continue sweeping into the village just to make sure. We got about

1 three hundred, four hundred yards out and the whole place just opened up. It was pretty
2 intense. It took us most of the rest of the day to get the last three to four hundred yards.

3 LC: When you say it opened up, can you describe it?

4 RS: Just people started shooting. I mean, they had rifles, AK-47s. They had some
5 machine guns. There were some mortars that they were shooting out of the place. So we
6 were to move into it. It took us, as I said, most of the day. We got up through the canal,
7 which was a natural fortification for the people in the village, for the North Vietnamese.
8 We got up against it and we were throwing, lobbing hand grenades over into the canal.
9 Stuff was coming back out at us. Then dark started to come. They told us to pull back, I
10 don't know why. We spent the rest of the night out there in the middle of the field.
11 Occasionally we would get some sniper fire from inside the village. One or two of our
12 guys got hit during the night. The next day we got up and moved into the village again,
13 but nobody was there. I mean, there were some people who were residents but the place
14 looked like it had just been tore apart, on the inside of it.

15 LC: The combatants were gone?

16 RS: Yeah, but the combatants were gone. I mean that was a frustrating thing, but
17 that was the last time we'd been back at that old regiment area. So that rather than going
18 back to that regiment area we stayed out in the sand at various spots for probably the next
19 month or so.

20 LC: That battle at the village, where were you? Where were you supposed to be
21 with regard to the Marines who were advancing in? Were you supposed to be right there
22 at the front line or were you supposed to be back?

23 RS: I was supposed to be back, not more than four or five yards.

24 LC: Okay. So you're supposed to be like pretty much right there?

25 RS: Pretty much right there, but I needed to have a field of vision in case
26 somebody is hit so that I can see what's going on. If I'm out front then I can't see.

27 LC: You in part relied on someone saying, "Corpsman up," but you couldn't rely
28 exclusively on that.

29 RS: Right. Correct.

30 LC: Because if someone is hit and nobody knows about it that's not a good
31 situation.

1 RS: Yeah. I've got some very weird pictures from that day.

2 LC: Do you? What kind of weird pictures? Can you describe them?

3 RS: When we got up to the canal wall, one of the Marines is in the process of
4 being—he's in mid air being blown backwards.

5 LC: Really? So you were snapping away with your camera?

6 RS: Yeah.

7 LC: Did you have it up to your face or were you just kind of—?

8 RS: No, I had it up to my face.

9 LC: Did you?

10 RS: Yeah and this is also where I found God.

11 LC: You want to tell me about that? A little?

12 RS: Sure. When we got up to the canal, we called it the berm wall. There was a
13 call for corpsman up and it was over to my right by, I don't know, 100 yards, 150 yards.
14 Once again it was just totally open terrain. One of the wonderful little tricks of the North
15 Vietnamese is once somebody's been hit they know that there's a corpsman going out to
16 get him. I just looked at it and had my camera. I took a picture of where I was going
17 which was near a—they had a rice hanging place in the middle of the thing so that when
18 they were harvesting the rice they could hang it out to dry. Then they'd beat the rice to
19 get the rice from the chaff and all the rest of that in that area. This guy had been wounded
20 out beside that. So I took my camera, took a picture of it, handed it to the guy who was
21 next to me. I don't know who it was. I just said, "Okay. I'm going out there. Send this
22 picture home." So I made it. I was running like crazy and got out there, treated the guy,
23 got him in the position. He wasn't going to die so I didn't need to move him out of that
24 position. I got him so he was stabilized and just said, "Okay. We'll be back to get you,
25 you just stay behind this coverage in the rice hanging thing. Then when things die down
26 we'll get you out of here." Gave him some morphine and then I looked at where I had
27 come from and I just said there is no way on God's green earth that those people could
28 miss me. So I just got up and walked back, but I knew at that point that there was no way
29 that they were going to hit me.

30 LC: Because they hadn't hit you because you came in.

1 RS: They hadn't hit me as I was going out. At that point was the first time I knew
2 that I was coming home.

3 LC: What did you attribute that to?

4 RS: I don't know, faith.

5 LC: Did you think the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) was being respectful of
6 your—?

7 RS: No, there was no way.

8 LC: So it was not coming from their side?

9 RS: No. I mean, they were still shooting at me.

10 LC: And you just stood up and walked?

11 RS: Yeah, but I knew that they weren't going to hit me.

12 LC: That's amazing. How was the man that you went in to treat? How was he?
13 What was his condition?

14 RS: He had been hit by a round in the leg. Actually we had trouble for finding the
15 round or where he was hit because the pain in his leg was no where near actually where
16 he ended up being hit. It was weird. Actually he said his foot hurt. I'm looking down at
17 his foot and you know nothing there. Eventually we just started moving back up his leg
18 and found the hole up top.

19 LC: He had some kind of recurred pain or something.

20 RS: Yeah. I mean, it must have been some sort of nerve, that nerve interference.

21 LC: Were you able to see to it that he actually did get picked up at some stage?

22 RS: Yes.

23 LC: Were you in charge of keeping track of that sort of thing? Like, okay there is
24 someone over there that needs—

25 RS: Well, he was actually from the 2nd Platoon. There was another corpsman,
26 Boylan, who was with 2nd Platoon, Tim Boylan.

27 LC: How is that spelled?

28 RS: B-O-Y-L-A-N. He got to the guy just after I had been there. Tim was kind of
29 yelling at me to keep my head down. I said, "No, I got to do this." Since he was in Tim's
30 platoon, Tim saw to it that that was taken care of. I went back to Tim later on and said,
31 "Did you remember?" He said, "Yeah, it's done."

1 LC: You sort of kind of handed it back to him at that point?
2 RS: Right.
3 LC: How were things going for your platoon and your guys?
4 RS: They were doing okay. We had the casualty who was hit when we got to the
5 berm wall.
6 LC: Right of whom you have a photograph.
7 RS: Right. He was taken care of. He was hit I think up in the upper chest or
8 something like that, but it was above the lungs. So he may have had some broken bones
9 and things like that. Once we pulled back, he could walk or he could run. So he came
10 back with us.
11 LC: Do you know what the casualty rate was on that particular operation, that
12 battle at the village there?
13 RS: I don't know. I mean, we caught a couple of casualties. I think that either
14 Mike or Kilo Companies had a fairly significant number. I know that on that day a couple
15 of corpsmen from the other companies were either wounded or killed. I don't know what
16 the ultimate was but I know that we had a rather large influx of corpsmen after that.
17 LC: When you went into the actual village the next day and you found that the
18 combatants were gone, the NVA was not there, you felt disappointed and kind of—?
19 RS: Well, it's a sense of frustration because you spend a lot of energy,
20 adrenaline, the whole ball of wax trying to do something. Then you get to the point where
21 what you're trying to do is within your grasp and then you get called back.
22 LC: You said you didn't understand why that order was issued.
23 RS: Right.
24 LC: Have you ever understood it? Have you thought about it later?
25 RS: No. No, I don't know.
26 LC: What did the guys say when they were called back? Having once reached
27 what they thought was—they were on the verge of—?
28 RS: Well, they were kind of irritated. I mean, everybody is grumbling about it.
29 It's like damn we should have gone over. We were ready to clean house. Yeah, it was
30 pretty frustrating.

1 JC: After this village operation was completed what happened? You went back to
2 the Sand Dunes you said, to stay in that area?

3 RS: Not exactly sure where we went directly from that. We started operating
4 more in the sand dune area. We did some sweeps through that area. I think it was really
5 trying to see if we could locate where these people had been or where the enemy had
6 gone. We did a lot of sweeps in the area. We also set up ambushes, night ambushes in the
7 area.

8 LC: Can you describe that setting up the ambush? How did that work?

9 RS: You have an area, which was a general area pretty close to being where
10 you're supposed to be because you need to rely upon the topography to give you your
11 cover and concealment. Basically we would be looking for any kind of movement, light
12 movement. We'd generally find a place that had some tree cover or at least a large dike
13 that would separate the rice paddies. If you got the dike you'd actually get on both sides
14 of the dike. You'd get half the squad on one side and half on the other. You'd be looking
15 back across. If there was any movement on either side because you could have movement
16 anywhere. So that if there was movement if it was possible you'd get the other people
17 back to your side of the dike that provided the best cover. If not you would just say,
18 "Okay, get down and hug the ground." I think on the night ambushes we really only saw
19 movement once and it was far enough away that we couldn't identify it. You never knew
20 if the ARVN were going to be in the area.

21 LC: You never knew?

22 RS: Seldom, so that if it could have been an ARVN patrol so you just don't open
23 fire.

24 LC: So if you saw movement, it could just as easily be ARVN as NVA.

25 RS: Unless you can identify it. I mean, now if they got close enough you could
26 probably identify it.

27 LC: By how?

28 RS: Just visually, who they were, how they're dressed.

29 LC: Was there any radio contact?

30 RS: Just by squeezing the hand set.

31 LC: But that only worked if there had been a prearranged signal.

1 RS: Well, what they would do is the company would have radio checks. That
2 would happen during the course of anything, but particularly at night. They'd call out,
3 "Lima 3 Alpha, this is Lima 3 radio check." You could hear that on the radio, the radio
4 man could. So then if we heard it rather than speaking into it we would just squeeze the
5 hand set to predetermine the number of times. They would know at that point, back at
6 company that everything was okay, or at least theoretically everything was okay.

7 LC: Right. It sounds kind of loose in terms of being able to identify who's in
8 your field of fire on some of these night ambush operations.

9 RS: Yeah, it is. Generally you knew that American troops were not moving at
10 night. We just couldn't control what the ARVNs were doing.

11 LC: Many times you weren't informed about what they were doing?

12 RS: Right, but ninety-five percent of the time or maybe even greater, if there was
13 movement it would have been the North Vietnamese, but unless you can identify your
14 target you can't shoot.

15 LC: That was the rules of engagement that you operated?

16 RS: Mm-hmm.

17 LC: Let's take a break for a second.

18 RS: Okay.

19 LC: Okay. Mr. Slingluff was there something that you wanted to say about some
20 of the material we already covered?

21 RS: Yeah, like I say it all comes in fits and starts. There was a time and I think it
22 was right around the time we were doing the sweeps of Oklahoma Hills. After we came
23 through—I don't know, there was a place we called Arizona Territory, Dodge City and
24 the Badlands. This is all pretty bizarre, the way things are named, but at any rate we had
25 been doing a bunch of sweeps in those areas. Somehow or another during that period we
26 ended up on Hill 55. That was when Larry Bell joined our platoon. Larry was my other
27 corpsman and became my best friend.

28 LC: Okay, Larry B-E-L-L.

29 RS: Mm-hmm. So we were all operating off of Hill 55 for maybe a week. We
30 were kind of there temporarily, I don't know just kind of hanging around waiting for the
31 next thing to come up. So we were running patrols off the hill to the south and then to the

1 west where road went to Hill 37, which I guess was several miles, four or five miles
2 down the road form Hill 55. So Larry joins us and I don't know whether the North
3 Vietnamese planned it for new corpsmen, but the first time he's off the hill, he gets shot
4 at. It's kind of like me, the first time off the hill somebody steps on a booby trap. So
5 Larry comes back and he's pretty freaked by the whole thing, but Larry is a good guy and
6 weathered that. I had mentioned that at some point or that we very seldom or never were
7 in the same patrol routes, but this was an exception because we came off and I don't
8 know whether it was an exception by design or what, but we would come off the hill,
9 cross over a river at the bottom of the hill, and then walk out maybe a hundred yards,
10 make a right hand turn, and then head towards Hill 37. We'd go up the road and this road
11 was one that was getting booby-trapped. We couldn't find who was setting these things.
12 We'd run a sweep, no booby traps found. Then later on in the day all of a sudden some
13 truck would be going down it and have his wheels blown off. We didn't know what was
14 going on so that we started running the same patrol route. We'd go down maybe two
15 miles, about half way between 55 and 37. We'd make a right back towards the river
16 which had actually cut away from the road from where we came off the hill and was
17 probably about five hundred, six hundred yards off the road at that point, but through
18 some tree lines and rice paddies so that you couldn't see the river from the road. We'd cut
19 back and go down to the river. Then we'd come back along the river for maybe three or
20 four hundred, five hundred yards. There were no villages in there and then back up to the
21 road and then back to the hill. We started running this same route. I guess about the third
22 time out on this route we came to the river and a bunch of us decided to go down and get
23 our canteens filled. There was a bank that dropped, oh I guess about five or six feet down
24 to the river where, obviously rivers are lower than the land around them. I climbed down
25 the embankment and was filling canteens. I was there with another guy. The rest of the
26 squad, when I was with the squad, had set up a perimeter with outlooks, look outs and all
27 the rest of that. All of a sudden from across the river we get, the two of us and I don't
28 know who was with me, we all of a sudden started taking sniper fire. We're fully exposed
29 to the fire wherever it's coming from. What do you do? Do you jump in the river? Do
30 you hug the ground? Do you try to get up and run? You just don't know what's going on.
31 We had a really cruddy machine gun. I mean, this thing, it was kind of like my .45. It

1 would only operate occasionally. We had a machine gunner who was named Paul
2 Mendez. He was from Puerto Rico and didn't speak much English and maybe understood
3 some. It was often difficult to tell. He was a little big spacey guy but nice guy. All of a
4 sudden we hear the machine gun crank up and it continues to run. It gave us the
5 opportunity to jump out of our predicament and then go back to safety, or relative safety.
6 The way Mendez got the machine gun to work is because there is a clip that comes down
7 on top of the machine gun belt as it feeds through. The clip kept on popping up so the
8 rounds wouldn't go into the chamber. So he was able to put his hand on top of this thing
9 which gets real, real hot with a cloth and keep it down, just push it down until we were
10 able to get out of there. That's how the machine gun worked.

11 LC: That's pretty amazing. Did he have a sense of where the fire was coming
12 from? Did you talk to him about it?

13 RS: No, he was just spraying the other side. Then we all got out the bloopers, you
14 know, the M-7s9 and we're trying to pop things across there just to see if we could hit
15 anything. I'm sure we didn't. He had a cloth or something that was in between his hand
16 and the metal, but without that we were kind of cooked. That's one thing. Then the next
17 day, we're running the same patrol route. We come down to the river. We don't make the
18 mistake of going down to get water. We've been there, done that, don't have to do it
19 again. We take a break and then we start walking back down the riverbank and there was
20 a line of trees that kind of came into the river. Then the trees got thicker as you went
21 further down. There was a rice paddy there. One of the guys, a guy named Bob Muleson,
22 walked into the tree line and stepped on a booby trap which exploded and took off one of
23 his legs. When I got to him the full booby trap hadn't exploded and his other leg was
24 caught in the trap, but it was, in my opinion, obvious that he was going to lose that as
25 well. You asked about a KaBar.

26 LC: Yes.

27 RS: So I had to cut off the other leg and call in the helicopters and put him on
28 board. So he was a double amputee. When I was treating him you hit this moral dilemma.
29 I mean, in my opinion, Bob was as good as dead. I didn't see how he could survive
30 anything like this. So the dilemma is do you try to save a life that you feel is gone
31 anyway. The response is yes, you have to. If not only for the possibility that the person

1 can live, but because the people around you are seeing what you're doing. If you don't do
2 something they lose confidence in your ability to do something. So it was as much for
3 kind of future events as it was for trying to save Bob. Lima Company held a reunion in
4 York, Pennsylvania, a year ago this past summer. I had never been to a reunion. Through
5 the internet I found out this thing was going on. So I said, "Okay, I'm going to run up
6 there for the day, and to see it." So I go up there and I walk into the room and the first
7 person I see is Bob Muleson.

8 LC: Did he recognize you?

9 RS: Yeah, we put it together. He's living a good, a productive life. So my moral
10 dilemma turned out to be a little less of a moral dilemma, but just a physical dilemma that
11 I shouldn't have tried to read something more into it, but it was kind of amazing.

12 LC: How much of the thinking about the influence of your actions with one
13 wounded man on men who were not wounded but might be, how much of that thinking
14 actually went on at the time?

15 RS: Oh, I think a lot of it does. I think that when you're dealing with people who
16 are not wounded but going to be wounded and they have confidence in the fact that if
17 somebody comes to them and they're aware of that person's presence and abilities, that it
18 gives their spirit and their inner self a greater confidence in their ability to survive what
19 has happened. I don't know if I can prove it on anything and I don't think there is a way
20 to possibly do that, but I think that the attitude of the patient has a tremendous amount to
21 do with the ability of that patient to recover.

22 LC: Do you think that that particular incidence actually built trust amongst the
23 men in your capabilities in the field?

24 RS: Yes.

25 LC: Did guys talk to you about it later?

26 RS: Yes.

27 LC: They did?

28 RS: Yeah.

29 LC: What kinds of things did they say, do you remember?

30 RS: Well, there was a guy who was right next to me who was kind of holding
31 Bob down. He saw that the booby trap wasn't exploded all the way. He knew that not

1 only was Bob's life in jeopardy, but both his and potentially mine were in jeopardy if we
2 screwed up with the remainder of the booby trap. So I was kind of jumping around from
3 side to side trying to get the best angle to perform the operation that I had to perform.
4 He's going nuts because he's saying, "You're going to knock that thing. You're going to
5 knock that thing," and I'm just telling him to shut up. This is bad enough. Don't bother
6 my mind with this. We're going to get through this. So that afterwards he went back to
7 the rest of the squad that was out there. He said, "You know, Doc did a good job. He
8 knew what he was doing." It turned out okay, which it did. Yeah I think that you have to
9 do your best. If people don't have confidence in you, you may as well pack your bags and
10 go home.

11 LC: Was there, in your unit, a kind of a special feeling toward the doc, the
12 corpsmen?

13 RS: Yeah.

14 LC: Can you describe how that operated, how it felt for you to know that that was
15 there?

16 RS: Well, it's confidence in the reverse. It's knowing that if and when I have to
17 do something that they would do anything and everything to make sure that whatever I
18 did, as stupid as it might have been, that I would get back. It was the type of thing where
19 they felt that perhaps their life was in my hands, but at the same time I knew that my life
20 was in there hands.

21 LC: Other people that we've interviewed talk about that particular special place
22 that the corpsmen had. That it was something that the unit kind of built around because
23 everybody needed him always to be available and well. We've heard that and I'm
24 interested in how it looked from your side that you could feel that coming from the men
25 that you were working with.

26 RS: Sure.

27 LC: Let's talk about the operations that came after the village fight that you
28 described earlier. Did you go back to Fort Apache?

29 RS: No.

30 LC: Okay. You never went back to Fort Apache?

31 RS: Never went back there.

1 LC: Do you know what happened to Fort Apache? Was it just abandoned or do
2 you know whether another unit was stationed there sometime?

3 RS: I'm sure that it was part of the southern perimeter of the defense around Da
4 Nang. So that I would image that although it may not have been a lynch pen, it was at
5 that southern area, the most farthest west point of that defensive perimeter at the south.

6 LC: Which was part of the Da Nang vital area.

7 RS: Right.

8 LC: What was your next set of operations? Do you recall?

9 RS: Well, basically we didn't have any formal operations. We just had an area
10 that we tended to operate out of. It was really the Sand Dunes area. Our battalion moved
11 to—there was a battalion headquarters that was set up in the Sand Dune area, which as I
12 said was probably about five miles south of Marble Mountain. If you went straight down
13 the coast from Marble Mountain you would run into this compound. Then if you made a
14 right from there you went to a bridge position or a bridge over the Tu Cau River.

15 LC: Can you describe that bridge?

16 RS: Sure. It was a single lane bridge. It was wood planking running across it,
17 then with heavier wood planking the length of it. Although the bridge itself I believe was
18 made of metal.

19 LC: Was that a French area bridge, do you know? Could you tell by looking at it?

20 RS: I couldn't tell.

21 LC: What was the responsibility of your unit in that area?

22 RS: First we operated out of some small platoon patrol bases. I have tried to
23 identify the names of the places. I can't do it. I just received some maps of the area. I
24 went to the U.S. Geological Survey or something or other and picked up some maps and
25 was trying to identify the places. We had these platoon patrol bases that we'd operate out
26 of for maybe a week and then move on to another area. We would just run patrols
27 through that area. I mean the same type of thing that we would do from Fort Apache.

28 LC: What were your bases, these temporary bases, what were they like?

29 RS: Well, let's see, there was one that somebody had built, at some point, a small
30 perimeter mound of dirt around it in a circle. There was a pond at one end of it. There
31 was a pagoda, an old pagoda that was mostly fallen apart in it. Somebody had dug a

1 bunker for sleeping and things. It was not formal. There was no concertina wire like Fort
2 Apache. It wasn't as permanent as that. It was just an area that we could operate out of
3 and it afforded some protection.

4 LC: So you stayed there, in a place like this or several of them, a couple nights or
5 more, a couple weeks?

6 RS: Yeah, it was probably about a week we spent there. I've got a really bizarre
7 picture of myself there.

8 LC: Can you describe it?

9 RS: Well, I'll do my best. When I went to Vietnam I weighed 210 pounds. I was
10 in decent shape. There was a point where our platoon had been beaten up a good bit, just
11 through booby traps, through constant going. An R&R (rest and recuperation) slot came
12 open to Hawaii. They said, "You're leaving. You're getting on the plane and you're out
13 of here for a week." Perhaps I was getting a little bizarre at that point. They just said,
14 "There's one. You don't have a choice, you're going." Well, Hawaii was not exactly
15 where I wanted to go. That's where all the married people went and met their wives and
16 all the rest of that. So I ended up going to Hawaii and landed there with not a lot of
17 money in my pocket, only a couple hundred bucks. So I decided that the best thing for me
18 to do was to fly stand by back to Baltimore.

19 LC: Was that allowed?

20 RS: No. I mean, what are they going to do, send me to 'Nam? So I got on the
21 plane and flew back to Baltimore and walked into my house and freaked everybody out.
22 It was kind of a zoo type show, but I needed to go get some clothes. There was a nice
23 department store in Baltimore that no longer exists. I said, "Okay. I'll run up to Stewart's
24 and I'll get some clothes." So I go out there and go to the men's department and say, "I
25 need a pair of pants and some shirts and things like that." He says, "Well, what size are
26 you?" I said, "I have no clue." So he says, "Ok, we'll take your measurement." He
27 measured me and he says, "Well, we don't have anything for you. You have to go to the
28 little boys department." Because my waist, was at that point a twenty-eight. No it was
29 twenty-six, excuse me. So I'd gone from 210 pounds. I think at that point I had regained
30 about 10 pounds and was weighting all of about a 140 to 145. So I did my R&R and then
31 I hopped a plane to go back to Vietnam. I took my pants with me that I had purchased

1 because this was my link to state side at this point. So I've got a picture of me with this
2 twenty-six inch waist at this platoon patrol base. I mean, I look like a freaking skeleton.
3 People look at that and they say, "Is that you? How in the world did you do that?" A good
4 diet.

5 LC: A lot of exercise.

6 RS: Yeah, exactly. That's the weird picture. I got my stateside pants on and I
7 don't know.

8 LC: Why did you actually go home, all the way home?

9 RS: I had nothing to do in Hawaii.

10 LC: Hawaii didn't do anything for you? It didn't help you at all to sort of be in
11 Hawaii?

12 RS: No, I mean what was I going to do there? There was nobody there that I
13 knew. As I said most of the guys who went to Hawaii were married and they weren't
14 interested in hanging with me.

15 LC: You really didn't have a choice about say going to Hong Kong?

16 RS: No. At that point they said you're out of here. I asked them, I said, "Does
17 that jeopardize the R&R that I want to take?" They said, "No. No. You can get your
18 R&R."

19 LC: Who was telling you this?

20 RS: Lieutenant.

21 LC: In Baltimore, did your parents or other family have any idea that you were
22 going to show up?

23 RS: No.

24 LC: What was their reaction when you opened the door? Did they recognize you?

25 RS: Well, kind of. I walked in the morning. It was probably about 8:30 in the
26 morning. Dad had gone to work. I walked in and saw my mother and her mouth just
27 dropped. Then I said, "Well, is anybody else home?" They said, "Yeah, Richard." My
28 younger brother is upstairs asleep. So I said, "Okay." He's the one that is 6'8". So I go up
29 to the third floor of the house and there he is in my bed in my room. So I grab him and I
30 look him in the eyes and I say, "What the hell are you doing in my bed?" He just looked
31 at me and said, "Well, what the hell are you doing home?" He rolled over.

1 LC: How old was he at this time? Was he in high school or something?

2 RS: Let's see, he was eighteen, yeah.

3 LC: That's all he had to say?

4 RS: That's it.

5 LC: Nice.

6 RS: Yeah. We had a cousin of mine from England. She was staying with us. She
7 spent about two years working in this country. She lived with us for that period of time.
8 She was there before I went to Vietnam and she was about my age. So we were kind of
9 like—and she's only 6'3". We were kind of like brother and sister. We were really close
10 without the sibling rivalry that goes on. She came home from work and I just decided that
11 I was going to stand in the front walk. I was out there talking with some people but just
12 turn my back to her. My hair, because of the sun, had just gone completely bleach white.
13 She is walking up the walk. She has no clue who I am. Then I turn around and it was
14 pretty wild.

15 LC: Yeah, that would be a great photograph to see the look on her face.

16 RS: Yeah.

17 LC: What did you do that week besides go shopping for clothes? Did you sleep?
18 Did you eat? Did you go out to clubs?

19 RS: I did it all. That morning I called over to my girlfriends' house, same
20 girlfriend. Her mother answers the phone and I say, "Is Robin there?" She says, "No,
21 she's at work and who is this?" I went by Bob at that point. I said, "Bob." She got
22 irritated. She says, "This is not funny, who is this?" I'm like, "It's me."

23 LC: She just didn't flat out believe it.

24 RS: She didn't believe it in the beginning and then I said, "Yeah, it is me." So I
25 found out where Robin was and then we went out and had a date that night and went to
26 some friend's house and had some steak. We just kind of hung around and basically did
27 what we would normally do.

28 LC: Did it feel normal to you?

29 RS: A little surreal. I mean, one of the things that I found is that conversation was
30 a little bit difficult because nobody could relate to anything I was saying.

31 LC: Did they ask you questions?

1 RS: No, not really, but I found that their conversation was extremely trivial. The
2 things that my friends or the people my age were concerned about were to me, absurd, yet
3 I couldn't express that.

4 LC: But something had changed.

5 RS: Yeah. I mean, something had obviously changed you know for better, for
6 worse, for whatever, but at that point I knew that I was a different person.

7 LC: Things that you normally would of felt fallen right into the conversation
8 about was kind of, you couldn't get a grasp, couldn't get a grip on it?

9 RS: Right.

10 LC: Because your head was somewhere completely different?

11 RS: Yeah.

12 LC: Did Robin know that you were coming back at all?

13 RS: No.

14 LC: No one had any clue?

15 RS: Right. She had to cancel a date for that night.

16 LC: Did she do so gladly?

17 RS: Yes.

18 LC: Well, that's good. Were you at all concerned about being, I assume you're
19 AWOL (absent without leave) technically?

20 RS: Technically, yeah.

21 LC: Were you at all concerned about that or was it just kind of who cares?

22 RS: No. If I was going to be concerned about it I wouldn't have done it.

23 LC: How long were you actually able to stay in Baltimore?

24 RS: It was probably about four days, four or five days. The Hawaiian R&R was a
25 day or two longer than the ones that were more local.

26 LC: Then you had to do the travel time.

27 RS: Yeah and then travel time back.

28 LC: Had you already bought your tickets to return to Hawaii?

29 RS: Yes.

30 LC: So you had bought a round trip?

31 RS: Yep.

1 LC: As it got closer to getting on the plane to go back to Hawaii and Vietnam,
2 how was that?

3 RS: It was a knowledge that that's what had to happen. So it was total
4 resignation, but not with any fear or trepidation or regret.

5 LC: Did you still feel this, even when you were in Baltimore, still feel this sense
6 that you were going to be fine?

7 RS: Yes.

8 LC: That this was going to unfold all right for you?

9 RS: Yes.

10 LC: That's remarkable.

11 RS: I mean, I knew after that day.

12 LC: So getting back on the plane, was it hard to say goodbye to everybody or did
13 you kind of have an inner peace around it?

14 RS: It was peaceful.

15 LC: And for them?

16 RS: I don't know.

17 LC: Did you get a sense that they—I mean they had been so shocked by you
18 showing up unexpectedly, were they on kind of a roller coaster? Do you know about their
19 feelings? Now you had to leave again.

20 RS: I would think that perhaps, but nobody would express it to me. If they had I
21 think that they're sensitive enough to know that it would have made it tougher on me.
22 They were just happy for the time.

23 LC: Flying back, did you feel kind of disconnected from the experience you just
24 had there in Baltimore with your family? Now you're going back into the kind of military
25 structure or was it fairly easy for you to do?

26 RS: It was actually pretty easy. It was just part of a continuum of life's events.

27 LC: So you got back to Hawaii and you were there very briefly I take it?

28 RS: Yeah.

29 LC: Only long enough really to change planes. Is that right?

30 RS: That's about it.

31 LC: Tell me about flying back to Vietnam. Was it a commercial charter?

1 RS: I think it was all done by Continental at that point. I remember just very
2 little. I remember just very little—I think I slept most of the time, going back. I just don't
3 really remember.

4 LC: Did you come into Da Nang again?

5 RS: Yes.

6 LC: What happened when you got back? Did you go back to the 3rd Platoon still?

7 RS: Yes.

8 LC: Where were they?

9 RS: They were still in the sand dunes. That's how I ended up with that picture. I
10 still had my pants.

11 LC: I see. Did you just kind of fall right back into basically the routine, although
12 it wasn't really all that routine of the work, the job?

13 RS: Pretty much, yeah.

14 LC: Did people talk to you, ask you about everything that you had done? Were
15 they keen to know how wonderful it had been to be in the States?

16 RS: Well, they were asking me how Hawaii was.

17 LC: Did you tell them how Hawaii was?

18 RS: I told everybody except the chief at the aid station, but he knew.

19 LC: Oh, he knew?

20 RS: He just looked at me and he said, "Do you know how damn lucky you are?"

21 LC: So the Hawaii story, you told them how wonderful it was?

22 RS: Yeah.

23 LC: So what sort of actions did you have? Were you continuing to go on the
24 sweeps and the kind of patrols that you described before?

25 RS: Yeah. Actually there wasn't a whole lot going on at that time. It was just
26 daily routine.

27 LC: Did that sort of introduce some kind of actual boredom because there's
28 nothing going on?

29 RS: Well, I think that—I don't know if boredom is the right word. Sometimes the
30 English language just fails. The Greeks have something like twenty-seven words that
31 describe love and we've got one. Our language is not good enough. Boredom, no,

1 bordering on boredom, yeah. It's kind of like a complacency with the surroundings. You
2 become too comfortable. That is probably the most dangerous time is when people
3 become too comfortable with their surroundings and with what's going on. You tend to
4 overlook things. I think that's why the military tried to get the positions or areas of
5 operations changed as really as quickly as they could so that as soon as any group became
6 familiar with a given area then you moved them on. If you're familiar with it you see the
7 same thing every time out.

8 LC: The kind of settling in is in fact dangerous.

9 RS: Right, exactly. You need a fresh pair of eyes looking at the same setting
10 constantly. I mean, we did do one sweep with the ARVNs again and we found some
11 North Vietnamese who had been hiding out in the tunnel. We took care of them. They
12 had been doing booby traps and things like that. I think we operated out of the Sand Dune
13 area for maybe another three weeks or so. We were getting down towards the first of
14 June. Then we were transferred to the Tu Cau Bridge. That became our area of operation
15 where we were pulling bridge duty, which was really an escape, with not a whole lot
16 going on. We would run patrols out of that. Our main function was also guarding the road
17 between the Tu Cau Bridge and the battalion headquarters in the Sand Dunes. We'd run
18 nightly we'd run what we called rat patrols up and down the roads. That was, like the TV
19 show, you had a machine gun mounted on top of a jeep and they would drive up and
20 down the roads at night. Then we had in conjunction with the rat patrols, and we would
21 have two jeeps going at all times. As I said in conjunction with those we had what we
22 called snake bites. A squad would go out up and down the road and every so often you
23 would drop off a fire team. So that's about three fire teams up and down the road. We
24 had, or at least I had a bit of a problem with that concept because they were initially
25 sending a corpsman out with the snake bites and that means that a corpsman was being
26 dropped off with a fire team. Now, I didn't mind being dropped off with a fire team, but
27 you've got two snake bits and three fire teams or five units that are working out there.
28 The corpsman can cover only one unit of three people. You've got thirteen people out
29 there and the corpsman can only cover three.

30 LC: And you're responsible for them regardless.

1 RS: Right. By this time John Jackson had been wounded and he was no longer
2 with us. I forget, we had a series—we had a platoon sergeant named Robert. E. Lee and
3 he was running it. Then there was—not Beltrane—Misig, Blake Misig

4 LC: Can you spell that? Do you know how to spell that?

5 RS: I think it's just M-I-S-I-G, or maybe it's M-I-S-S-I-G. We're kind of running
6 things and was able to convince them to keep the corpsman on stand by back at the base
7 or back at the bridge. If something happened, to use one of the snake bites, or one of the
8 rat patrols to get the corpsman out there, but that way the corpsman could cover not only
9 the bridge position but also the various units that were up and down the road.

10 LC: So you would have more mobility to get to someone if there was a problem.

11 RS: Right, exactly. That turned out actually pretty good. At night when one of the
12 rat patrols ran over a booby trap, how that got there I have no clue.

13 LC: A booby trap that took out the jeep?

14 RS: Yeah, it took out part of the jeep, or took out the jeep. There was, oh lord
15 what was his name? It will come to me later and I can fill it in at a later date. He had gone
16 and asked for permission from me to go up to the battalion aid station because there was
17 a dentist up there and to have a filling looked at his tooth. Well, I knew what he wanted
18 to do. He wanted to go get a beer. He was a friend. So I said fine and signed the thing. He
19 was on that jeep that hit the booby trap when it was coming back and was killed, which is
20 a bummer. It was one of those things where you look back at the decisions you make and
21 you regret, but then you come to the realization that nothing would have changed it. So
22 you just deal with it.

23 LC: How did you deal with it when it first happened? Did you feel guilty?

24 RS: Yeah. I mean, it's one of these things, where if only I hadn't have which is
25 the same thing as saying if only I had, or whatever it is. After a while you can only beat
26 yourself up so much over decisions that you make, recognizing that life is full of
27 decisions that have repercussions. At certain times it turns out wrong, but there is nothing
28 you can do about it.

29 LC: Were you the corpsman that was called to that jeep?

30 RS: Well, what happened was the other rat patrol was out there. They were just
31 about to cross in the middle and saw what had happened. So they loaded the wounded on

1 their jeep and brought them back. So we were able to treat them. There was a guy named
2 Brown who was also wounded pretty badly. Robert E. Lee was actually driving one of
3 the jeeps. He was wounded but not terrible.

4 LC: Did you call in dust off for these wounds?

5 RS: No because it was going to be faster for us to treat them where we were and
6 then get the jeep and run him out to the battalion aid station. That was really only about
7 two to three miles up the road. They could call in the evac from the aid station.

8 LC: Were there any other incidents in the Sand Dune's patrols that you recall that
9 left an impression on you?

10 RS: Not really. Other than the rat patrol being hit was really the only incident for
11 quite a while.

12 LC: So it was fairly quiet at that time and you didn't have very much, if any,
13 direct contact with the enemy?

14 RS: Right. No, no, I'm going to go backwards again.

15 LC: Okay, fine.

16 RS: Because I just had one of these incredible flash backs.

17 LC: Okay, sure.

18 RS: When we were walking out of the Dodge City area, you know, Arizona
19 Territory Badlands after one of the sweeps that we had done down there. We were
20 coming out of it and we were—I think we were all trying to leave the area. The Colonel
21 had come out, and I don't know his name, but he was in an Amtrak. There were a couple
22 of Amtrak's with him and I think a tank or something or other. We were walking in the
23 same direction as the vehicles, but going a little bit faster. This all goes back to the
24 medical dilemma type thing. As we were walking past the Amtrak, somebody from a tree
25 line shot off an RPG (rocket propelled grenade). It hit one of our guys, a guy named
26 Hawk. That's the name that came to me when I was trying to think of the other name. At
27 any rate, it hit him in the hip and exploded downward. Basically he had nothing left of his
28 body from the waist down. When we got to him and the other corpsmen at that point was
29 a guy named Hubbard. The two of us got to him and he was still alive. Hence you have
30 the dilemma and we're in the process of looking at this and trying to start an IV. I got the
31 IV going. The helicopter came in and we put him on the helicopter. He was still alive

1 when we put him on. That is one of those times that you look at it and you say, “Okay.
2 This person will have no life.” What do you do? You do what you do. I don’t know
3 whether the corpsman on the helicopter pulled the IV or what. It was thankful that he did
4 not survive. So he was killed. He was an interesting guy. He was just a funny little guy.
5 He was from Oklahoma or something like that. His father worked in a post office.
6 Whenever they had packages that were not deliverable that had food items in it, he
7 diverted them to us. So when Hawk got a package from home it was always a delight for
8 everybody.

9 LC: That was pretty smart. How many times would you say in the course of your
10 time in the bush and I know later you went to the BAS did you see some kind of really
11 horrific traumatic injury that you felt someone wouldn’t survive. You’ve described a
12 couple of them. Were there many more that we’re not talking about? Were there just a
13 handful of them?

14 RS: There was just a handful.

15 LC: It’s June of 1969, probably toward the end of June at this point. Your time in
16 the bushes is actually coming to an end, is that correct?

17 RS: Yes.

18 LC: How did you know that was going to happen or did you know in advance?

19 RS: Well, corpsman, we knew had give or take six months in the bush. It was
20 explained to me that the reason was because the corpsman had a very high casualty rate
21 that if they kept the corpsman—it’s kind of like second lieutenants, they move them out
22 of the bush just so that a few would survive.

23 LC: Did you ever have a colleague corpsman who was assigned with you, Larry
24 Bell, or any of the others injured?

25 RS: Yes.

26 LC: Were you injured? Were you wounded?

27 RS: No, I mean not to speak of.

28 LC: But other corpsmen that you knew of, or had worked with?

29 RS: Yes. I can go into that one.

30 LC: If you only feel comfortable.

1 RS: Yeah. I got out of the bush. I guess it was the first part of July. Larry had
2 actually come in-country maybe a month after me. He came out of the bush also about
3 two weeks after me. Our battalion had moved from the sand dunes area over to the place
4 where I originally came in-country and described that first BAS.

5 LC: Yes.

6 RS: So we were back there however that whole base was being renovated for the
7 ARVNs. They were going to take it over under the Vietnamization program, brand new
8 showers, brand new living quarters, I mean, we were jealous. So Larry came out of the
9 bush and we were at this station. We had a cook out with steaks and a bunch of beer. So
10 the two of us, we decided to get beer in excess, so we got pretty hooched up and we got
11 all maudlin and all the rest of this stuff. We're talking about what we're going to do when
12 we get back to the States and the rest of it. Larry was from Alloway, New Jersey, which
13 is not too far from Atlantic City. That was before Atlantic City became all filled with
14 gambling and all the rest of that. The casinos didn't exist. It was actually a beach. He said
15 yeah he loved going to Atlantic City and sitting on a beach and watching the girls go by.
16 So we made a deal that we'd go to Atlantic City once a year and watch girls. The next
17 morning somebody comes in and says one of the companies got hit pretty hard. It was
18 Lima Company and that they needed more corpsmen because the corpsmen that had
19 replaced both Larry and I, had replaced Larry and me, pardon me, had been wounded or
20 killed or something. They needed another corpsman out there. Larry had only been back
21 in the rear for only about two or three days. I said, "Look, I've been back here for a
22 couple of weeks. I'll go back out." I was going to have to go out the next day and that
23 was the arrangement. This is one of these things where you get sick again. I got sick
24 again. I don't know whether it was because of the beer or whatever, but Larry said,
25 "Look, you can't go back out there." So Larry went back out to Lima Company 3rd
26 Platoon and he was killed about a week later.

27 LC: Do you know what the action was that cost him his life?

28 RS: They were on a patrol, I don't know exactly where. The squad that he was
29 with set up to take a break under one of those dry, those hangers for the rice. Evidently
30 the whole place was booby trapped. It sounds to me that there was somebody with a
31 remote. They blew the whole place and like four or five of them were killed. Everybody

1 was wounded. Somebody was able to make it back to the company headquarters and told
2 them what happened. They went out and picked up the piece.

3 LC: Did you go out?

4 RS: No.

5 LC: Were you at battalion aid at this time?

6 RS: I was at battalion aid and we had moved on from that regimental area
7 because we only spent about two or three days there. We went up to Hill 37. We'd been
8 there about two or three days when the news came back.

9 LC: Was the whole company, did the whole company react to this event or the
10 whole platoon? I mean, this wasn't just individual friends. This was a big—

11 RS: Well, anybody who knew Larry reacted. He was one of the really good
12 people. He was kind of like a piper when we would go into villages. Kids just
13 gravitated to him. He was just very kind, considerate person. I talked with his mother
14 maybe ten years ago and she says, "Well, we're just country." If you think of somebody
15 from New Jersey and you think of the things around New York. New Jersey is a garden
16 community where they raise vegetables and fruits and things like that. Most of New
17 Jersey is farming. She just says, "Well, we're just country." You could see it in Larry. He
18 was just very laid back.

19 LC: Was that the first time that you had communicated with his parents or
20 family?

21 RS: Yes.

22 LC: Did you do that on your own, of your own volition?

23 RS: Yes.

24 LC: After you knew that he had been killed, did it occur to you maybe to write a
25 letter and then you decided not to to his family or did it not even occur?

26 RS: I just couldn't deal with it. For whatever reason, I think some people deal
27 with death better than others. I don't deal with it very well.

28 LC: Well, let's talk about the battalion aid station and your work there. Once
29 you're moved back from the bush what responsibilities did you take on at the BAS?

30 RS: I had an option at that point where I could either stay with BAS or go back to
31 the rear near division and 1st Med Battalion and work out of 1st Med. My problem with 1st

1 Med is they required people to polish their boots and stand inspection. That was just not
2 part of my personal genre.

3 LC: Did that make no sense to you, also, I mean after your experience the past
4 six months?

5 RS: Right. I don't know if I would have been able to fully deal with that in this
6 kind of Mickey Mouse stuff. So I volunteered to stay out of battalion, which not too
7 many people have done before. So I think they really didn't know what to do with me for
8 a while. I had my ambulance driver's license so I was made ambulance driver.

9 LC: How did that work? What was your ambulance?

10 RS: It was an ambulance that was a jeep that was open air that had stretcher
11 hangers in the back. Technically it had been what the military called dead lined.

12 LC: What does that mean?

13 RS: It means that it was not operable, but they had refused to—I don't know if
14 they had refused, but they hadn't sent us a replacement. So we kind of had to put it back
15 together with band-aids and everything, and wind up the rubber bands and keep it going,

16 LC: Did you help with that kind of repair stuff? Were you any good at that?

17 RS: No, but I was good at washing it. I could take it down to the motor pool and
18 say, "Okay. This is what it's doing."

19 LC: Did you have a friend over at motor pool who could help you out?

20 RS: Yeah, they'd help me with it.

21 LC: Good because they knew what you were doing.

22 RS: Yeah. They made me the lead corpsman for the aid station which all that
23 means is I would go in every morning and check the stations and make sure that they
24 were fully supplied and then check with the people in the supply tent to make sure that
25 we had enough. Then they would give me a list of stuff that we needed. So when I would
26 drive into Da Nang with the ambulance I could pick up the supplies that we needed for
27 the aid station.

28 LC: Did you generally get everything you asked for when you went into Da
29 Nang?

30 RS: Oh, yeah.

1 LC: Were there ever any problems around getting more, I don't know, the
2 medical supplies you needed, drugs?

3 RS: No, not the medical supplies. I had problems once with the beer.

4 LC: What was the problem with the beer?

5 RS: The doctor had given me permission to buy as much beer as we needed.

6 LC: As much as you needed?

7 RS: As much as we needed. (Both laugh)

8 LC: Yeah, I'm laughing too. I'm trying not to.

9 RS: It gets good. The aid station, once we got to Hill 37, it was a fairly large
10 place. We had more space than we needed so we took the back of one the hooches and
11 we made a bar out of it. We had the typical things, the Playboy spreads hanging from the
12 wall, a bar, and there was always ice somewhere. So it was my job to make sure we had
13 beer. So I would run into Da Nang everyday to get the supplies and with permission of
14 the doctor you buy as much beer as we needed.

15 LC: Was the doctor's like imprimatur or authority important in this process?

16 RS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Because a regular enlisted person there was no
17 way that they could buy as much beer as I was buying. It grew to the point where I was
18 buying 150 cases a day. Now 150 cases doesn't fit in one of those ambulances.

19 LC: No. What did you use?

20 RS: A trailer.

21 LC: Where did you get a trailer?

22 RS: From the motor pool.

23 LC: They were glad to supply you with a trailer.

24 RS: Yes, because they knew that I would have beer. I also got one of those tiny
25 refrigerators, those ones that are about two and a half feet tall. The excess beer that I
26 bought I put in the refrigerator. Beer was \$2.40 a case. I would sell it out at twenty cents
27 a can.

28 LC: So you did rather well off this—

29 RS: I was doing extremely well. Besides that, the Marines that couldn't afford the
30 twenty cents a can, they always had cameras and things like that so I had a hockshop. So
31 I had all these cameras and stereos and everything else. Sometimes Marines didn't come

1 back. I was doing really well. I paid for a year of college off of my beer stand, hockshop.
2 At any rate, I was in Da Nang one time with my ambulance and trailer full of beer. The
3 MPs (Military Police) picked me up. I had mentioned earlier that I had been to division
4 medical twice.

5 LC: Yes.

6 RS: This was my second trip. So they took me up to division medical where
7 some admiral is looking at me. I've got a vehicle that supposedly doesn't exist because it
8 had been deadlined.

9 LC: Correct. So they ran your plates, so to speak.

10 RS: Right. They saw 150 cases of beer with a trailer attached to an ambulance. I
11 also had another couple of corpsmen with me who had made their *gui d'entrance* into the
12 PX. They bought a couple of bottles of Bourbon and things like that. I mean, this was
13 highly suspicious. So they're taking pictures and all the rest of the stuff. They're reading
14 me the Riot Act and they're going to throw me in prison, all kinds of stuff is going to
15 happen to me. Finally it's beginning to get dark and I looked at one of the guys or the
16 people who was taking this inventory and stuff and I said, "You know, you've got a
17 problem." I said, "The problem is this, you can put me in jail, I don't care, but I've got
18 three other corpsmen here which is basically half of what we have out at the hill. If that
19 hill gets hit tonight and they don't have the medical personnel it isn't going to be my fault
20 that you didn't get them back out there."

21 LC: Was that persuasive?

22 RS: Yeah. They said, "Okay. We'll get you a truck. We'll load you up on a truck.
23 We're keeping the ambulance." I also had probably about forty cases of Coca Cola. I
24 said, "Well, can we take our drinks?" They said, "Yeah, everything but the beer." So we
25 formed a line and we're throwing the—they all left and they left some lieutenant who
26 was obviously brand new in-country and had no clue what was going on. So we're
27 loading the soda and the beer starts going off on the truck. He's jumping up and down
28 going crazy. He's got a photographer there taking pictures of this whole thing. The last
29 picture they have is us all in the back of this two and a half-ton truck waving goodbye on
30 top of the beer.

31 LC: Pulling off into the sunset.

1 RS: That's it. We're taking the evidence with us. So we get back out to the hill,
2 but the word got back to the office, because it had office hours. So they had office hours
3 and the captain who was holding my trial was somebody whom I helped out of a booby
4 trap a while back. He's kind of looking at me and he says, "Okay, what have you done
5 now?" I explained to him and he says, "Well, they have you driving a vehicle that doesn't
6 exist." I said, "That's not our fault. They refused to get us a new one." He says, "Okay,
7 you're not guilty there. They have you driving without a military driver's license." I said,
8 "Excuse me?" I pulled it out of my pocket. He says, "Well, you're not guilty there." He
9 says, "Now how about the contraband?" I said, "Well, I'm guilty." He said, "Are you
10 having a party over at the BAS tonight?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, everybody's
11 going to have to chip in a buck to get in and that's your fine."

12 LC: That was a pretty smooth way out.

13 RS: So it worked. It was on my record, but that's okay. That just kept me from
14 being a lifer.

15 LC: Well, yes. Did he come to the party?

16 RS: Yes. He got in free.

17 LC: There you go. Your fine was made up, I presume?

18 RS: Yeah, it was about twenty-five bucks so it cost me a buck.

19 LC: That was the last time you saw sort of the medical—

20 RS: Well, actually in a week we got a brand new ambulance. It was one of these
21 big enclosed jobbies and that way they couldn't see the beer.

22 LC: So that was actually an upgrade.

23 RS: It was. It was very kind of them.

24 LC: At BAS, what patients came to battalion aid and which patients were
25 Medevac'ed to regiment? Can you made a distinction there?

26 RS: We really had very few casualties. I mean, we had normal accidents where
27 somebody would get hurt or whatever it is, but not through combat. I think we did have
28 one incident where—I mean, this was when I was at Hill 37 because that was primarily
29 when I was at the BAS. We did have one incident where the mine sweep went out in the
30 morning to go between Hill 37 and Hill 55. Somebody stepped on a booby trap in the

1 mine sweep. It's either that or it was another one of the remote controls because it doesn't
2 make sense to me that they missed it with the sweepers.

3 LC: And when you—okay. Go ahead.

4 RS: So they brought the casualties back up to the hill on a vehicle. We
5 Medevac'ed a couple of them and one of our corpsman, Mike Ferguson was wounded at
6 that point or during the incident, but he stayed with us.

7 LC: When you say they were using the sweeper so you can't really figure out
8 how they might have missed this trap, are you talking about mine sweepers?

9 RS: Yeah.

10 LC: So metal detecting mine sweepers?

11 RS: Yes, exactly.

12 LC: Those were kind of commonly used on many of what you described as
13 sweeps?

14 RS: Yes.

15 LC: Okay. It seems like from what you're describing that the booby traps and the
16 hidden traps were primary concerns since you weren't really contacting the enemy kind
17 of face-to-face or fire-to-fire.

18 RS: Right.

19 LC: How effective do you think those sweepers were really?

20 RS: I think they were very effective. I mean they found a number of them. It was
21 just on rare occasion that they were missed.

22 LC: When you were working at battalion aid station, this is moving towards the
23 second half of 1969, who did you actually report to?

24 RS: Well, we had Dr. Surry was there. He was the physician in charge and the
25 officer in charge of the BAS.

26 LC: Do you know anything about where he was from or what his—?

27 RS: I think that he was from Missouri.

28 LC: How did you get along with the physician and the other people working
29 there? How did things kind of work as a team?

30 RS: Pretty well. It seemed to work very well.

31 LC: You were seeing Vietnamese civilians as well as American service persons?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: Were you also seeing, at any point did you treat enemy POWs?

3 RS: I did not.

4 LC: Did you know of that happening?

5 RS: Yes. I know they treated one. That was after Bob Muleson had stepped on a
6 bobby trap. We found somebody who was what we considered a suspicious age or
7 whatever who didn't have his ID with him. I was rather pissed. So in order to make sure
8 that he couldn't see where he was being taken I wrapped his head up with tape. I imagine
9 they had to treat him when they got back there in removing the tape.

10 LC: They had to treat him in removing the tape?

11 RS: Yeah. I'm sure that most of his hair came with it. It was not one of my finer
12 moments.

13 LC: I see, but you just did that. No one told you to do it or not to do it.

14 RS: I was just so pissed off that I couldn't see straight.

15 LC: Was that probably the closest you ever came actually to an enemy personnel,
16 enemy personnel at all?

17 RS: Probably not. It wasn't my job to fight them, but I know that day going
18 across the field that we were literally two feet from them on the other side of that berm
19 wall. Later on at that same place down by the river where Muleson stepped on the bobby
20 trap, we set up some night ambushes. We think we found the person who was setting the
21 booby traps because he was sleeping about forty yards from us when we woke up in the
22 morning. He didn't know we were there and he got up to stretch. He didn't see the next
23 morning.

24 LC: Was that men in your rifle company who took care of that, in the squad?

25 RS: Yes. He started to run. He all of a sudden saw us because we were trying to
26 flank him to capture him. He took off and that was it.

27 LC: Did your company that you know of ever take any POWs?

28 RS: No.

29 LC: I want to go back to your talking about the beer incident because I think
30 that's pretty interesting, but it also leads me on to wonder about sort of excessive use of
31 alcohol and actually the use of drugs. Did you see some of that, as a corpsman you may

1 have seen people who found drugs to be a way out, or at least temporarily a way out. Did
2 you see that?

3 RS: What I observed was that I think 1969 in terms of domestic policy and
4 domestic aversion to the war was a linchpin year because after 1968 and Tet and then you
5 had Walter Cronkite's pronouncement that the general populous at that point turned
6 against the war. The troops who were coming over were gradually less motivated. We
7 had some people who joined our unit who were drug users. When we were in the bush
8 that was something we just couldn't abide by or tolerate. That was the same as putting a
9 gun to our heads and saying that they're willing to pull the trigger.

10 LC: Yeah, the margin was very narrow.

11 RS: We had one guy in particular who came over. He was to me just an obvious
12 drug abuser. We told the lieutenant that lieutenant had to find somewhere for this person
13 to go, but it was not with us. Within a week he was out of there.

14 LC: Do you have any idea where he was sent or—?

15 RS: I really don't care. He wasn't with us and that was the main thing. In the
16 bush, no, I saw very occasional but not prevalent marijuana use. I mean, just once or
17 twice. I didn't use marijuana myself. The people whom we were with by and large
18 didn't. The only place it was ever used was in what we would—(Editor's note: Tape ends
19 abruptly. Then continues on with the same topic)

20 LC: You were saying that you just saw marijuana use very occasionally, but
21 nothing—

22 RS: I wouldn't think I saw it being used more than two or three times the whole
23 time I was there.

24 LC: Can we talk for a second about the Walter Cronkite issue and the impact his
25 report had? How aware were you of what the U.S. media was doing in terms of covering
26 the war while you were over there?

27 RS: Not a lot. *The Stars and Stripes* didn't really report that.

28 LC: Was that your primary source of information about the United States?

29 RS: Yes.

30 LC: Were you getting letters and sending letters back and forth from home?

31 RS: Yes.

1 LC: Were they telling you much about—
2 RS: Not the anti-war stuff, no.
3 LC: Did you ever make phone calls back home using the MARS (Military
4 Affiliate Radio System) system or some other system?
5 RS: No.
6 LC: Was it that you never had the opportunity?
7 RS: Right, exactly. It was not where I was.
8 LC: I see.
9 RS: We were pretty far out. Although geographically we weren't that far from Da
10 Nang it was still kind of light years away.
11 LC: Can you describe that? In what sense?
12 RS: In the sense that of things that were available to people. You go back into Da
13 Nang which I did with the ambulance and you go to the Air Force base and they have air
14 conditioned housing and they had clubs that were set up that had real people serving real
15 drinks. We did a stack arms one time when we were out of the bush.
16 LC: What's a stack arms?
17 RS: Stack arms was when a field company—how it happened to us is we were
18 out in the field and we get this order to go up to the road where we are going to be picked
19 up by some trucks and we're going to be transported to some place. We didn't know
20 where that was. They took us into Da Nang and they had, I guess the China Beach area or
21 something similar to it. They all of a sudden say, "Here, you got a day at the beach." We
22 all kind of got off our trucks. I mean, we had been out in the bush for almost three
23 months. We really looked ripe. We smelled bad too. So they let us off the trucks and they
24 were going to give us a change of clothes. We could go into the beach area and have a
25 milkshake and a hamburger. It was like going back to the States or something. It was all
26 pretty surreal. So we did that. Then we came back out with our new fatigues on and got
27 back on our truck and picked up our weapons and went back to the bush. It shows that Da
28 Nang was really light years away form where we were. Hello?
29 LC: Can you hear me?
30 RS: Yeah.

1 LC: Okay. Did that feel very strange to you at the time, that kind of now we're in
2 some kind of America like beach setting with hamburgers and the next thing we're out in
3 the—?

4 RS: Oh, it was just weird. We didn't really quite know what they were trying to
5 prove. When we got off the trucks, as I said we really looked bad. There was some
6 colonel who was walking by. He looked at us and he said, "You are a disgrace to the
7 uniform." We're like, what? He had no clue either.

8 LC: How did that make you feel about command?

9 RS: Well, people are sometimes stupid and he was being insanely stupid. It made
10 me question the wisdom of some of the people who were running the show, but it didn't
11 have a long-term effect.

12 LC: Did you in general feel that the commanders who were closer to the squad
13 level, platoon level actions, they had a grip on the situation?

14 RS: Well, they had a greater empathy.

15 LC: This colonel kind of embodied the opposite?

16 RS: Right. I don't know where he was coming from.

17 LC: When you did visit the China Beach area, was there music playing? Are
18 there songs from that time period? Did anybody have tape recorders?

19 RS: Yeah, they had music.

20 LC: What kind of things did they play, do you remember?

21 RS: You know, I don't really recall. I made a recording of AFVN (Armed Forces
22 Vietnam Network) radio and I've got that recording.

23 LC: Oh, you do?

24 RS: Yeah.

25 LC: How long is that recording? I mean, is it a couple of hours?

26 RS: About an hour.

27 LC: How did you make it?

28 RS: I had a cruddy little tape recorder.

29 LC: Was it from your hockshop?

30 RS: Yeah.

31 LC: Why did you decide to record something, just to kind of keep it for later?

1 RS: Yeah. I just thought it would be neat. It had recordings of Chicken Man on it
2 and things like that.

3 LC: Have you listened to it subsequently?

4 RS: Yes.

5 LC: You're able to play it still?

6 RS: Mm-hmm.

7 LC: Did music play any kind of part for you while you were there or afterwards
8 as either a comfort or a reminder of home or any of that? Was it just kind of a—?

9 RS: I mean it did, but it was kind of more like background.

10 LC: Let me ask you a couple of other questions about the sort of closing months
11 of the tour that you were there.

12 RS: Okay.

13 LC: Did you continue to work at the BAS for the rest of your tour?

14 RS: Yes.

15 LC: I think you mentioned earlier something about going on medical, what we
16 called MedCAP, Medical Civic Action Project outings, did you go on anymore of those
17 as you were staying—?

18 RS: Yeah. Doctor Surry was interested in, I don't know what kind of specialty he
19 would have, but he also had a camera. He was taking pictures of various illnesses and
20 things that he ran across. So he was interested from a personal standpoint and getting out
21 into the community and working with the people. Therefore he would arrange to go out to
22 the villages from time to time and work with the people and treat them. Corpsmen would
23 accompany him.

24 LC: And you went along gladly?

25 RS: Mm-hmm, sure.

26 LC: What sorts of things was he interested in providing the people? I mean, was
27 he interested in preventive care, or addressing situations where people were ill, or both?

28 RS: Both.

29 LC: There was a dentist who was with you on some of these trips?

30 RS: No, the dentist really stayed back at the hill, Hill 37.

1 LC: Do you remember going on any of these trips into the village with the
2 doctor?

3 RS: Yeah.

4 LC: Can you describe any one of those or how it felt to be doing that?

5 RS: Well, since I was the ambulance driver, I carried all the stuff that we would
6 go down with. There was usually another jeep that would go along with us to provide
7 some sort of security. So they'd run a squad from HNS (host-nation support) Company or
8 something like that down with us just to set up a defensive perimeter in case it was
9 necessary. The villages we went to were basically close to the hill, not far away. Many of
10 the people in those villages actually worked up on the hill so they would know us. He
11 would set up a clinic because there were some people who were very reticent to come up
12 on to the hill and look for treatment at the BAS. Most of the people who did that were
13 those who worked on the hill. I think a lot of it was security because they generally had
14 passed to get up there with us. So he would go down to the village and we would just set
15 up a clinic. The people would come around and he would treat them for whatever their
16 ailment was.

17 LC: What kind of equipment and medication and other medical treatment stuff
18 did you take with you? Did you have a certain kind of basic package that you would take
19 when you went out on one of these trips?

20 RS: Well, we would take a bunch of surgery kits so that in case there was
21 somebody who needed something removed or a boil. There were a lot of really ugly gross
22 type things. He would work on those and see if he could relieve the pain there and start
23 getting some sort of treatment in place where people could heal from these things.

24 LC: Do you know what kind of diagnosis those would be given now?

25 RS: I mean basically infection.

26 LC: Okay, infections. How long would you stay out on one of these missions?

27 RS: We would go out in the morning and we would come back in the evening.

28 LC: That was probably a very full day. Did you have scores of people come?

29 RS: I mean, we weren't mobbed, but we would have a constant stream of people.

30 LC: Do you know how word would get around that you were coming out? There
31 was no advanced warning obviously.

1 RS: No. They would see us and word would get around.

2 LC: How do you feel about that part of the work that you did? How do you feel
3 about it now?

4 RS: You know I wish we could have done more.

5 LC: In the sense of having more people, more trained people to apply for the
6 obvious problems in the shortcomings of their medical—

7 RS: Yeah, exactly. I mean, they are very backwards medically. For example
8 leprosy is a treatable disease, but it still carries in Vietnam or it did at that point a social
9 stigma. Therefore you have people who had a treatable disease who are not being treated
10 and were being ostracized by their community. I mean, this is going back to the Middle
11 Ages in their attitude. You had to be able to fight the attitude as well. We ran into one
12 leper colony that actually the North Vietnamese were using as cover because they knew
13 that the South Vietnamese wouldn't come into them. The people in this colony, the living
14 conditions that they had were just absolutely incredible. They were so bad. We would
15 take our C-ration boxes that would carry a case, which was twelve meals and we would
16 be throwing the boxes away and they would be fighting over the boxes because that was
17 the roof of their house. Their house itself was a hole in the ground with this cardboard
18 pulled on top of it. It's primarily because they were not allowed to function within their
19 society. There are things like that that you just wanted to reach out and say look we can
20 treat this. We can cure the people. We can do it and don't send them away.

21 LC: Did you treat some of those people at that leper colony?

22 RS: Not at that one because I was out with the platoon at the time. I didn't have
23 the antibiotics necessary to do this. When we were in that area it was considered
24 extremely dangerous area. Our guard was going to have to be up one hundred percent at
25 all times.

26 LC: Were you able to process the fact that you had to work for the U.S. service
27 personnel that you were assigned to, but also there was this whole other group of people,
28 Vietnamese civilians, in need? How did you kind of go back and forth between the two?

29 RS: Your prime responsibility is the U.S. serviceman so that was not a question.
30 That was what we were there for. Then treating the people when we had the time and

1 opportunity that became a job that we were to do, but that could be dropped in an instant
2 if we were needed for the U.S. military people.

3 LC: Right. When you were in the villages and you had a small number of
4 riflemen with you to set up a perimeter, did anything ever happened that threatened
5 your—?

6 RS: No.

7 LC: Nothing ever disturbed your delivery of medical care?

8 RS: No.

9 LC: Let me ask you about—again at BAS, you were a little more sort of stable in
10 terms of where you were living and the people that you were working with everyday as
11 opposed to when you were in the bush.

12 RS: Right.

13 LC: Were there any pets that the area had?

14 RS: We had a dog named Chieu Hoi.

15 LC: Where did Chieu Hoi live?

16 RS: He lived in one of the hooches and he got plenty of attention and plenty of
17 food.

18 LC: Was there a particular guy who's kind of taking care of him or is it sort of
19 collective?

20 RS: We knew that nobody could take him home. I think the person who was
21 watching after him most, there was a corpsman named Tom King. I think Tom did a lot.
22 At least I have a picture of him holding Chieu Hoi.

23 LC: Was Chieu Hoi a good dog?

24 RS: Yeah.

25 LC: Was it fun to kind of have him around?

26 RS: Sure.

27 LC: So he got fed as it were under the table a lot?

28 RS: Mm-hmm.

29 LC: What did you feed him?

30 RS: Steak, chicken.

31 LC: Really?

1 RS: Chieu Hoi ate well. Once we got back to the battalion there was never a lack
2 of food. It was there. We would have cookouts every weekend where we had a fifty-five
3 gallon drum cut in half the other way from the shitters. Just load it up with wood, start the
4 fire, cook the steaks or burgers or chicken or whatever happen to be down at the mess
5 hall. They had a good mess hall so there was plenty of food.

6 LC: Did you look forward to these cookouts?

7 RS: Yeah. They were fun.

8 LC: Was it a way to—did you get to know people even better when you could
9 kind of relax and have this meal with them that wasn't chow line and all that?

10 RS: Sure.

11 LC: Can you describe some of those cook outs?

12 RS: Well, we had a Christmas cookout where Frenchie Mishaw dressed up as
13 Santa Clause and had a bunch of kids from the village come up and gave them presents.

14 LC: Where did he get a Santa outfit?

15 RS: I have no clue.

16 LC: Was it actually a Santa outfit?

17 RS: I've got a picture of it.

18 LC: Like a red suit with white trim on it?

19 RS: It was a red suit and I guess he had white surgical cotton on all over his face,
20 I don't know. It was pretty crazy.

21 LC: What did the Vietnamese kids make of this?

22 RS: I have no clue. They probably thought that this man was nuts.

23 LC: Were presents given out? Do you remember?

24 RS: Yeah.

25 LC: Do you have any idea what they gave out?

26 RS: I don't know. I think we gave out a lot of canned foods and things like that,
27 things of that nature.

28 LC: So useful things?

29 RS: Yeah. I mean, there weren't many toys where we were.

30 LC: Yeah, that would be exactly right, but food and things that they could use,
31 maybe some candy or something.

1 RS: Yeah. I mean, there is plenty of candy because we had a small PX up on the
2 hill. It was out of the back of a tractor-trailer truck or something, about the same size. A
3 guy named Dutch Van Grunoff ran it. I have no idea how to spell that.

4 LC: Okay. That's all right.

5 RS: He's from California.

6 LC: Could you get cigarettes and beer?

7 RS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

8 LC: What else could you buy?

9 RS: Well, you couldn't get beer. They had to get beer from me.

10 LC: You had the corner on that.

11 RS: That's it, I had the market. There were, as they say in the south, Vienna
12 Sausages. I don't know, sardines and then they'd have canned foods, the Mexican rice
13 with hot stuff. They had all kinds of stuff that you could buy to eat as well as candy bars
14 and things like that. Then they had the obvious, your shaving stuff, toothbrush,
15 toothpaste, personal items.

16 LC: Did the PX do a pretty good business there?

17 RS: Yeah. They were the only guy in town. Dutch would try to figure out what
18 people were looking for so that when he ordered from the main PX he could have the
19 stuff sent out.

20 LC: Was he a Marine as well?

21 RS: Yes.

22 LC: Okay. The Christmas cookout was getting pretty close to the end of your tour
23 there. Can you describe your feelings as you were nearing the end of your tour?

24 RS: Just wanted to get out.

25 LC: Just getting kind of like—

26 RS: Getting real tired of it. As I said before it's kind of like been there, down that
27 and now it's time to move on.

28 LC: Were you anxious or had there never—since that moment that you described
29 where you got up and just kind of walked away from a village full of NVA, had you had
30 any anxiety about being a short termer?

31 RS: No.

1 LC: What was the end date of your tour?

2 RS: The end date was January twenty-ninth. That was the day I was supposed to
3 arrive back in the States. So that I was expecting to get the word of my departure any
4 time from like January twentieth through the twenty-fifth.

5 LC: Did that happen as you expected?

6 RS: Yeah, pretty much. It happened as I expected. I did do one last patrol.

7 LC: Okay. Can you tell me about it?

8 RS: There had been some mortar fire come up on the hill from around the hill.
9 HNS Company, all the other companies were out doing things. HNS, they were basically
10 pay clerks and things like that. They ran the perimeter watch for the hill. They needed to
11 go out and sweep the area around the hill to see if they could find where the launch sight
12 was or anything like that. They needed a corpsman and they came up and asked, "We
13 need a corpsman." I said, "I'll go." That was two days before I left country.

14 LC: Were they shocked that you said you would go?

15 RS: Yeah. Chief Malkaty who is the corpsman chief of the thing, he says, "You
16 sure you want to do this?" I said well basically I figured I could get killed up on the hill
17 as well as I could anywhere else. So, I mean, it was fine.

18 LC: Was the actual patrol eventful or uneventful?

19 RS: It was uneventful. We just went out. We did the normal thing, kind of
20 walked around in circles, found nothing and came back up.

21 LC: Taking that mortar, I'm sorry did you say it was mortar fire?

22 RS: Mm-hmm.

23 LC: That was quite unusual?

24 RS: No. We would get it occasionally and I forget what night they showed
25 combat on TV, but that was the night they always mortared us, with Vince Morrow. So
26 we would be watching, what we call comedy hour. All of a sudden a mortar would come
27 in and we would kind of grab our little TV and run into a bunker and watch the rest of the
28 show.

29 LC: Was this TV from your hockshop as well?

30 RS: Well, actually I bought it. It was one of those little Sony jobs with a nine-
31 inch screen.

1 LC: What could you get on your TV?
2 RS: Whatever they were sending out of Da Nang.
3 LC: So it was—
4 RS: It was Armed Forces Network.
5 LC: Did you guys sit around watching TV a lot? Was that one of the forms for
6 entertainment?
7 RS: Oh, in the evening.
8 LC: What else did you do? Did you play cards?
9 RS: Played a lot of spades. We'd listen to music, but as I said it was kind of
10 background. Then we would go into our make shift bar and have a good time in there.
11 Then go to bed. It wasn't wild. The rest of the time, after I finished my ambulance run I
12 would just sun bathe.
13 LC: Working on your tan?
14 RS: Yeah.
15 LC: Did you guys spend much time talking about getting home and being at
16 home and what would happen when you got home? Or was that kind of not done?
17 RS: Not really. Occasionally somebody would talk about it once they got a letter
18 or something like that. They'd kind of share with us what they wanted to share and then
19 go off, but it wasn't a topic that everybody sat down looking forward to speaking about.
20 LC: When you got your orders to leave Vietnam, what happened? How did you
21 process out? You're still in-country now.
22 RS: Well, I went to—I mean obviously the aid station, whoever was running all
23 the paperwork there and from what I recall they just said goodbye. They put me in the
24 ambulance and drove me into Da Nang Airport where I had my orders. I presented them
25 at the place where we were checking out and hopped on the plane and went back to
26 Okinawa.
27 LC: Was the saying goodbye, was that just a very kind of quick thing?
28 RS: It was very quick.
29 LC: How did you feel?
30 RS: Well, it was like when I left the company, I felt that I was leaving friends.
31 That I think was tougher than leaving the BAS, just because the intensity of the

1 relationship was stronger. I mean, when I was leaving country a couple of the guys from
2 the company knew that I had received my orders and they came over. We sat around the
3 station and had a couple of beers and said goodbye. They were getting pretty short
4 themselves by that point. We said our goodbyes and that was it.

5 LC: Did you turnover your business to anybody?

6 RS: I liquidated.

7 LC: As it were.

8 RS: Right, exactly. Also, about a week before I was ready to go, I loaded all my
9 stuff that I wanted to take with me into the ambulance. I took it over to the PX, main PX
10 and they had a shipping station so that you could box up all your stuff. By that time, one
11 of the big things that you bought over there was stereo systems. So I had my Akai reel to
12 reel. Then I had a TEAC reel to reel so I could dub and cross record. I had my Pioneer
13 speakers along with my Pioneer amplifier, still have this stuff. I put all of that in boxes
14 and shipped it all home and left the TV behind as a farewell present.

15 LC: How long did it take for your stuff to show up?

16 RS: It preceded me home.

17 LC: Really?

18 RS: Yeah. It was very quick.

19 LC: So you went down to Da Nang to the airport and sort of unceremonious you
20 just waited for a plane?

21 RS: Yeah, you just got on a plane and you're off.

22 LC: What was the mood on the plane? Do you remember?

23 RS: Well, when we took off there was a big cheer. Then it was pretty quiet. We
24 ended up going back to Okinawa, which I guess about a three and a half hour flight,
25 something of that nature. I really don't recall that much. I remember landing in Okinawa
26 and getting into a barracks where people were going to wait to be processed out once
27 again and kind of go back to their formal uniforms and turn in all your grungy stuff and
28 bathe and get ready to go home so that you look presentable. I told them that I would
29 refuse to go home in the Navy uniform, that I wanted a Marine Corps Uniform.

30 LC: They were trying to put you in a Navy uniform?

31 RS: Well that's what I went over in, my dressed blues.

1 LC: That's what was—
2 RS: That's what was in my box, which didn't fit anyway.
3 LC: Right. I was going to say. Were you bringing back your clothes from
4 Baltimore that you had bought?
5 RS: Yeah.
6 LC: Were they still like in one piece?
7 RS: Yeah, they were still there. They found somebody in one of the Marines who
8 was processing me out. He said hang on and he took my measurements. About an hour
9 later he showed up with a Marine green uniform. So that's what I wore back.
10 LC: How long were you in Okinawa?
11 RS: I was there for two days. Actually I had drawn the short straw on the first
12 night and I had pulled watch duty which is you have to have somebody back at the
13 barracks to make sure everything is secured. I drew that along with a guy name Mike
14 Noah. So we had the short straws. The next night Mike and I decided to go out and it was
15 our turn to go out and do the town, which we did. When we came back people were
16 saying, "Where were you? You had your flight out of here." So we missed the flight out.
17 So we went out the next day. It really only delayed it by maybe twelve hours.
18 LC: Do you remember going out that night on this town?
19 RS: I'm not going there.
20 LC: Let's take a break for a minute, okay?
21 RS: All right.

Interview with Robert Slingsluff
Session [2] of [2]
Date: December 10, 2003

1

2 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins. I'm resuming my interview with Mr.
3 Robert Slingsluff. Today is the tenth of December 2003. I'm in the interview room of the
4 Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas.
5 Mr. Slingsluff, again, is in Baltimore, Maryland. Mr. Slingsluff, let's just kind of review
6 and see if there's anything in your period in Vietnam that you'd like to add to what we
7 were talking about yesterday.

8 Robert Slingsluff: I did remember the name of the person who was killed on the
9 rat patrol and his name was Dale Pickett.

10 LC: Is that spelled P-I-C-K-E-T-T?

11 RS: Yes.

12 LC: What was his rank, do you remember?

13 RS: I think he was a lance corporal.

14 LC: Okay. Again, when the jeep was hit, you were not actually on the scene.

15 RS: No, I was back at the bridge position.

16 LC: Right. Speaking of the Tu Cau Bridge, can you just kind of fill in a little bit
17 about what the operational responsibility of the unit was with regard to the bridge?

18 RS: Well, basically it was to ensure the viability of the bridge because it
19 connected the coastal area with Route 1.

20 LC: Was that important? Go ahead.

21 RS: For moving troops, yeah. If the bridge wasn't there and you were moving
22 troops south from the Sand Dune area, if that bridge didn't exist they would have to go
23 back in towards Da Nang. Moving people out of the battalion by truck that would add
24 maybe half an hour to forty-five minutes to their trip because it would be a circuitous
25 route. I don't know if it was tremendously strategically valuable, but you want the bridge
26 there versus not.

27 LC: Did your unit know anything about attacks that had been made on the bridge
28 or was this pretty much proactive rather than a defensive maneuver?

1 RS: It was really a defensive. We had had attacks on the bridge. When we were
2 there, we would occasionally get sniper fire into us. I knew Dale because people would
3 have bridge duty, the Marines would have bridge duty. They'd be standing on the bridge
4 watching stuff coming down the river because it flowed pretty well at that point. If there
5 was a pile of garbage or weeds or something coming down, their job was to shoot at those
6 things to make sure that there was nobody under them who was using that as cover to try
7 to get into the bridge position or perhaps lay explosives. I used to go out on the bridge
8 when Dale had the duty on the bridge. It was my way of getting some practice with the
9 M-16.

10 LC: Were you any good with the M-16?

11 RS: Not as good as he was. We were within an inch of each other. Now he
12 sighted it in and I was consistently about an inch to two inches high and right. So
13 therefore the consistency was there so therefore I was hitting what I was aiming at. It was
14 his sighting in and he had the advantage that way.

15 LC: Can you explain what sighting in is?

16 RS: Sighting in is you have on the sight closest to you, not the bead at the end of
17 the barrel, you have a mechanism that it's a screw type thing that moves the sight up and
18 down which gives you the ability to gauge your range in number of meters. So as you
19 move it up, each click, I think, is like a thousand meters, full click. You can sight it in. So
20 what he would do is pick a point out in the river where when anything that was coming
21 down, he knew the distance between where he was and whatever was floating down the
22 river. He would wait for whatever it was and that might be 150, 200 yards out and wait
23 until it got to that point. Then he knew he could get clean shots at it, at whatever was
24 coming in.

25 LC: So you remember him as quite a good shot?

26 RS: Yeah, he was a pretty good shot, but most of the Marines were. They had
27 pretty good training and they knew what they were doing.

28 LC: Did you ever formally have to qualify on the M-16?

29 RS: No. As a matter of fact I'd really never seen an M-16 until I got in-country.

30 LC: Was there any chatter about the quality of the M-16?

1 RS: There was some chatter about it. There was some complaining that the AK-
2 47 they could use the rounds from the M-16. So therefore if the enemy captured
3 bandoliers or things like that, they could turn our ammunition against us. Whereas if we
4 captured there's, we couldn't. There was a little bit of complaining about the guns
5 jamming up, but that never really happened that much because the Marines really, really
6 took care of their weapons and kept them clean pretty good.

7 LC: That was just sort of part of an ethic within the Marines that the weapon
8 needed to be cared for?

9 RS: The weapon was your best buddy. That's what you slept with.

10 LC: Can we just talk for a second about your own experience with being injured
11 in the field? Did that ever happen to you?

12 RS: Minor things. I cannot conceive of anybody going through it and not being
13 injured to some extent.

14 LC: But not necessarily all by enemy fire.

15 RS: Not by enemy fire. There are many ways to be injured. You can just be a
16 klutz and get injured.

17 LC: Did you treat servicemen to whom that had happened?

18 RS: Sure. I mean, somebody would twist an ankle or something like that and so
19 that you'd make sure that they elevated whatever it is. You'd try to give them day off or
20 something like that. Wrap it tight. Occasionally we'd be able to get ice so that we could
21 ice it down. A lot of times, the Vietnamese kids would show up at the oddest places
22 selling popsicles and sodas and things like that. I mean you're out in the middle of no
23 where and all of a sudden some kid shows with a bicycle and on the back he's got a
24 bunch of sodas and he's got ice. It was just strange. You just wondered where in the
25 world these people came from.

26 LC: What did you use for money with these kids?

27 RS: We would use the—we were not supposed to, but we would use the MPC,
28 which was military payment certificates. They accepted those as money much more so
29 than piasters or something like that.

30 LC: They were happier to get—

1 RS: They were happier to get that but then the military or the authorities over
2 there would from time to time convert the MPC. Where the old MPC wasn't worth
3 anything after a given date and everybody would have to turn in what they had in terms
4 of MPC to get the new MPC, which was usable.

5 LC: Do you remember what kind of advance notice you had on those exchange
6 dates?

7 RS: On those exchanges?

8 LC: Mm-hmm.

9 RS: Like one day.

10 LC: Did you ever get caught with useless MPC?

11 RS: No. We would be out in the bush and we would have some MPC with us. If
12 they pulled a switch on a day when you're out in the bush, the old MPC was no good, but
13 we as American soldiers could bring in the old MPC and change it for perhaps a month
14 afterwards.

15 LC: But Vietnamese civilians—

16 RS: But the Vietnamese could not do it. So at that point there was a big rush by
17 the Vietnamese civilians to find somebody who would try to change the MPC for them.

18 LC: Were there some guys who just did that and were happy to do it?

19 RS: There were some who did it.

20 LC: Did you know of anybody who kind of did that for the Vietnamese civilians?

21 RS: Not directly, no.

22 LC: So when you said you were not injured seriously was there an incident that
23 occurred where you were injured?

24 RS: There was one time when we were out on a sweep. It was a company—no it
25 wasn't, a platoon sized operation. Lieutenant Jackson, who was just an absolute stickler
26 for telling people not to walk on trails, to keep off the trails, that's where the booby traps
27 were, well, he walking not even on a trail but near one and he stepped on a booby trap
28 that went off and was injured. As soon as I saw it I started moving in his direction. There
29 was a kind of a rice paddy dike between him and me. On my side of it there, they had
30 these cactus plants over there. So I jumped, I was running so I jumped ahead of the cactus
31 plants and then was clearing the dike. I didn't realize there were a whole bunch of other

1 cactus plants on the other side of the thing. So when I landed in the cactus, I lost my
2 balance. So I had cactus spikes up my rear end for about a month afterwards. It was
3 painful to sit down. Cactus spikes, they come off into you and then they break off. So you
4 got all these crappy little things that are coming out of your body because your body
5 starts to reject them awhile later and it infects. It was pretty darn messy.

6 LC: Had you treated that in other servicemen?

7 RS: Not to the extent that I had it. Occasionally somebody would get a cactus
8 quill or two in them. You'd pull it out with tweezers or whatever it is and treat it. But I
9 had literally hundreds of them all over me, because I did a pretty good roll in the cactus
10 patch.

11 LC: That sounds painful.

12 RS: You do what you do. But that wasn't enemy fire.

13 LC: Now was Lieutenant Jackson hurt seriously in that incident?

14 RS: Yes. I think that he ended up being a single amputee. I've tried to locate him
15 and from what I understand I think he's living in Seattle, Washington, at this point and
16 he's an attorney from what I heard.

17 LC: Were you able to get up and get to him and give him some assistance even
18 though you had your own problems at that time, at that moment?

19 RS: Yeah, but at the same time, once again I was working with Doc Hubbard.
20 Hubbard had also moved to him. He was on the right side of the cactus patch to get to
21 him. By the time I rolled out of the cactus patch he was already attending to Lieutenant
22 Jackson.

23 LC: Did you call in Medevac?

24 RS: Yeah.

25 LC: What was your opinion of the Medevac crews and pilots?

26 RS: They were great. They did their job. They were there as fast as they could get
27 there. They made sure, if they had room, that all the wounded were taken care of and
28 lifted out of there.

29 LC: Did you make the sort of triage decision on the ground as to who, if there
30 were several people—?

31 RS: To prioritize, yeah.

1 LC: Where, for example with Lieutenant Jackson, where would he have been
2 taken?

3 RS: He would have probably been taken to 1st Med Battalion.

4 LC: Why?

5 RS: When you have somebody who would be an amputee or a serious injury, the
6 Medevac isn't going to run him into a battalion's aid station because the equipment there
7 is not enough to take care of the type of injury. So the corpsman on the helicopters would
8 make once again another decision as to where they would be taking these people. Now 1st
9 Med had full operating rooms, numerous doctors and surgeons and had the ability to take
10 care of any injury that was coming in. The other alternative was there was a naval
11 hospital in Da Nang. That would also have been an alternative depending upon how busy
12 people were or the medical sites were at the time. That would determine where they went.
13 I think that most of our people, by just priority, went into the 1st Med Battalion because
14 that was really a Marine facility versus a naval facility that covered a broader range of
15 people.

16 LC: Were you able to, through grapevine, or even more formal mechanism keep
17 track of where for example your lieutenant was and what his status was?

18 RS: Not really.

19 LC: Not at all?

20 RS: It was really kind of scuttlebutt. You'd hear bits and pieces. There was one
21 time when there was an Amtrak that had been hit. It exploded. It was carrying some fuel.
22 The numbers of the guys from Lima Company were burned. One quite seriously, a guy
23 named Mendez, this was not the Mendez who got the machine gun going.

24 LC: Okay, not the machine gunner.

25 RS: Not the machine gunner. He was taken down into actually the naval hospital.
26 I had the ability because I was really out of the bush at that time, but just out of the bush
27 and I knew him. So when I drove my ambulance into Da Nang I stopped by the hospital
28 to see how he was doing. It was really not good. I don't know if you've ever seen burn
29 injuries, but they're quite horrific. I mean right now my wife and I give fairly good
30 support to—we have a Regional Burn Center here in Baltimore that's John Hopkins Bay
31 View. Actually the director whom we initially knew just died about a month ago, but he

1 was a good friend of ours. Then the person who took over lives, is a member of our
2 church, and lives on the next block down. He's a burn plastic surgeon and things like
3 that. So we try to give as much support to that just because of having gone and seeing
4 Mendez in the hospital.

5 LC: Is that right? So that's one of the ways in which the experience over there is
6 continuing to be sort of be part of how you organize your own life now.

7 RS: Right.

8 LC: Was there a specialist unit at that naval hospital in Da Nang for burn
9 victims?

10 RS: Yes. I mean there had to be. Evidently I think there is a hospital in Houston
11 that does burns.

12 LC: M.D. Anderson maybe?

13 RS: It may be, I just can't remember the name. Evidently it was one of the
14 foremost burn centers in the world. A lot of the techniques that they use today for treating
15 burns were developed down at that Houston facility during Vietnam because of the burn
16 victims who were coming back. Once they had burned victims and they stabilized them
17 in Vietnam then they would fly them to Houston.

18 LC: How long would it take to stabilize someone in that kind of condition? Do
19 you have any idea?

20 RS: I have no idea. There's a tremendous amount of fluid loss in the body
21 through blistering and things like that so that you really have to infuse their system with
22 fluids. I think a lot of it is getting their fluid levels back and maintaining them.

23 LC: What was Mendez's rank?

24 RS: I think he was either a PFC or a lance corporal.

25 LC: Do you know where he was from?

26 RS: No, I don't.

27 LC: I wonder if you observed any tension between Hispanic members of the
28 different units that you saw or worked with and whites or blacks? Did you ever see
29 anything?

1 RS: There was always an underlying tension. A lot of it I think was imported
2 from the United States, you know people coming over. There weren't overt distrust and
3 things. I mean some of my best friends were Hispanic.

4 LC: Your best friends over in Vietnam?

5 RS: In Vietnam, yeah. An example would be Mendez, machine gunner. He, when
6 we were at the Tu Cau Bridge, he would get up and do his thing on the bridge, his watch.
7 He would take his machine gun up. Anything coming down the river he would pop a few
8 rounds from the machine gun into it. That's what he did. There was a time—he had a
9 great deal of difficulty because of the language barrier. I think I had mentioned that he
10 didn't speak English very well. Whether the comprehension was there or not was difficult
11 to tell because there was not a response when you spoke with him. There would be a nod
12 or something like that. I think that he felt, because of the language barrier, isolated which
13 is something that is very difficult in a stressful situation over a prolonged period of time
14 to be isolated from the rest of the people. So he had evidently had it and just started going
15 a little bit berserk on the bridge. He was firing fairly randomly up the river and things like
16 that. It was not a good situation to have somebody with a machine gun who was not
17 really with it. Whenever anybody tried to approach him, all of a sudden a machine gun
18 was swinging around and you're going okay, this is not good. In order to get the machine
19 gun away from him I was able to walk out on the bridge and talk to him. Basically trying
20 to say that, "Look, you are a member of this platoon. You are an important member. I
21 credit you with saving my life back at the river."

22 LC: Do you think he understood?

23 RS: Yes, he understood that. I said, "You are a good, good Marine. Let's just not
24 mess it up." So he allowed me to come in and get the machine gun away from him. We
25 called in Medevac and the Medevac'ed him back to Da Nang. He needed a psychiatric
26 work up at that point. He had had it.

27 LC: How long had he been in-country? Do you know?

28 RS: He had been in-country, I don't know, probably about six months or so.

29 LC: Was there anyone around who could speak Spanish or was he just totally
30 alone?

1 RS: There were other people who could speak Spanish, but most of these guys
2 were from New York City. He was from Puerto Rico. He was different because of that.
3 His background was different. His upbringing was different. I get the impression, rather
4 than being an urban, was a rural dweller. So there's language and then there's
5 communication. I think he, although they may have talked the same language, they
6 weren't communicating.

7 LC: Were you aware of this before the incident on the bridge? Were you aware
8 that there was a problem around his kind of inclusion or exclusion from the group?

9 RS: Yes. In retrospect it's easy to say, "Well, I should have done something, but I
10 don't know if I could have or would have. Just because you didn't realize, or I didn't
11 realize that the situation was quite as critical as it was.

12 LC: Was there anything the day, or the day before, or the day of the incident on
13 the bridge where you had gone speak to him alone that gave you any kind of forewarning
14 that—?

15 RS: No.

16 LC: How much traffic was there on the river that was, if you will, legitimate
17 traffic?

18 RS: There was really virtually no traffic coming down the river in terms of boats
19 or other people or just using it as a mode of transportation. What we had to mainly deal
20 with was people using the bridge going from Route 1. If they were coming from the south
21 they were hanging a right so they could cross over the bridge because it was the fastest
22 way to get into the coastal area of Da Nang.

23 LC: So when he was popping off shots into the river, was that what he was
24 doing?

25 RS: Yeah and the riverbank, down the river. That was not really in the line of fire
26 of Route 1 or the villages up and down Route 1. He was really kind of shooting off
27 towards rice paddies and things like that.

28 LC: Right, and that just didn't make any sense.

29 RS: Right.

30 LC: Why do you think you were able to approach him when probably nobody
31 else was able to or wanted to?

1 RS: Just because I'd had a positive experience with him. Because once—when
2 we were back at the river and he had been able to get the machine gun working, I was
3 really thankful for him being there and doing that. I expressed that to him so therefore I
4 had had conversation with him that was positive.

5 LC: Did you have any Spanish that you were able to use?

6 RS: I think I took three years of Spanish in high school and couldn't remember
7 anything.

8 LC: That must have made you a little frustrated too.

9 RS: Well, it was—you would ask why I took Chinese because I found it easier
10 than Spanish.

11 LC: Is that right?

12 RS: I mean, I took Spanish in college too because I needed to get rid of my
13 language requirement real fast. So that when I first went to take my placement test, I
14 placed out of Spanish I which I knew was a mistake.

15 LC: Right, you wanted Spanish I.

16 RS: I wanted Spanish I. I needed to start at the very beginning. They said, "Look,
17 we'll try you in Spanish II. If you can't do it then we'll do it because if you finish
18 Spanish II your language requirement is done." I managed to get a B in the course so
19 somewhere along the line there was something that still clicked, but no, I could not speak
20 Spanish to him. I could count to ten for him.

21 LC: Did you do that for him?

22 RS: No.

23 LC: Oh, you never displayed yourself.

24 RS: No, didn't try it just said look you know. That was the type of situation
25 where I was not going to try to speak Spanish.

26 LC: Was it extremely tense? Were you very tense that time on the bridge?

27 RS: I mean it was tense.

28 LC: Did you feel certain that you could in effect get the gun away from him? Did
29 you feel certain that you could or was there a question in your mind?

30 RS: Yeah. No, there wasn't a question in my mind. There was no reason for him
31 to hurt me.

1 LC: Right. Do you think your position as corpsman also had something to do
2 with his trusting you?

3 RS: Yes.

4 LC: In general were the relationships between Hispanics and blacks fairly
5 complex or was it just kind of simple? Did you make any observations on that?

6 RS: I think that the nature of our situation was a dominant factor in glossing over
7 the differences because when you're out in the bush you're dependent upon each other. It
8 doesn't make any difference whether you're black, white, pink, purple, or polka dotted.
9 When you're in combat it's—I guess the best way to describe combat is amoral chaos.
10 There is recognition that there is a dependency upon the person next to you and that's just
11 the person next to you. It's not the black person, the white person, the polka-dotted
12 person, it's the person next to you. Once you've been there and done that then despite the
13 fact that you may have an issue, the fact is that that is the person who was next to you
14 overrides the other issues or at least kind of dampens them down to the extent where they
15 are no longer predominant. Now I didn't spend a lot of time in the rear areas, but from
16 what I've heard and this is—it's just the scuttlebutt and all the rest of them. There were
17 far greater racial issues, drug issues and personal issues in the rear areas because in my
18 estimation the imminent danger to self was not predominate.

19 LC: So there was time for other more kind of personal dynamics.

20 RS: Right, exactly.

21 LC: The first assignment that you had where there was segregation by race. Did
22 you ever hear or observe what kind of happened with that? Did you encounter them, that
23 group at any time?

24 RS: Not really. There was at one of the places when I was in the rear area, an
25 incident where people from that squad would—you're in line for the chow hall. One of
26 the guys from that squad is in line in front of you. Then all of a sudden there are ten of
27 them in front of you. After awhile you just get pissed off at it. You say, "This is bull.
28 Don't butt in line. I'm sitting here in line." For me it wouldn't have mattered, once again,
29 if they were white, pink, polka-dotted, purple or whatever. Don't butt in line. I don't like
30 people butting in line now. It's one of my personal foibles that I really detest. I will stand
31 in line to do whatever I need to do, but don't walk in front of me. They were doing that

1 one day and I just had to bullshit. It was so much BS. I was talking to them and I made
2 the comment, I go, “Oh, boy, this is a bunch of crap.” They said, “You calling me boy?”
3 It’s like no, I’m not calling you boy. I made a comment “oh boy” but it had nothing to do
4 with a racial, or at least in my opinion, it was just an expression that I would have used
5 for anybody because it was part of my personal vernacular. It became a big racial thing. I
6 finally just said, “No, man. I’m not dealing with this. I’ll leave. I’ll come back and I’ll eat
7 somewhere else.” It was that kind of tension that existed where it appeared to me that
8 people were seeking an insult.

9 LC: Looking for confrontation?

10 RS: They were looking for it. It was something that I didn’t want to look for.
11 Shoot there was enough confrontation going on around me. I didn’t need to look for
12 more.

13 LC: As you recall, did this happen in Da Nang?

14 RS: No, that was—let’s see. That was actually out at Hill 37. I mean, I never
15 went to the chow hall in Da Nang.

16 LC: Were there other incidents like that or is that the one that kind of stands out?

17 RS: That’s the one that came to my mind, that there was one in which I was
18 involved. Once again it’s more of a question of language versus communication.

19 LC: You see that as kind of a theme. It’s come up a couple different times about
20 this distinction between being able to say what you mean and just having words that
21 don’t actually do anything.

22 RS: Yeah, but also I think that I was and felt at the time that I was kind of an
23 anomaly.

24 LC: How so?

25 RS: From the troops over there. One of them was, most of the guys were from the
26 cities or very rural areas. They weren’t your typical suburban person. Their sisters
27 weren’t debutantes, mine was. The expectation of many of these people, and this is not
28 good or bad. As a matter of fact I find my experience growing up in retrospect probably
29 more surreal than theirs. Theirs was much more real than having somebody put on a
30 white dress and you go out in tails with white gloves and dance with—mine was not a
31 real world. Theirs really was, but because of my upbringing and the expectation that once

1 you're out of high school you will go to college. It was never a doubt in my mind that I
2 would eventually go to college because that's what everybody did. Within the enlisted
3 ranks of the Marines and the people with whom I was dealing on a daily basis, there was
4 a difference. It was, I think obvious to them as well as to me that we really, once again,
5 spoke a different language or we communicated differently. I think my language was a
6 little bit more refined. Once again, I'm not trying to put anybody or anything down. It's
7 just this is the way it was.

8 LC: Do you think that sometimes people's assessment or men's assessment on
9 first blush was that you were an elitist?

10 RS: Yeah, probably just because I spoke differently. That was before they got to
11 know me. Once they got to know me then that went away. Then rather than talking, we
12 could communicate. There were some people who didn't want to get beyond that first
13 blush. It's difficult to—you can't force people to.

14 LC: That's right. Those observations are very interesting. Can we go now to the
15 time when you were actually leaving Vietnam?

16 RS: Mm-hmm.

17 LC: You told me yesterday that you were issued a new green Marine uniform
18 because you didn't want to use the Navy uniform and were able to get that changed. You
19 got on the plane in Okinawa to go where?

20 RS: We were going to land in Los Angeles.

21 LC: What happened when you got to Los Angeles? Did you stay there for a little
22 while?

23 RS: No, it was basically getting processed through the airport. Okay, I haven't
24 thought about this one in a long while. In order to—when people were picking up their
25 bags to leave, normally if you're coming in from another country you go through
26 customs. The military had a make shift customs. At this time I was an E5. So that when
27 we got off the plane since I was a higher rank than most of the people who were coming
28 off the plane, I was grabbed and told, "Okay, you're the customs person."

29 RS: I said, "I'm the what?" So therefore they picked me and maybe half a dozen
30 other people to go through the bags of all the people who are coming back from Vietnam
31 looking for contraband. Well, I had no clue what contraband—I mean, I knew that they

1 weren't suppose to have weapons and hand grenades. That was pretty obvious. I was
2 supposed to go through their bags and things like that.

3 LC: Did they tell you what you're supposed to look for?

4 RS: Well, they kind of did. I was going through these people's bags and all the
5 rest of it. There were some things that guys brought back as souvenirs that for me—they
6 were probably contraband, but they were innocuous. I mean pictures and things like that.
7 I'd look at these things and I'd, "Just go, just go."

8 LC: Do you mean photographs?

9 RS: Yeah, photographs and things. These guys hadn't expected people to be
10 going through their personal stuff. So they had some very personal stuff. I finally just
11 said, "Look, I didn't see it, leave." I wasn't at this point going to bust anybody's chops
12 over anything.

13 LC: Were you basically standing at a table or something with them standing right
14 there?

15 RS: Yeah, I was at a table and they would bring up their stuff and open it up. I'd
16 just make sure they weren't bringing back a hand grenade then let them through. So we
17 got through our customs thing. Once we got through that, there were some women from
18 the Red Cross who were there. They were handing out lemonade and cookies, which was
19 all very nice. Then we went into the airport. There were a couple of protestors who were
20 outside our receiving area. They were carrying their little placards or whatever it is.

21 LC: Did you get the sense that they were there every day?

22 RS: Yeah, I got the feeling that they were there everyday.

23 LC: Can you describe them?

24 RS: They were all just ugly.

25 LC: Were they old, young, white, black?

26 RS: They were mainly young white, I guess maybe post college, late twenties,
27 early thirties type things. There was a mix. There were some who looked like
28 grandmothers.

29 LC: This seemed to be kind of they're beat that they did.

1 RS: Yeah, I mean this was their protest. The thing, which was really kind of a
2 shock to me because I just hadn't seen it, nor was I prepared for it and that was the
3 ugliness that was developing towards the soldier at that point. That was pretty shocking.

4 LC: Were they ugly, these protestors?

5 RS: Well, to me they were ugly just because they didn't have anything kind to
6 say.

7 LC: Do you remember what they said?

8 RS: I mean they were just—not really it was just a roar.

9 LC: A feeling?

10 RS: Yeah.

11 LC: You have an impression of them as being—

12 RS: They were not supportive.

13 LC: Right. Do you remember what their posters or placards said? Or what the
14 tenure of it was?

15 RS: It was kind of like stop the war type stuff. This is an illegal war, that kind of
16 thing.

17 LC: This is at the end of January 1970?

18 RS: Yeah.

19 LC: So you kind of get past the protestors. Do you remember any exchanges
20 between the other guys who were also exiting the plane?

21 RS: No, I was just interested in finding my next flight

22 LC: Were you kind of on your own now?

23 RS: Yes.

24 LC: Tell me about your next flight.

25 RS: Well, I mean it was a long flight. It was from LA through Baltimore,
26 Washington. I remember sitting down next to a fairly attractive young woman. She
27 immediately looked at me and really didn't want to have a lot to say to me.

28 LC: You think because you were in uniform?

29 RS: Yeah. The irony of wanting the uniform and then coming to this country was
30 that once I was back in this country and engaging the reaction that I had, or was receiving
31 that, that I wanted to get rid of the uniform. It obviously kind of pegged me. One of my

1 protests while I was in Vietnam before I left and it was kind of protest against just
2 military protocols and things was at this point I had grow a Fu Manchu mustache. The
3 Marines didn't like the—or the Maine officers didn't like the Fu Manchus because if you
4 had a mustache it was only supposed to come down to the corner of your lip and couldn't
5 come below that. However Admiral Zumwalt had taken over the Navy and was trying to
6 make it more person-friendly and had issued an order that mustaches could actually come
7 below the corner of the mouth, which irritated the Marine officers, but still I had a Fu
8 Manchu at this point.

9 LC: Which is significantly below the corner of the mouth.

10 RS: I mean, it was down to the base of my chin. Once the uniform was off I was,
11 just because of that alone I probably didn't look like I was in the military.

12 LC: Did you have your haircut? Do you think that was another thing that people
13 were kind of looking at?

14 RS: Well, when I was in the bush, probably fairly early on, I had my head
15 shaved. It was really a matter of cleanliness because it was just easier to not have hair
16 than it was to have hair. It had taken quite a while for my hair to grow back in. At that
17 point my hair was not—it was really kind of on the borderline of military length
18 acceptability. It had grown back out.

19 LC: So that probably wasn't all that much of an issue.

20 RS: No, that wasn't that much of an issue.

21 LC: Now the woman on the plane, that's someone that you would have liked to
22 had a conversation with.

23 RS: Sure.

24 LC: Your kind of head spaced I guess at the time, was that you were coming back
25 to the States and here's a nice woman that maybe you'll have a conversation with her.
26 Your read from was, what?

27 RS: Basically that she had no interest in having a conversation with me.

28 LC: How did that make you feel?

29 RS: I was a little bit pissed. I had no idea that there would be such a pervasive
30 animosity towards people who are in the military at that point. It was pervasive in certain
31 areas, more in public space, obviously not in private space where you knew people.

1 LC: Did anything else happen at the airport at BWI (Baltimore/Washington
2 International Airport) that that was similar to what had happened in LA?

3 RS: No.

4 LC: Protestors?

5 RS: No, no, because BWI was not exactly a major receiving area for people
6 coming back from the war. So it was not targeted.

7 LC: How was it to go home?

8 RS: It was fine. I was home. There were people who were glad to see me. I had
9 mentioned that before when I was stationed at Quantico that a cousin of mine had been
10 stationed at Ft. Belvoir.

11 LC: Right.

12 RS: Well, he had gone to Vietnam probably about a month before me. He was in
13 the Army stationed down near Saigon. He was really an office pogue, but he had returned
14 once again about a month before I did. So he was in Baltimore and I had introduced him
15 to a friend of mine who was a friend of my girlfriend's also. They later were married. So
16 that he was down at their house and the father of this girl, I mean he was a Naval
17 Academy grad and knew what was going on so they made a big deal. I had a nice big
18 steak dinner and all the rest of that. It was good because people were happy to see me and
19 I was happy to be there. I was not going to have to go back. I had some time off so that I
20 could kind of regroup myself because there was basically no military diffusion once
21 leaving Vietnam.

22 LC: What do you mean by that?

23 RS: I had mentioned I think that I had been on patrol somewhere around the
24 twentieth, between the twentieth and twenty-fifth of January. Here I am on January the
25 twenty-ninth and I'm back in society again. There was no debriefing period. There was
26 no kind of cooling down. There is a big deal in today's society that if an incident happens
27 around the school they have all these counselors that go in and they talk with people. I
28 don't know whether I needed it. I think a lot of people thought that I did. To me, I was
29 just me. There was no opportunity to kind of diffuse any anger or prepare me or anybody
30 else who was coming back from Vietnam, certainly not the lone ranger. To prepare us for
31 our assimilation back into a society that speaks a different language because you picked

1 up a jargon and just to be able to try to get you on an even keel before they put you back
2 in with the people.

3 LC: Right. You said that other people may have thought you needed a little
4 buffer or some kind of cool down, but you didn't really think you did. The abrupt change
5 was something that you felt you took in stride?

6 RS: I thought so. I felt that I took it in stride pretty well.

7 LC: Who didn't think so?

8 RS: Cars back firing were not nice. I don't know whether a debriefing period
9 would have solved that because I know that my wife has said that there were times when
10 noises would happen several years later. I was hitting the deck and things like that. She
11 said that there were times when I was obviously not sleeping well.

12 LC: Was your wife someone that you knew when you first came back?

13 RS: No.

14 LC: Okay. So you met her later on.

15 RS: Yes.

16 LC: She was observing these things some years after your return?

17 RS: Oh, about a year. I met her in February of '71.

18 LC: So you had been back a year.

19 RS: Mm-hmm.

20 LC: Let's talk about 1970 a little bit. Do you remember the announcement of the
21 United States invasion of Cambodia?

22 RS: Not specifically, no.

23 LC: Do you remember the shootings at Kent State?

24 RS: I remember the shootings at Kent State.

25 LC: Did you have any particular feelings about that or did you process that as
26 part of the larger experience?

27 RS: Mainly the larger experience. I was stationed at—my initial duty station was
28 at Main Navy, the Main Navy yard, which no longer exists. They tore it all down, but it
29 was just opposite the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pools.

30 LC: When did you go there?

31 RS: I reported there in February of 1970.

1 LC: So you had a couple of weeks between the end of your tour in Vietnam and
2 reporting there in D.C.?

3 RS: Mm-hmm, but then they further—it became apparent to them that I was
4 not—I was in the sick officer's—now what do they call it? It's where somebody gets sick
5 and they come in to you. It was a clinic. It was specifically for officers.

6 LC: Like a sick call?

7 RS: Yeah, it was a sick call. I was in there. In the morning people would be in
8 line and I would log them in. This was probably within my first or second week there,
9 some guy stands in front of me and says—first of all he walks in the door. We weren't
10 open and he stands in front of me and says, "I want to see the doctor." I say, "Well,
11 what's your name?" He says, "My name is Star." I go, "Okay." So I go through all the
12 officers' files and I can't find it. He's in civilian clothing and I can't find it. I say, "I can't
13 find your health record here, are you sure you have any?" He starts getting pretty
14 belligerent about the thing. Finally I just look at him. I said, "We aren't even open yet.
15 Would you go outside and sit down and when it's your turn I'll give you a call." So he
16 leaves the door and about thirty seconds later I get this telephone call and it says, "You
17 don't have Admiral Stars' record?" Now his father had been chief of naval operations.

18 LC: Okay, I thought I recognized the name.

19 RS: I'm going, oh shit. I said, "He didn't tell me he was an admiral and he's in
20 civilian clothes, how do I know?" So I go over there and I pull his record. It's there and
21 all the rest of the stuff. At that point I was kind of *persona non grata*. So I was called into
22 the commanding officer's office and he says, "You really got to be more polite to these
23 people." I said, "Well, why? If they're not polite to me why should I be polite to them?"
24 They immediately shifted me up to the naval security station on Nebraska Avenue
25 servicing the Marine Guard up there.

26 LC: They moved you out of customer service with admirals?

27 RS: They got me out of there. They got me where I was dealing with Marines
28 again.

29 LC: Do you attribute that kind of—you were bristling a little bit there. Do you
30 attribute that to just, a month ago I was on patrol and now I'm—?

1 RS: Well, I viewed that their priorities were really askew. There were things that
2 were more important going on than busting somebody's chops because they can't find
3 your health record.

4 LC: Did you sense there was this disconnect between what the command people
5 were busying themselves with? Did you sense that disconnect and were you angry about
6 it?

7 RS: Well, I thought that most of the military people in Washington were
8 politicians versus military people. They had very little empathy for the enlisted person
9 and what was going on. I think that they were out of touch.

10 LC: When you say politicians, the sort of upper echelon in D.C. were politicians,
11 can you just kind of explain that a little bit?

12 RS: This is a retrospective view. That is that the guys who were the admirals and
13 the generals who are playing the game in Washington, D.C., their main function is to act
14 as the go between, between the politicians, you know, the Senate, and the House, and the
15 President and anybody else whose within the bureaucracy of our nation's political
16 system. That's what their function is. Hence by nature they've become politicians
17 themselves. Now I don't know if you've had a lot of conversations with politicians, but I
18 mean to me they are some of the most bizarre conversations I've ever had.

19 LC: Why's that?

20 RS: Well, politicians are everything they say is calculated and couched so that it
21 can't be held against them. It is extremely difficult to—it's kind of like the pundits in
22 the media now listening to what Alan Greenspan had to say yesterday and picking apart
23 every nuance of every word and saying, "What did he actually say?" In other words
24 language has been so deconstructed that language is no longer an ability to communicate
25 an idea, but it is a protective mechanism for that person who happens to be a politician to
26 make sure that nobody can use what ever he said against him, hence our previous
27 president.

28 LC: Your reference there was to Bill Clinton?

29 RS: Yeah. I mean he was the master deconstructor of our language.

30 LC: Why do you say that?

31 RS: Well, is is is? I mean tell me about it.

1 LC: What does “is” mean? Is that your reference, what does “is” mean?

2 RS: What does “is” mean? I mean let’s debate the word “is”. Let’s debate what
3 sex is. Well, wait a minute that’s two things we can debate, two words at the same time.
4 The politicians to me—it’s just so difficult to speak with them. They become caught up in
5 there own little world of self importance and that everything hinges upon every blasted
6 word that they happen to say that they have lost touch with the rest of the world.

7 LC: Did you have any of these same kind of sensibilities about the command in
8 Vietnam?

9 RS: Not really. Never really gave it that much of a thought.

10 LC: Can you sort of walk us through your reassignment there in D.C.? You went
11 to Nebraska Avenue. What did you do at that facility?

12 RS: Well, they had a dispensary that was there. They had a doctor who would
13 come in like three days a week. At the end of one of the buildings we had a dentist, a
14 dental clinic. There were approximately four corpsmen in the place and then one dental
15 tech as well. Then we had a chief that who was in charge of it. We would run sick call. I
16 mean, it was laid back, out of the way, and I was not going to get into trouble. I think that
17 that was the purpose of sending me there.

18 LC: Were any of the other corpsmen there, or physicians, Vietnam veterans. Had
19 they been over to Vietnam?

20 RS: There was one other corpsman who had been to Vietnam.

21 LC: Had he done a full tour there as you had?

22 RS: Yes.

23 LC: Did you connect with him on that issue?

24 RS: Not really.

25 LC: Were you talking to anyone about your experiences or was this just your
26 next job and you really didn’t talk about Vietnam.

27 RS: I really didn’t talk about it.

28 LC: Did you talk to anybody about it?

29 RS: Not really.

30 LC: Not at this job?

31 RS: No.

1 LC: Was that very routine posting? Did you have a lot of routine there that was
2 fairly simple for you to execute?

3 RS: Well, it was probably a little bit more complex to execute than being down
4 town. That's because we actually ran the sick calls whereas downtown, even in the
5 officers' sick call, the officers demanded to be seen by a doctor. They wouldn't be seen
6 by a corpsman. Back up at the security station, the Marines would come in, they would
7 have a problem, and we would take care of it.

8 LC: Was that more fun for you to?

9 RS: Sure. I mean it was a good place to work. There were no expectations in
10 terms of being a great sailor, Marine, or whatever it is. We were just in there and we did
11 our job. We did our job well.

12 LC: At this point, in the spring of 1970, how many more months did you have for
13 your enlistment to end?

14 RS: Well, it was one year that I had remaining. I was due to get out in April.

15 LC: In April of 197—?

16 RS: Of '71. At this point they were doing a kind of a roll back in number of
17 people in the military.

18 LC: Because why?

19 RS: Just because of the wind down in Vietnam and they just didn't need as many
20 people. So if they could get you out earlier, and they could find a reason to do it, then
21 they would forgive—they had a three-month early out program. You had to have
22 something that you were doing, like an acceptance at a job or something of that nature.

23 LC: You had to have somewhere to go.

24 RS: You had to have somewhere to go. They just couldn't kick you out on the
25 street. I applied at the University of North Carolina and was accepted, but it was after the
26 normal acceptance dates for admission in college so that when I applied they had made
27 the assumption that I was applying for the fall semester of 1971. Really I wanted to get
28 in, in the spring semester of '71, which was in the middle of their academic year. When I
29 called them up I said, "Look, I need to do an interview. You've got my application,
30 you've got my SATs, you've got my recommendations, and all the rest" Yeah, they had
31 the material. They said, "Well, we'll get back in touch with you. We aren't making

1 decisions until such and such time in the spring.” I said, “You don’t understand, I’ve got
2 to get out now.” I was running into the bureaucratic bulwark. So one weekend I just
3 drove down to Chapel Hill. I went into the admissions office and I said, “I’m here for my
4 interview.” They said, “We aren’t doing interviews.” I said, “You don’t understand, I’m
5 here for my interview and I’m going to sit here until I get an interview.” So they called a
6 guy, Dean French. They allowed me to go into his office. I said, “I’m here for an
7 interview.” He said, “Well, you don’t understand, we’re not doing it.” I explained the
8 military situation. I said, “I need to have an admission so I can get out of the military
9 three months early. This is where I want to go to school. I haven’t applied anywhere
10 else.” I had also changed my residency because when you’re being discharged from the
11 military you can really be discharged into any state you want to, as long as you have a
12 residence to which you’re being discharged. I knew somebody down in Chapel Hill. I
13 used their address so that I was a resident of North Carolina. Upon my discharge I would
14 be.

15 LC: This was all part of your plan to get into UNC (University of North
16 Carolina)?

17 RS: Yeah. I had that entered in my military record, that this is where I would be a
18 resident. I showed them the military record, which gave them an address, and it
19 confirmed that I was not actually now a resident of North Carolina.

20 LC: Was Dean French sympathetic?

21 RS: Oh, yeah. He said, “You’re in.” So that was it. I said, “Can I get an
22 acceptance letter right now?” He said, “We’ll put it in the mail.” So that I had that, which
23 allowed me to get out three months early.

24 LC: So when exactly did you separate from the service?

25 RS: It was the last week of January of ’71.

26 LC: Okay, January of ’71. Can we just go back for a moment back to the middle
27 of, I guess, 1970? You said that you remember Kent State. Do you have any impressions
28 to the nation’s response to that event? Did it influence you at all?

29 RS: It didn’t really influence me a lot. That’s because incidents like that happen.
30 Let’s just say incidents happen. Whether they’re good or negative or whatever it is, things
31 happen. I don’t believe that there was any real reason for Kent State to have happened

1 other than you had a bunch of angry young protestors and you had a bunch of very young
2 National Guardsmen who were being threatened either verbally or whatever. I don't
3 know if stuff was being thrown around. I wasn't there, but it all came together. The
4 incident happened and it was very unfortunate. For people who were looking for
5 culpability, there was a lot of finger pointing. As I said before, incidents happen. It
6 wasn't by design. It was very unfortunate. If somebody is holding a gun around me, I
7 make the assumption that that gun is loaded. That's the safest assumption to make. I'm
8 not going to sit there and purposefully antagonize the person who has that gun. I'm
9 certainly not going to threaten that person. I feel that students in demonstrations at that
10 time, and later on I became involved in some of the demonstrations, but the students
11 didn't realize the seriousness of the nature of what they're protest was doing and the
12 potential response to it. They were clueless. The incident happened. As I said it was very
13 unfortunate. Could it have been avoided? Probably. If it was avoided there, could it have
14 happened somewhere else? Probably is the answer. I don't know if that's just too
15 pragmatic a response to it, but I really think that's that how I felt at the time. I was not
16 really in favor of the anti-war people.

17 LC: You must have seen a lot of anti-war people. You were stationed in D.C. Did
18 you see them everyday?

19 RS: I had to drive through them every morning because my duty station at the
20 dispensary was right across the street from American University. There is a circle when
21 you come up from Georgetown towards American University and that circle happened to
22 be where they had their demonstrations everyday. It was obvious that I was military. So
23 therefore going to work every morning, all of us who were driving into work, and I was
24 living in Arlington, Virginia, at the time. I had an apartment over there. But every
25 morning we were the targets of their verbal and sometimes attempted physical abuse.

26 LC: How many people were there on an average day?

27 RS: Twenty or thirty.

28 LC: Was it kind of the same crowd everyday?

29 RS: Same group, yeah.

30 LC: So they kind of began to recognize you as you drive in there day after day
31 after day. How is it that they were clear that you were military?

1 RS: Well, when I was coming to work, I was in my uniform.

2 LC: Got it. So they were looking at you in the car and you've got a Marine Corps
3 uniform on.

4 RS: Yep.

5 LC: Do you remember any of the interactions that you had with them? Can you
6 describe what it was like to drive through that crowd or pass them everyday?

7 RS: It was kind of irritating. You'd try to drive around the circle and they would
8 be in the way. You would have to stop their car. They'd start bouncing the car up and
9 down occasionally and—

10 LC: Would they actually get in the road and they would put their hands on the
11 car?

12 RS: Yes. Then they would have their face up to the window and they would be
13 screaming something at you about what an evil person you are, how could you do this.

14 LC: What did they accuse you of doing? They had no idea that you were a
15 Vietnam veteran.

16 RS: Well, I had to wear my ribbons.

17 LC: Oh, you did?

18 RS: Yes. That was a part of the uniform.

19 LC: They were clued in enough to know what that signified?

20 RS: Some of them were.

21 LC: What kinds of things did they say?

22 RS: I mean it was all the same college BS, "Baby Killer" type stuff, "Murderer."
23 "How could you do that?" "You should be put in jail," type things.

24 LC: The other service personnel working there at the dispensary, they had to go
25 through that gauntlet as well?

26 RS: Yeah.

27 LC: Did you guys talk about it?

28 RS: I mean we just called them a bunch of idiots. "The idiots are out there
29 again."

30 LC: Were they there at night as well when you would go home?

31 RS: No, not really. It was just mainly morning.

1 LC: In the morning

2 RS: They had to party at night.

3 LC: Did you ever notice that the number of people out there protesting swelled

4 when particular news events might develop over in Vietnam or the president might made

5 a speech or something?

6 RS: No. Not really, but that may have been because I really wasn't just reading

7 the newspaper at that point.

8 LC: Is that right?

9 RS: Right. I would go to work. I would leave work. I would go back to my

10 apartment, and I would run on into Georgetown, go to some of the clubs and the rest of

11 that. By this point my girlfriend she couldn't—and rightfully so, just couldn't handle my

12 mental state or whatever it was.

13 LC: Was this Robin?

14 RS: Yeah.

15 RS: So I was pretty angry. So we had pretty much—she was down in Chapel Hill

16 and I was up in the Washington area. We were gradually drifting apart at this point.

17 LC: Part of that, you think, was accelerated by your kind of post tour—?

18 RS: Well, I think that that was part of it. I also think that a gulf had developed

19 between shall we say our academic, where we were in our learning curve. She was

20 getting ready, I guess, to finish college at this point. She was a year away from finishing.

21 I was still basically a high school grad.

22 LC: But you were planning to go to UNC.

23 RS: Sure, but still academically I was still kind of several years behind. I think

24 that that was beginning to wear on the relationship or at least it was from my perspective

25 because I felt that I had lost about four years.

26 LC: Your age at this point is what, twenty-two?

27 RS: Twenty-three.

28 LC: You're about to start college, which puts you in a much different place.

29 RS: Right.

30 LC: Was going to UNC, was that plan kind of linked to her or was it

31 independent?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: Okay. It was driven by the fact that she was down there.

3 RS: Yes.

4 LC: But you didn't change your plan when your personal situation—?

5 RS: No, I mean Chapel Hill is a great place.

6 LC: You had been down there several times over the course of the years?

7 RS: Oh, yeah. Yes.

8 LC: What was your impression of President Nixon at this time and his
9 management of the war particularly?

10 RS: Well, I agreed with pulling out of Vietnam. The reason was, and this is the
11 reason I became involved actually with Vietnam veterans against the war. My reason was
12 not a typical reason. It was obvious to me, at that point, from what was going on and
13 what I was observing, that there was no way that the people of this country had the
14 political will to finish what had been started. To me the wasting of one more life because
15 you want to gradually do it with honor or with whatever was, to me, an absurdity because
16 to me life was more important than whatever pretense they could come up with for not
17 pulling out immediately. However, if I had had my druthers I would have wished that we
18 had the ability and the will to finish what we had started. I think it's unfair to say what we
19 had started but what had transpired.

20 LC: Did you think at the time, or have you thought subsequently about whether
21 President Nixon actually agreed with you? That he thought also we didn't have the
22 political will, the political will of the president of the country could—?

23 RS: I think it was obvious that we didn't. Anybody who denied that was in la la
24 land.

25 LC: So you think that rather than kind of setting that tone, he followed what was
26 apparent?

27 RS: I think that—and we alluded to Walter Cronkite before. Once Walter
28 Cronkite pronounced that we lost the war, the great sage of the screen had come out and
29 said this is how it is. Hence it had, at that point, the finger of whatever had gone into the
30 hearts of Middle America. It was no longer fringed groups who were protesting the war,
31 but the average person watching the war on television at home at this point, had felt that

1 it was a useless endeavor and something that we could never win and that we were in fact
2 losing. The dissatisfaction with the war among really the voting public was I think
3 obvious.

4 LC: You attribute much of that kind of crystallizing feelings in what Nixon called
5 the silent majority to Cronkites' announcement after Tet?

6 RS: Yeah, basically. I mean I think that Cronkite carried much more weight
7 among the average person in this country than people realized at the time. When he came
8 out with his pronouncement I think that that sealed the fate of where we were going to be
9 going in Vietnam.

10 LC: How do you feel about Walter Cronkite now?

11 RS: Never met the man. What do I think about his statements? I think that I don't
12 know if he had an agenda, a political agenda, I don't know. But he was, I think, wrong in
13 what he said. I think that he had been set up for it because I think that the reports that
14 were coming back from the military top brass, Westmoreland et al, at that time, had
15 created a situation where there was an anticipation of success and that we were in fact
16 succeeding, and that when Tet happened it was so on the surface belauded what had been
17 said by the military that it was a shock to the public and a shock to the media. I really
18 don't know if Cronkite knew what to think of it. I think that obviously he didn't do a lot
19 of investigation into the whole Tet phenomenon and what happened and the end result.
20 Rather than understanding that it was an absolutely amazing victory against the last gasp
21 effort by the North Vietnamese that it was turned around to be perceived as the opposite.

22 LC: That was crucial toward the development of U.S. policy afterwards. You said
23 you weren't watching very much TV that year that you were—

24 RS: I was doing a lot of drinking.

25 LC: Was that part of your way of adjusting to being back or adjusting to what
26 had happened to you while you were over in Vietnam?

27 RS: It was just a way to go out and party. Let's get away from this. Let's just
28 not—you don't even want to think about it.

29 LC: So just kind of separating from it?

30 RS: Yeah, I want to get out of the military. I want to get on with my life. I don't
31 want to have to deal with this stuff. Let's go down to Georgetown and party.

1 LC: When and where did you actually then finally separate from the service?

2 RS: It was Ft. Lee, Virginia, was I think my point of separation. It was kind of
3 like driving over there in a car and getting processed out and saying goodbye.

4 LC: Was it that easy?

5 RS: Yeah.

6 LC: Did you feel relief?

7 RS: Free.

8 LC: Free, okay.

9 RS: Free at last, free at last.

10 LC: When you drove out the gates of Ft. Lee, which I have been to just recently.
11 I know a lot of people that processed out there, did you just hit the gas and want to get
12 out of there?

13 RS: I said goodbye. I'm going home. I had about two or three days to get my
14 stuff down to Carolina.

15 LC: Okay. Was this during January then?

16 RS: Yeah, this was the end of January. First day of class down at Carolina was
17 February first.

18 LC: Did you have an apartment set up?

19 RS: I had a cousin who was a professor in the institute of government at Chapel
20 Hill. He and his wife had an extra room in the back of their place, actually an extra
21 couple of rooms. So I made arrangements with them to rent the two rooms and stay there.

22 LC: What was it like becoming a student now? You've just been in the service
23 for four years and now all of a sudden this is a completely different, much less structured
24 set up, attending college. What was that like?

25 RS: Well, I had an immediate peer group that I could walk into. I wanted to play
26 lacrosse.

27 LC: So back to the lacrosse?

28 RS: Yep. So that my cousin had told the lacrosse coach that I would be coming
29 down and that I wanted to play. They were a nationally ranked team. I think they were
30 ranked number five in the country at that point. They anticipated that I would be coming
31 down. Then I had a slight medical problem. At some point I had caught a piece of

1 shrapnel in my leg. I don't even know when it was. As I say, things happen. Whatever
2 happened to me was so minor compared to what else was going on that it was absurd to
3 even mention it. A piece had—this body rejection type thing—a piece had come out. It
4 had become infected. I was having trouble walking. So I kind of limped into his office
5 and said, “Well, I’m here to play lacrosse.” He’s looking at me, yeah right, you can’t
6 walk, how are you going to play lacrosse? I just explained. I said, you know, this has
7 happened. So he ran me down to sports medicine and they looked at the thing. They took
8 me over to I think a Doctor Taft or something. He just kind of cleaned out the wounds
9 and let it heal through secondary intention, which is healing from bottom up. Had it
10 patched and taken care of and eventually it all turned out okay. Because of the limp, the
11 muscle in my right leg had atrophied some. So they put me on a program of lifting
12 weights to build the legs back up so that they were of equal strength. In sports medicine
13 they do everything symmetrically. So they got me symmetrical again. I started playing
14 lacrosse. So I immediately had a bunch of a person with whom I had a common interest
15 and that was the lacrosse team. So that part of the assimilation was actually very easy.
16 The first class I ever went to was a political science class. My cousin, who had been with
17 me at Quantico and then when I came home, he was also at Carolina. The girl that we had
18 introduced him to was actually in nursing school over at Duke. So he figured this was a
19 good place to be as well. It was his address that I had used because he bought a house.
20 His family had a fair amount of money. His parents had died and left him a trust fund. So
21 when he moved to Chapel Hill he bought a house, which was beyond my means. So I
22 used that address. When I signed up for this political science course he told me, he said,
23 “Look, you can get a course that is not a lecture or discussion with a TA, but the same
24 course is taught in a discussion group and it’s much more personal and smaller. He said,
25 “I think you’ll like it better.” So I kind of looked at it and agreed. I still hadn’t officially
26 transferred sections. The first class was part of the lecture of this class that I was
27 eventually going to drop. I went to that one class and saw an attractive young lady and sat
28 next to her. She’s my wife.

29 LC: What was the class? What was it about?

30 RS: It was just Political Science 101. I mean it’s just introduction into political
31 science. That was the only time I ever attended that class, that one-day. It’s kind of weird.

1 LC: Yeah. So as you say, things happen. Were you qualified at this point to get
2 some kind of tuition assistance or other assistance from—?

3 RS: I mean I had the GI Bill. The GI Bill was not a lot.

4 LC: Was it difficult to manage the paperwork around that?

5 RS: No.

6 LC: It was fairly simple?

7 RS: Yeah, I mean Carolina—they knew how to deal with it and deal through it.
8 They just sent in the paperwork to the VA (Veteran's Administration) and the VA would
9 send me a monthly check and that was it. I mean, they weren't sending anything directly
10 to Carolina. It was just a monthly kind of living allowance, which was signing at ninety
11 something bucks a month or something.

12 LC: Did you have to get a job in addition to make up your expenses?

13 RS: Yes.

14 LC: What did you do?

15 RS: Well, I had summer jobs doing construction, but during the year I worked at
16 a television and appliance store where I would do sales on commission, but also I worked
17 with their TV repair department and helped fix up TVs. Basically a tube jockey, you used
18 to call a TV repairman rather than throw it out. This is an obsolete profession. So you'd
19 call a TV repair person and some guy who looked official and had this big tube box
20 would show up at your place, open up the back of the TV and putz around on the inside.
21 If it worked, it worked and if it didn't he says, "Well, I've got to take it in to the shop."
22 Well, I was the person who putzed around on the inside. I knew enough about the various
23 tubes and what they did so that I could say, pull a tube out of something and say, oh, it's
24 a C-35M. Yeah, I've got one of these over here. It looks like this one's burned out and
25 plug it in. If the thing worked, then it was great. Probably about half the time it worked
26 and I looked like I knew what I was doing.

27 LC: So you appeared to be a highly skilled technician?

28 RS: Oh, absolutely. Then the rest of the time I would take it back in and it was
29 usually something short circuit somewhere. They were going to have to replace
30 something and solder stuff and the rest of that. So that's what I did. I also did their

1 installations for stereos or sound systems in new construction houses and also installing
2 televisions antenna on top of roofs.

3 LC: Was that actually fun?

4 RS: Yeah.

5 LC: Was it kind of a fun thing to do?

6 RS: Yeah.

7 LC: How did you get that job?

8 RS: I walked in the door and said, "I'd like a job."

9 LC: Did you reference having run your own hockshop or any of that?

10 RS: No.

11 LC: Did anyone that you were kind of working with or just kind of around and
12 about, on the lacrosse team, did they all know that you were a Vietnam veteran, that you
13 were older, that you had had this other experience?

14 RS: Yeah. The guys on the lacrosse team knew that I was a Vietnam veteran.
15 There were also two other Vietnam vets on the lacrosse team.

16 LC: Really?

17 RS: Yeah.

18 LC: From what services?

19 RS: Army.

20 LC: Was it something that you guys talked about or you kind of like
21 acknowledged it?

22 RS: We just acknowledged the fact that we were there.

23 LC: Okay.

24 RS: There was no great conversation about it.

25 LC: Were you talking about it at all at this point?

26 RS: No.

27 LC: Not really.

28 RS: No.

29 LC: I think you mentioned that you decided to major in history, is that correct?

30 RS: Mm-hmm.

31 LC: When did you make that decision?

1 RS: Fairly early on. I wanted to concentrate on Asian History and also Asian or
2 politics with an emphasis on Asia.

3 LC: Can you explain why?

4 RS: Just because I had greater experience there. I felt that I knew it a little bit
5 more and had a better sense of kind of an Asian psyche than most people.

6 LC: Were you in any way trying to find out at this point what the United States
7 position had been in Vietnam? Why you had been there or was this kind of an
8 intellectually separate—?

9 RS: I think it was intellectually separate because really I did a tremendous
10 amount with China. Going back in Confucian Society, studying their religions, it was a
11 great emphasis on China, more than Vietnam.

12 LC: Was that because of what was available at UNC for an undergraduate at that
13 time or was it because you had become interested, really, in China?

14 RS: I had just become interested in China.

15 LC: Had you had any of these interests before you joined the service?

16 RS: No. Not really.

17 LC: You took Chinese language.

18 RS: Yes.

19 LC: How much did you take?

20 RS: Two years.

21 LC: How did you do?

22 RS: I did fairly well. Mainly we did a lot of written work. Chinese, at that point,
23 we used a system called Wade-Giles, which was a phonetic translation, which is no
24 longer used. Although I think Wade-Giles was probably a more phonetically correct
25 system than we use now or at least I was able to relate to it better. So a lot of our work
26 was written. We did go to the language lab and listen to tapes and speak. We tried to
27 speak in class. Then we also did get into some of the written figures and things like that. I
28 enjoyed it and did okay. I was a B, low A student in it.

29 LC: When you were learning speech, were you learning Mandarin?

30 RS: Yeah.

1 LC: How did you do with the characters? About how many did you actually
2 master?

3 RS: I don't know, probably a 100, 150 or something like that.

4 LC: I ask you as one who also did that. Yeah, it was difficult.

5 RS: I mean you start off with the (speaks Chinese).

6 LC: Right, *Yi, er, san, si*.

7 RS: I can still say, (says phrase in Chinese).

8 LC: There you go. So you did pick up a few things.

9 RS: Yeah and, (says phrase in Chinese).

10 LC: To my ear, your pronunciation is very good. It's a northern Mandarin Beijing
11 accent. Do you remember your teacher? Did you have a Chinese teacher?

12 RS: No. He wasn't Chinese and I forget his name. I did in some of my Chinese
13 culture classes have Chinese teachers.

14 LC: In the Chinese culture classes, like what? Religions or—

15 RS: Yeah, it was religion. It was social customs, legal systems. My
16 undergraduate dissertation was on law and society in traditional China, which was
17 dealing with the legal system and how it related to Confucianism. I don't know. It ended
18 up being about an eighty page paper or something like that.

19 LC: What did your sort of peer group, your friends who were playing lacrosse,
20 think of you studying Chinese?

21 RS: I don't think they knew.

22 LC: Really?

23 RS: Yeah. I was older than most of them, other than the guys who were vets, I
24 was older than most of them. Now lacrosse was also, especially them, and especially at
25 Carolina was very much a frat boy type sport.

26 LC: For people later on who might not understand that reference, can you say a
27 little bit about that?

28 RS: Most of them belong to social fraternities, the Greek system. A lot of the
29 players at that point came out of the Baltimore area and New England prep schools. In
30 the Baltimore area, even here, it was very localized to the private school system.

31 LC: So fairly privileged background you might say?

1 RS: Yeah. So you would expect the guys to be members of fraternities, which is
2 something that just did not appeal to me. After practice and everything else they went
3 their own way and I went home. Also I was married in 1972.

4 LC: When?

5 RS: In December.

6 LC: In December of '72, okay.

7 RS: So that by the time I was into my second year of playing, I was married. I
8 think there was only one other guy on the team who was married and he was one of the
9 other vets.

10 LC: That kind of changes the whole social—

11 RS: Yeah, exactly, the dynamic of what is going on. Our coach at this point was a
12 guy who is perhaps one year older than me. He was out of the frat boy system. He had
13 attended Denison.

14 LC: Denison College?

15 RS: Yep. He was married, but I think he hadn't grown up. So I really didn't relate
16 there either. As I said I had a peer group or a structure that was created by the lacrosse
17 team. It had something that focused what I was doing and also dictated my time, what I
18 had to do. I had a certain time for studying. I had a certain time for going to class. I had a
19 certain time to work and a certain time to play lacrosse, practice, et cetera. So my life at
20 this point was very structured. There wasn't a lot of time for screwing around and a lot of
21 free time, which was in my way of thinking good for me.

22 LC: Did your wife, the woman who became your wife—did she continue in
23 school?

24 RS: Yes.

25 LC: She continued to attend then?

26 RS: Yeah. She was a senior when we were married.

27 LC: What was she studying?

28 RS: She was studying English and English education.

29 LC: What did the two of you think you were going to do with these degrees,
30 English and history?

1 RS: Well, she had already applied to the library school to get her masters in
2 library science. So that's what she did. I figured she thought she was going to be a
3 librarian of some sort.

4 LC: And you?

5 RS: Pardon?

6 LC: And you?

7 RS: Me? I had no clue.

8 LC: But you were enjoying what you were doing?

9 RS: Yeah, I was enjoying it. I was discovering that I had a mind, which was
10 good.

11 LC: In the course of your first couple of years there, 1971 and 1972, were you
12 beginning to see on campus protests against the war?

13 RS: Yes.

14 LC: Can you tell me about that?

15 RS: I mean, they were pretty much a regular thing around the student union.
16 There were all signs and I also ran into some other vets who were in the Vietnam
17 Veterans Against the War office.

18 LC: How did you run into them? Did you kind of take yourself over there and
19 find out what they were about?

20 RS: Well, no my cousin, once again. He had found them and then I met some of
21 them in social gatherings at his house.

22 LC: What was your first impression of what that group was about?

23 RS: That they were against the war, which at that point I wasn't really going to
24 get into the minutia of why. At that point I knew that I was against what was happening.

25 LC: What was happening? What did you think was going on?

26 RS: Well, people were getting killed needlessly because we were not committed
27 to what we were supposed to be doing. There was no reason for anybody to be killed if
28 we were going to pull out.

29 LC: So your sense was the Nixon administration should be getting people out of
30 there like ASAP.

1 RS: I mean, if you're not going to fight, don't fight it. Don't put people's life at
2 risk. If you're going to fight it, do it and win it, but the politicians and the media had so
3 dictated the course of the conflict that it was not winnable the way the politicians were
4 going about it. I think that if we look at what's happening in Iraq today. You've got this
5 guy Dean who's saying he is going to pull out, well shoot if I'm a Saddam Hussein
6 sympathizer or Saddam Hussein himself, this man has given me hope.

7 LC: You're referring to Howard Dean?

8 RS: To Howard Dean, right.

9 LC: Who's running for President right now?

10 RS: Right. So that if Howard Dean wins, Saddam wins because he'll pop out
11 from whatever hole he's in and his goons will go around murdering people. He'll take
12 over or at least this is what he thinks. This is what Howard Dean is basically the message
13 that he's giving. We had the same thing in Vietnam. The people who were saying pull
14 out, pull out, pull out, well shoot they turned a huge defeat by the North Vietnamese in
15 the Tet of '68 into a victory. At that point we lost the war, but we didn't lose it because
16 we lost it militarily, we kicked their rear ends.

17 LC: Militarily.

18 RS: Right. We won that thing hands down. In the Battle of Ia Drang they tried to
19 meet us on their terms and go force against force and we still beat them when they
20 essentially ambushed one of our battalions. We beat them every way to Sunday, yet it
21 was given away by the politicians who refused to allow the end action. The end action
22 being at the end of Tet of '68, is destroying their supply areas in Laos and Cambodia,
23 running your troops up against the DMZ (demilitarized zone) and saying, "Okay, we're
24 freezing it right here. This is what the Geneva Accords said." This is where it is. You no
25 longer have an Army in the south. The Viet Cong are no longer really Viet Cong because
26 they've all been killed. What you've done is you've replaced them with a bunch of
27 people from the North infiltrating them down. That's kind of like taking somebody from
28 Brooklyn and putting them in Alabama and saying, "Meld in." It wasn't working. The
29 Vietnamese people, with whom I came in contact, they were not in favor of the Viet
30 Cong or the North Vietnamese. You also had a government in South Vietnam under

1 Thieu that was marginally beginning to function as a government. It was something that
2 was potentially workable in the long run and yet it was all given away.

3 LC: You made a reference there to the Geneva Agreements. I presume you're
4 talking about Geneva 1954, which divided it in South Korea, or I'm sorry Vietnam. I was
5 thinking about Korea because I wonder if you would have, at any point, thought it would
6 be a good idea to invade North Vietnam?

7 RS: I think that that depended upon the political dynamic of China.

8 LC: Could you say something about that?

9 RS: If that, at that point, was going to create a conflict with China and it could
10 erupt into immediately another World War because Mao and his troops were not exactly
11 friendly towards us, especially after Korea. It could of spread back into the Korean
12 peninsula. All sorts of things could have happened. I think that at the end of '68, if we
13 had consolidated our victory, eliminated the supply lines from China and the Soviet
14 Union with respect to building up their armaments across the borders. If we had been
15 allowed to really, I mean not just an invasion of Cambodia like Nixon did but something
16 where it is consolidated to say, "Guess what? We're here to stay. This is not going to go
17 away." At that point we could have taken them to the bargaining table rather than doing it
18 in 1971, '72 and finally signing in '73, that we could have taken to the table and been in a
19 position of tremendous strength rather than dealing from a situation where we have
20 announced the Vietnamization. We've started withdrawing all of our troops. We've made
21 a commitment to the people of this country to have our troops out of there period. You no
22 longer have your bargaining chips. You can't do it.

23 LC: Do you lay that failure with President Johnson in February and March of
24 1968?

25 RS: I lay it on Johnson, yeah, for not having the guts to allow the military to do
26 what the military wanted to do. It was political meddling. This is nothing different. They
27 did it with George Washington.

28 LC: What do you mean?

29 RS: The politicians trying to micromanage the war. It goes back to what I said
30 about politicians. They know better than anybody else about everything.

1 LC: So when you were in Chapel Hill in say 1972 and you're thinking about the
2 Nixon administration and you're thinking about Vietnam Veterans Against the War, were
3 you seeing some of the same failings in him, inability to just draw line and say we're
4 leaving? Instead of that, going ahead with this rather drawn out negotiations?

5 RS: Yeah, I mean I was disappointed in the fact that he just couldn't say, "Okay,
6 fine we're out of here."

7 LC: So you felt he should have taken a tougher line withdrawal and made that—?

8 RS: I mean, I understand the political ramifications and the people in the south
9 and trying to get an honorable peace and having the Thieu government set up with a
10 potential for success. You were also dealing in 1969, 1970, '71 with a still depleted North
11 Vietnamese government, or military, because of Tet. They were having trouble getting
12 their supplies and everything in position for their ultimate push into Vietnam, into the
13 south. At the same time we were making these great gestures to the South Vietnamese
14 saying, "Oh, yeah. What we're going to do is, we will support you. We will turn the
15 prosecution of the war over to you. We will give you the support that you need. We will
16 supply you as you need it. We feel that you are able to handle the war yourselves." If that
17 was in fact what we were going to do and we had the commitment that, if the north
18 invaded the south again that we actually would return, and that we actually would send
19 the supplies and ammunitions and advice over to the South Vietnamese as they needed it,
20 but we reneged on it all. We reneged on everything.

21 LC: Is that what you thought in 1973?

22 RS: That was before the events so I didn't know what to think at that point, but I
23 mean we backed off the whole thing. We abandoned them. We did the same thing to the
24 Iraqis in Desert Storm. The Shiites got massacred and we're now just digging up the mass
25 graves as a result of our lack of global, political will. I think the people of the United
26 States have to make up their mind of what we are as a nation to the world scene. Are we
27 the world policeman? Are we the defenders of liberty? Are we responsible, or are we just
28 going to go back into an isolation of society? I think that that would be absolutely stupid.
29 We can't become isolationists in a world that's getting smaller because of
30 communications, because of travel, because of the ability of other nations to reach out
31 and touch us at will.

1 LC: Are you referring there to terrorism?

2 RS: Yeah, terrorism or to the North Koreans announcing that they can target our
3 West Coast cities with nuclear weapons. Our stupidity in allowing ICBM
4 (intercontinental ballistic missile) guidance systems to be obtained by the Chinese. That
5 was gross insanity. We can not become an isolation society. It is my belief, this is just
6 me, that if there is a threat to freedom anywhere on the globe, that it is a threat to us and
7 it has to be dealt with.

8 LC: By the United States?

9 RS: By the United States or if the United Nations was strong enough to address
10 the situation, that would be fine, but I don't see that they are. I see that they've become
11 eunuchs.

12 LC: Let's go back to Chapel Hill for a minute.

13 RS: Off on my rant.

14 LC: No, that's fine. These are actually important insights that we want to collect.
15 Can you talk about your kind of initial membership or I guess membership in the
16 Vietnam Veterans Against the War there in Chapel Hill?

17 RS: Well, the people were—I don't even remember any of the names of the guys,
18 but they were all—they dressed in their fatigues and the rest of the stuff. They were
19 pretty militantly against the war. I don't think that they saw it necessarily the way I did. I
20 think that they had come to the point of saying war is bad, period. War is bad period but
21 sometimes maybe is necessary. I really didn't talk with them about Vietnam itself nor did
22 we—I really delve into their reasons for joining because I felt that my reasons were my
23 reasons and they were good enough for me.

24 LC: Got it. Did you go out and actually stand out on the campus at all and say
25 your peace or protest?

26 RS: No, not really.

27 LC: Did you attend protest?

28 RS: I went to one in D.C.

29 LC: Can you tell me about that? When was that?

30 RS: Oh gee, I don't know.

31 LC: In '72?

1 RS: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

2 LC: Can you tell me about going back to D.C. attending a protest?

3 RS: It was just a bunch of people and they were all jumping up and down. You
4 tend to get caught up in the emotion of the situation.

5 LC: Was it one of the really large protests?

6 RS: Yeah, it was pretty big.

7 LC: By pretty big do you mean like half a million people?

8 RS: Yeah, I would say that. I mean we were outside the White House and
9 everything else. It was pretty weird.

10 LC: It was weird?

11 RS: Yeah. I was not comfortable in it.

12 LC: Did you go with people from UNC?

13 RS: A couple of the guys from VVAW (Vietnam Veterans Against the War).

14 LC: What did you wear? Do you remember?

15 RS: What did I have? I think I had on my Marine Corps corpsman's coat and
16 probably jeans. I don't know whether I had my beard at that point or not.

17 LC: You were identifiable though to the other protestors as a veteran?

18 RS: Mm-hmm.

19 LC: What kind of exchanges did you have with other protestors, most of whom
20 were not veterans? Did they look at you funny?

21 RS: Well, I don't know if they looked at me funny or not. At that point that was
22 not really relevant to who I was or whatever it is. I didn't talk with them a whole lot just
23 because the verbal prattle that would come out of their mouths was so in my opinion
24 uneducated and irrelevant that there was no sense in talking. It's like carrying on a
25 conversation with a three year old. You can only do it for so long. They, to me, were in
26 their level of maturity and understanding of what war was, purpose of war, why—is it
27 Bennett who wrote the book *Why We Fight*?

28 LC: Mm-hmm.

29 RS: They had no clue of why we would fight. That's an important part of the
30 American culture is what do we stand for.

1 LC: Your sense was that most of the other protestors, many whom were probably
2 younger than you, hadn't really wrestled with these kinds of issues. They were just kind
3 of flat out against the war or it was—what was your—?

4 RS: Yeah, they were flat out against the war. I think it was Winston Churchill, if i
5 might paraphrase him, said, "If you're not liberal when you're young, you have no heart
6 and if you're not conservative as you get older, you have no brain." That is a very blunt
7 paraphrase of what he was saying, but at this point I understand the idealism of the
8 young. I see it in my children and that's fine. I'm thrilled by it because they have hearts. I
9 realize that they are intelligent enough that at some point they will have enough world
10 experience to understand that at times a more conservative philosophy might be one to
11 follow. I had made a reference I think earlier to Johnson's Great Society.

12 LC: Yes.

13 RS: Well, one of my first jobs when I was out of Chapel Hill, was I was a social
14 worker. I was an AFDC Specialist, which is aid to families with dependent children. I did
15 their eligibility. It was one of those learning experiences where you think gee, this is a
16 wonderful job. You're helping people and pat yourself on the back, kudos to me. When I
17 really took a hard look at the system that I was helping implement I looked at it at a
18 different light and said, this is really a destructive system.

19 LC: Why did you think it was destructive?

20 RS: Because it took away a person's initiative. It took away the family structure
21 within a poor class of people. In order for somebody to be eligible for AFDC payments to
22 support their children, the husband couldn't live in the house.

23 LC: That was one of the criteria?

24 RS: That was a criteria.

25 LC: What states was this?

26 RS: This is North Carolina, but this was a national program. You're destroying a
27 family by saying that the father cannot live here. If the father doesn't live here then you
28 get your money. We as a society were paying for the destruction of the family unit, the
29 nuclear family.

30 LC: You were thinking about this while you were actually working there?

31 RS: While I was working there. Oh, I got fired big time.

1 LC: How long did you last?

2 RS: About six months. That was like gah!

3 LC: You started talking about this at work, that maybe this wasn't so—

4 RS: I said this system really sucks. I mean this is horrible. How can you people
5 do this?

6 LC: And they fired you huh?

7 RS: Oh, yeah. I got fired.

8 LC: What excuse did they give when they fired you?

9 RS: Well, I also found that the head of the agency who had been the head of the
10 agency since Franklin Roosevelt was using the old system that they had for providing aid.
11 That was that if somebody went on welfare what they had to do was sign over their assets
12 to the state and then they could live in their homes, they could have their furniture, they
13 could do whatever it is, but when it died, the state would take possession of their assets
14 and auction them off to pay repay what had been given to them over the years. Once
15 again they were destroying the family or the sense of history of a family because there
16 were no bodies of real estate that were being owned by long term families, by small
17 farmers and things like that. What ended up happening is they would gather the real
18 estate. They would auction it off. There is one guy who owned half of the stupid county
19 who bought all these little farms. The auction really never made it to auction. It was just
20 *de facto* that he was going to buy it for whatever it was. The head of the agency had her
21 pick of the antiques. Some of these were original American hand-made things that were
22 centuries old that had been handed down through these families. They just disappeared
23 into her little warehouse. I found out about that and went to the newspaper. I was a
24 whistle blower before they had whistle blowing.

25 LC: You went to the newspaper?

26 RS: Yeah.

27 LC: What newspaper did you go to?

28 RS: Oh, it was Pittsburgh Herald.

29 LC: So you went to the local newspaper?

30 RS: The local newspaper, oh man.

31 LC: They were very glad to have your story.

1 RS: Oh, man. It was a mess. I got fired. She got fired. The whole place got fired.
2 LC: She meaning the reporter that you spoke with?
3 RS: No the head of the agency.
4 LC: Oh, the head of the agency. So there was a general slaughter?
5 RS: Oh, I took the whole place down.
6 LC: And then you left the town?
7 RS: And then I left, became manager of a sporting goods store, to something I
8 knew.
9 LC: Did you feel that you had done the right thing even though—?
10 RS: Oh, I know that I'd done the right thing.
11 LC: That was important to you, to do the right thing?
12 RS: Yeah.
13 LC: In that situation and in other situations, like protesting the war.
14 RS: Yeah. Sure.
15 LC: How did you feel in 1973 when the Paris Peace Accords, do you remember
16 that?
17 RS: Oh, I was happy because it meant that the troops were coming home.
18 LC: Do you remember the release of POWs in news events?
19 RS: Yeah. Every person who came home was another person who wasn't going
20 to be killed. To me that was a positive, something very positive.
21 LC: What about 1975 when Saigon—?
22 RS: There was the grand realization that we had once again as a nation failed to
23 live up to what we had said we would do or by action had implied we would do. To me it
24 was a sad day because it was a day that will forever be burned in the minds of a large
25 number of people. Whether they see it as the culmination of a failed policy, one that had
26 a chance of actually becoming positive at some point during the whole process, but it was
27 a symbol of a failed policy.
28 LC: Did the kind of conclusion of the war focus your thinking about your own
29 experience or did it cause you to reflect on—?
30 RS: No, at this point I was just avoiding the whole thing.
31 LC: How long did that sort of feeling persist you, or does it still?

1 RS: No, it doesn't now. It did until 1991.

2 LC: What happened in 1991?

3 RS: Desert Storm.

4 LC: Can you talk about how that commitment of U.S. forces changed your
5 perspective on your own experience?

6 RS: Well, I think that at this point I had a greater understanding of global politics
7 and why we were there. That brought out the protestors again which just irritated the crud
8 out of me because I felt that these people were undermining policies that I felt were
9 necessary. There are some really bad people around this world. Saddam Hussein is one of
10 them, Idi Amin was another. Moammar Kadafi was until we bombed him and he all of a
11 sudden straightened up. Hitler was a bad guy. There are some people who are just
12 horrendous, horrendous people. I think that the global community and this is not just
13 saying the United States needs to address problems that exist because of these people are
14 just mass murders. Somebody has to take the responsibility. Other countries like Iraq
15 can't come in and totally subjugate the people of another country. I know that some
16 people use the argument, well, we do it, but I think there's a difference between Saddam
17 Hussein and George Herbert Walker Bush doing what he did or felt that he had to do. At
18 that point during Desert Strom it was more of a collaborative effort using the United
19 Nations which I think in the long run ended up hurting because I think George the first
20 relied upon the United Nations and the coalition to dictate the policy and that once we
21 had kicked Saddam Hussein and his people out of Kuwait, that what we had tried to
22 accomplish had been accomplished. As the tanks were heading for Baghdad the United
23 Nations said, "Stop, we've accomplished what we need to accomplish. We've
24 accomplished our stated goals and so therefore we won't go any further." We did stop,
25 which allowed Saddam Hussein to get his power back again within his own country. We
26 had made promises to the Shiites and also to the Kurds. We reneged on these promises
27 resulting in many hundreds of thousands of deaths. I don't know where I am at this point.

28 LC: You were thinking in 1991 that this was unjustified—

29 RS: Okay, my irritation with the protestors.

30 LC: That's kind of what gelled your rethink about where you were—

1 RS: Yeah, that there had to be somebody out there to say and express the fact
2 that, in my opinion, the United States does have a responsibility, a global responsibility.
3 Where do we live up to that responsibility, we don't do it by putting our heads in the
4 sand. It's extremely comforting to say I'm for peace and I'm against war. Who can argue
5 with you in these circumstances? People use the arguments, they say, "Well, the Bible
6 says thou shall not kill." Well, if you go back and you look at the actual more literal
7 translation of that command then it says thou shall not commit murder and there's a
8 difference. If you look at—I guess Augustine wrote about the theory of a just war. I don't
9 know if you've—

10 LC: Saint Augustine, yes.

11 RS: So it was Augustine and then Ignatius and a few others. They wrote about
12 what are the criteria for a just war. If you read the criteria, a lot of it is very subjective.
13 You can justify just about anything, not just about anything. I mean, there are some very
14 specifics that it has to be winnable et cetera, et cetera, and that an ultimate good has to
15 come out of it. When I was reading the criteria of going into this, into Iraq, I said, "Yeah,
16 it meets the criteria according to my understanding of the criteria." Yet at the same time
17 there was a Professor named Stephen Vicchio from Notre Dame who was arguing the
18 opposite saying nothing ever justifies war, even under Augustine's criteria, that war can
19 never be justified. We had a little *tête-à-tête* about that.

20 LC: You and he did?

21 RS: Yeah.

22 LC: When did you have a chance to speak with him?

23 RS: At church he was talking—we have a discussion group every Sunday before
24 worship. He comes in and speaks on occasion. I just could not believe what he was
25 saying. I talked about the arrogance, pardon me, of academia at times. I said, "Well, look,
26 answer this question for me." I said, "When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, after
27 he had prayed and everybody else had fallen asleep, he goes back out and Judas is
28 bringing up the soldiers who are going to arrest Jesus. Peter takes out, in some case say a
29 knife, some people say a sword and he cuts off the ear of a servant. Christ picks up the
30 ear, heals the servant and tells Peter to put up his sword. Then he makes the statement,,
31 'He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.'" I asked Vicchio, I said, "Why was

1 he even carrying a sword in the first place?" I mean why. Wouldn't this have been a
2 wonderful time for Jesus if he was a total pacifist and was saying that violence is never
3 warranted? Why didn't he say throw down your sword, never use it again? After all Jesus
4 was one of the greatest teachers of our time, or not of our time, but of all time. So he
5 didn't take that opportunity to do it. He said, "Put it up," in other words you're allowed to
6 carry it with you which is basically saying self defense is okay and there are times when
7 it might be justifiable. Don't live by it, but you don't have to ignore it. Vicchio wouldn't
8 answer that. He just said, "Don't you start quoting the Bible to me. If you start quoting
9 the Bible, I'll just quote you into oblivion." I'm going okay, fine.

10 LC: That was a productive response.

11 RS: I know. It was an absurd response by somebody who's supposed to be at the
12 top of his profession, whatever.

13 LC: In thinking about these issues about the justice of some conflicts and the
14 injustice of others in 1991, did you begin to kind of reflect differently on your experience
15 in Vietnam?

16 RS: I actually started talking about what my experience was.

17 LC: Who did you talk to?

18 RS: I was asked to come over and speak to a class at a local high school.

19 LC: By whom?

20 RS: By one of the teachers.

21 LC: Who knew that you were a veteran?

22 RS: Yeah. The daughter of one of my cousin's was in the class. They were
23 getting into Vietnam in their history and she said that she had a cousin who was in
24 Vietnam. They asked me if I'd come over.

25 LC: And you said yes?

26 RS: Yeah.

27 LC: Did you think much about it before you accepted?

28 RS: No. I had been thinking about doing this because I had actually just prior to
29 that had taken the Senior High Fellowship form our church down to the Vietnam
30 Memorial.

31 LC: The reference there is to the Wall in D.C.?

1 RS: Yeah.

2 LC: Can you tell me what your experience there was like?

3 RS: Well, I had never been and was not really aware of how it was organized,
4 chronologically.

5 LC: Yes. How the names on the Wall were organized.

6 RS: Yeah. I thought that this would be a good idea. I took the names of some of
7 the people whom I knew and I did what I would call brief recollection of who they were
8 as people.

9 LC: This is for your own purposes or for—

10 RS: No, for the class. Before we went I gave each of them this recollection, a
11 different recollection. It was their job to find the name of the person on the Wall so that
12 basically the idea was to try to let them understand that these are not just names etched
13 into granite, but these were real people who lived, breathed, had loves, had desires, et
14 cetera. I did that and I worked up a kind of a patrol where we parked beside where the
15 cherry blossoms are, around that pool.

16 LC: The cherry trees at the Title Basin.

17 RS: Yeah, it's right there at the Title Basin. We'd walk across the field towards
18 the Lincoln Memorial and then go to the Vietnam Memorial, which is in front of it. What
19 we'd do is the patrol, I would have them walk alone so that they weren't in a group.
20 Basically the way we would on patrol, by keeping a space between us. So they had to
21 walk over there thinking about what they were going to be doing and thinking about the
22 person whom I had given the recollection of.

23 LC: How big was this group that you took?

24 RS: There was probably about twelve.

25 LC: What were their ages?

26 RS: These were senior high's, really, probably about tenth, eleventh, and twelfth
27 grade.

28 LC: Did they kind of buy into this exercise that you had set up?

29 RS: Yes.

30 LC: How did it go?

1 RS: It went really well. A couple of the people in the class, I mean they still come
2 up to me today and say that it was one of the more moving things that they'd ever done.

3 LC: What about for you?

4 RS: It was real difficult.

5 LC: This was your first visit to the Wall. You were kind of in charge of a group
6 so you had that responsibility. Were you able to kind of have your own experience there?

7 RS: Yeah, but it wasn't what I thought. When I got to the Wall—well, actually
8 on the way over because we drove over in one of these fifteen person vans. I had
9 mentioned earlier that I had recordings from Vietnam. I also have recordings from a guy
10 named Ken Wright who sang some of the songs that were kind of popular, folky type
11 songs that were popular during that era. He played the guitar and sang when he was in
12 Vietnam.

13 LC: And he was a corpsman?

14 RS: And he was a corpsman. There's one set where mortars are going off in the
15 background while he's singing. He also wrote a couple of his own songs, which had to do
16 with what was going on. I mean there was one song, *Going Home Today* and, *Many*
17 *Won't Weep for He's Just a Number at Best*. There were some interesting songs so I
18 played that music as well as AFVN radio on the way over. I had all my junk with me. I
19 had copies of *Stars and Stripes*. I had my photographs and just a whole pile of stuff so
20 that on the way over the kids could kind of sift through it and look through what I had. So
21 we got there. We walked over to the Wall. What I wasn't expecting was all the kids to
22 end up in front of the same slab because it was chronological, which makes sense, but I
23 wasn't prepared for that. It kind of freaked me out.

24 LC: Can you say why?

25 RS: It was not what I expected. So all of a sudden I started looking at this one
26 section of the wall, names and things was something that was quite unexpected.

27 LC: Have you visited the Wall again?

28 RS: One other time.

29 LC: By yourself or with a group?

30 RS: I took another class back.

31 LC: Was that your daughters' class?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: I guess before we talk about that, I would like to ask you about how that talk
3 went, the talk that you decided to give to your cousin's daughters' class. How'd that go?

4 RS: It went well. I mean, it was kind of disjointed. Obviously I was not used to
5 talking about it. I really didn't know what I wanted to say or how I wanted to approach it
6 because I hadn't really thought through a theme of what I wanted to say. I find that just
7 relating an experience is extremely difficult. It's something that the kids can't relate to. I
8 think they appreciated me coming out. They asked questions and I answered a lot of
9 questions and things. I think they got something from it. For me it wasn't as intellectually
10 satisfying as I wanted it to be

11 LC: Was that because you were speaking to kids or because they couldn't really
12 hear what you were saying?

13 RS: It was because I was not organized enough. I can speak to kids. I mean, I
14 dealt a lot with kids through the course of the last several years. I've coached lacrosse.
15 I've coached all sorts of things. I've talked with kids. Our house is kind of like—or it was
16 when the kids were in high school—a gathering place where everybody felt comfortable.

17 LC: Everybody wants to go to your house.

18 LC: Yeah. It was like we were always second mom and dad type thing, which is
19 good.

20 LC: Very good. Can we take a brief pause here?

21 RS: Sure.

22 LC: Okay. Mr. Slingshuff, let's just continue talking about your experience in the
23 1990s and particularly with regard to the Wall. So you went to D.C. to visit the Wall a
24 second time and that was with a class that included your daughter?

25 RS: Yes.

26 LC: How did that come about?

27 RS: Her school was going to take a trip and they were looking for parents to go
28 along. So I volunteered.

29 LC: Was it already decided that they were going to go to D.C.?

30 RS: Yes.

31 LC: Was the Wall something that was already on their agenda?

1 RS: Yes.

2 LC: The day that you went, what happened?

3 RS: It was pretty uneventful. I went. Obviously my daughter had told her class
4 that I had been to Vietnam so they knew that. They were fairly young. This was my
5 younger daughter.

6 LC: How old were they?

7 RS: This was in 1992. So she was about ten years old. We went and the kids got
8 in front of the Wall. You know how you can do the etching type thing?

9 LC: Yes.

10 RS: I showed them a couple of names and specifically Larry Bell. A few of them
11 took etchings of Larry's name. I bought the—they had the book that gives the directory
12 of names. So I bought that book. It was fairly uneventful. I didn't have to do a lot of
13 teaching or organizing.

14 LC: Was it moving for you?

15 RS: Every time I see it. I mean, both times I've seen it, it has been. It's kind of an
16 amazing monument. When you think of the number of people who died, and the thing
17 that—I get irritated because people in this country didn't allow what these people were
18 fighting for to be gained.

19 LC: Can you elaborate a little?

20 RS: Most of the Marines that I know were very patriotic. We all kind of grew up
21 with John Wayne. There was this tremendous sense of nationalism and heroism of Audie
22 Murphy and *To Hell and Back* and all the rest of that stuff. I think that there was a much
23 greater sense that America is a good place or the United States is a good place. The
24 motives that we have, as a nation, are generally positive or good goals. The people who
25 went over believed in America, believed in the dreams of the United States, believed in
26 freedom, believed in God, country, mom, and apple pie and all the positive things of the
27 nation. Believed that what we have here is, and I've used the term before, through the
28 grace of God. I was born here. I didn't deserve it. I'm just here. I'm not in Russia and I'm
29 not in Iraq, but I didn't do anything to be deserving of being here. It's just that I am. I
30 think that the people I knew felt the same way. We are here. We are Americans, citizens
31 of the United States. We've been given great gifts that were undeserved. That isn't to say

1 that they weren't fought for by previous generations and that the gifts that we have didn't
2 come with a price because they did. They came with a price from previous people who
3 had recognized the potential for this nation and what we have, and the potential of
4 freedom. We're willing to fight for it and now it's really our turn to do it. To preserve it
5 for future generations, not only for future generations, but to look at people around the
6 world and say they are as deserving as we were, as human beings. So therefore it's our
7 turn to try to spread what we have on a global scale.

8 LC: And you felt that about the Vietnamese, that they had a right too.

9 RS: Absolutely, I feel that about any person in the world, be they from
10 Zimbabwe to Argentina to Columbia, whatever. People, human beings, regardless of who
11 they are, where they're from and what their beliefs are have the right by the nature of
12 human being to deserve freedoms and an ability to use their minds, to speak their minds
13 without fear of being killed for doing so.

14 LC: The U.S. has an effect, would you say a moral obligation to assist that?

15 RS: I believe that. I firmly—I know that there are other people who don't and
16 that's fine. I would fight for the death for them to express that opinion.

17 LC: It reminds me, what you're saying, very much of Kennedy's inaugural
18 speech where he said, "We will fight any enemy. We will pay any price for the defense of
19 freedom." I'm paraphrasing, but would you—?

20 RS: Well, I agree with that. I think that we have an obligation. One of the words
21 that are seldom used in modern vernacular when speaking is responsibility. I believe that
22 we, as a people, every single individual in this country has a responsibility to see that
23 people anywhere, everywhere, have the ability to live freely. We've been given
24 something. We don't have a right to it, it was a gift. We have a responsibility to see that
25 as many people as possible can receive that gift as well.

26 LC: Was some of that thinking behind what you were trying to transmit to the
27 two different groups that you went to the Wall with?

28 RS: Yes.

29 LC: Your daughter's class, they were young. Do you think they kind of got what
30 you were trying to—?

1 RS: You know, I don't know. I think that at that age there are some kids who are
2 intellectually much farther along than others. Some may have grasped, some may not.
3 Somebody like my daughter probably didn't. She is similar to me at ten years old.

4 LC: Which is, or was?

5 RS: Oblivious.

6 LC: Have you talked to her subsequently she would be in her twenties now?

7 RS: Yeah. She's twenty-one now.

8 LC: About the war?

9 RS: Yeah, and I think she understands. I bombard both my daughters with
10 information. I'm on the Internet a fair amount with a bunch of other Marines. So there's
11 kind of this network of Marines from 3rd Battalion 1st Marines. We keep in touch on a
12 regular, daily basis. We find articles. We find old pictures. We find things that might be
13 of interest and you throw it on the net. You let everybody kind of look at it and things
14 like that. There are some good commentaries from them. I forward a lot of it to my
15 daughters to let them know that I am not the only weirdo in the world.

16 LC: Do they think you're weird?

17 RS: I don't think so. My older daughter, we love getting into political
18 discussions.

19 LC: Like?

20 RS: Well, she graduated from Boston University. She was like her mother in the
21 fact that she was pretty academic. She graduated magna cum laude with two majors.

22 LC: What year?

23 RS: Two years ago.

24 LC: What are her majors?

25 RS: They're history and social studies education. She did an undergraduate
26 thesis, an honors paper. She had picked the topic actually prior to 9/11. It was women in
27 Islam. Her focus on her study in history was the Middle East. So we would get into some
28 pretty good discussions about what's going on, especially about politicians and things
29 like that. We enjoy the repartee.

30 LC: You both enjoy it?

31 RS: Yes, drives my wife nuts.

1 LC: Why is that? Why does it drive her nuts?

2 RS: Oh, just because she can't stand people talking politics because everybody's
3 opinionated.

4 LC: And everyone's opinion is equally—

5 RS: Right, but she doesn't understand that I will argue my opinion to the death,
6 but at the same time I'm absorbing some of the other arguments. I might include those in
7 my thought process in the future.

8 LC: Right, exactly. But there's a dynamic there that is not just, I think this and
9 I'm not changing and I don't care what you say.

10 RS: No, no, no.

11 LC: Was it sometime after your first visit to the Wall that you contacted the
12 parents of Larry Bell?

13 RS: Yes.

14 LC: Was that part of, again, you rethinking? You had said that you didn't really
15 think about Vietnam for many, many years. So you kind of were getting back in touch
16 with refiguring how you wanted to assess it in your own life

17 RS: Right. Well, I wanted to find out where Larry was buried.

18 LC: Okay, so it was a very specific thing.

19 RS: Yeah, I wanted to talk to with her, but I also wanted to find out where Larry
20 was put to rest.

21 LC: How did that exchange go?

22 RS: I mean, it was okay. It was good. I'm very glad that I had the opportunity to
23 talk with her.

24 LC: Did she welcome speaking with you?

25 RS: Yeah, I think so. We exchanged letters a couple of times after that. Her first
26 letter she kind of, it was good speaking with you. I'm sorry I failed to ask if you had been
27 injured also. So I mean it was very nice. I enjoyed that. I found out where Larry was laid
28 to rest, went over to the cemetery.

29 LC: Was that helpful to you in kind of getting a grip on your own feeling about
30 Vietnam?

1 RS: Yeah. There's a certain—I know it's a popular term these days—closure or
2 whatever. At least I knew where Larry was. It was also on the road that's on the way to
3 Atlantic City.

4 LC: So there was a certain kind of—I don't know what to say—convergence of
5 some kind. What kind of relationship have you had with the Veterans Administration?

6 RS: I've never called them for anything.

7 LC: Ever?

8 RS: Ever.

9 LC: Why?

10 RS: I don't think they have anything to offer me.

11 LC: So you've never had medical care or claimed any kind of benefit or
12 anything?

13 RS: No.

14 LC: Have you ever indicated, when say you were applying for a job or a loan or
15 something like that, that you were a Vietnam veteran? Did you claim that status in any
16 kind of position?

17 RS: I don't know if there's any reason that I should claim a status, but I don't shy
18 away from it. I put it if it's there.

19 LC: If it's there, you do indicate it

20 RS: Mm-hmm.

21 LC: Do you ever think about the policy behind different places asking that
22 question of potential employees or others?

23 RS: I've never really thought about it as a policy. I mean if I found out that
24 somebody would be using that against people, that would be one point where I would go
25 on my own demonstration. I would let the world know of these people discriminating.

26 LC: Right. Obviously in general, the thinking is there is some affirmative action
27 implication behind that question.

28 RS: You mean so it'd be positive?

29 LC: Yes, exactly.

30 RS: I've never really thought about it. I do not believe in preferential treatment. I
31 believe that people should be hired or recognized or whatever they are trying to

1 accomplish and other people have the power to say yay or nay for whatever they're trying
2 to do. That it be done on the person's abilities and/or their willingness to try to perform a
3 specific function or job or do whatever they're trying to do. I think that once you start
4 getting into preferences, you're opening up a can of worms that is just absolutely
5 enormous. It's something that is tough to stop.

6 LC: So you don't feel like demographics of any kind should play a role in—?

7 RS: Not really. I think that we are running into this kind of white male
8 persecution at this point as a backlash to whatever has gone on. I mean I've never felt
9 persecuted myself, but I have always felt that you're attacking a problem at the wrong
10 end of the spectrum

11 LC: Can you explain that?

12 RS: The problem comes not with somebody looking for a job and being chosen
13 based upon a non-skill criteria. If that is how it works, then it doesn't serve either the
14 institution that is making that decision nor the individual who is accepting it. It doesn't
15 serve either of them well. The problem starts with education. Getting away from the
16 politically correct standards of education and getting into the minutiae of education where
17 you're actually teaching people. Politics, once again, has played too much of a role in
18 trying to crate an educational system that is basically failing, especially in urban areas. In
19 Baltimore, we lived just outside of the city. When we first moved back to Baltimore from
20 Chapel Hill in 1978 we purchased a house inside the city. It was in a very nice
21 neighborhood. We loved the house and the neighborhood and all the rest. Then we all of
22 a sudden had children, our first in 1980 and everything was fine and hunky dory until all
23 of a sudden we came to the realization that we were going to have to send our little dear
24 to school. We looked at our alternatives based upon where we lived. Our alternatives
25 were we send them to the local public school and the previous year they had only found
26 two dead bodies in the schoolyard.

27 LC: Only two?

28 RS: Only two. We're looking at that and we're saying gee that's an education in
29 itself. Or we could send her down the road to a private school which was at thirteen grand
30 a year, or we could have her transferred out of this one school district into another which
31 meant we would have to drive her about four to five miles each way because if you

1 transfer out they don't provide bus transportation, or move and move into a different
2 school district. We opted to move. We predicated the purchase the purchase of our home
3 on the quality of the education that was available in the public sector. It was a great
4 move, especially for our older daughter who did extremely well and benefited from the
5 diversity of educational programs that the public schools have. Until the end of her junior
6 year when the school board decided what they really needed to do was revamp the whole
7 thing. They brought in a guy named Stewart Burger who had destroyed a school system
8 in St. Louis or somewhere else.

9 LC: Was he the superintendent?

10 RS: Yeah, he was going to be the superintendent, but his job was to come in here
11 and dismantle the whole system that was working and create a system that didn't support
12 quote unquote "elitism". Now elitism was the gifted and talented program, which our
13 older daughter was in. For Sara, that was okay because she had already gotten beyond the
14 point of the most advanced diluted class that they were going to offer in the next years.
15 An example was her language in school was German. They were eliminating the German
16 class further up. She needed three years of a language to get into college. So we just went
17 to the school system and said, "Okay, Towson University is across the street. We are
18 going to send her to the class in German there and you're going to pay for it."

19 LC: Did they agree?

20 RS: Yep, they had to. So that she was beyond it and wherever she needed a
21 course we could find it and we could find it either through community colleges or
22 through Towson University. We'd push the issue. Our younger daughter who was a
23 couple years behind this, she was going to get lost in the shuffle.

24 LC: By that you mean be negatively impacted by this change?

25 RS: Exactly because the courses and what was going to be available wouldn't be
26 available for her as they were for our older daughter. We moved her into a private school.

27 LC: Did you consider sending her to the Quaker school?

28 RS: No, because Friends School was a school for self-starters.

29 LC: What does that mean exactly? Can you just go ahead and explain what that
30 means?

1 RS: It means that it doesn't have a tremendous structure to it. The kids are
2 allowed to pick their own courses, derive their own course of study once they've met the
3 certain basic criteria. There's a tremendous amount of freedom in how they structure their
4 courses. It's usually for kids who are academically inclined to excel of their own volition.

5 LC: Right, without a lot of pattering over curriculum.

6 RS: Right. Now our older daughter, Sara, would've absolutely thrived in that
7 kind of setting and I wouldn't have had any problem at all sending her to Friends School
8 because she would have done extremely well, but we already had a good public school
9 system so why pay fifteen grand a year? Now our younger daughter was like me. You
10 had to put the positive charge in the right ear and the negative in the left ear and wake her
11 up every morning.

12 LC: That wasn't going to work for her.

13 RS: That would not work for her. So we sent her out to Saint Paul's which was a
14 school with much smaller class size and greater teacher to student involvement. It worked
15 pretty well for her. She really didn't like Saint Paul's that much because it also is a school
16 with—I mean Saint Paul's for girls is—there are a lot of little rich bitches running
17 around. It's like they've got more money than sense.

18 LC: There's kind of a click system?

19 RS: Oh, extremely click. Just absolutely and it drove Ann nuts because Ann is
20 not that type of person, but she found a good peer support group and good friends. They
21 are all extremely good friends now. The education or at least the structure of the
22 education taught her how to study. Now she does extremely well. She's a senior at
23 Eckerd College in Saint Pete, Florida.

24 LC: Yes, I know exactly where that is.

25 RS: They have a search and rescue program and she's in that. She loves it. I don't
26 think she's gotten anything, but an A for the last five semesters.

27 LC: Search and rescue, do you mean air, sea, and land?

28 RS: Basically sea. Their campus is right on the Tampa Bay. The Marina, which
29 Ann loves, is about fifty yards from her dorm.

30 LC: Is that what she is intending to do for career?

1 RS: I mean, her major is environmental policy. She's talked about going to law
2 school in policy. Her latest thing right now is that she did an internship with Cornell
3 University last summer. It was in their fisheries program. She likes to scuba dive as well.
4 She's a good athlete and she's a strong girl. She's another one of our six footers. She
5 loves doing things that are outdoorsy so that the person who is the head of the program at
6 Cornell said that if she wanted to come back next year that would be great. If she wanted
7 to go to graduate school he was on staff on Cornell in the faculty and to give him a call.
8 She was thinking of going into their forestry program.

9 LC: That's a good school.

10 RS: Yep.

11 LC: Let me ask you Dev, have you spent much time reading the many, many
12 books that have been published about Vietnam?

13 RS: Yes.

14 LC: Can you pick out two or three that you think are really good and maybe a
15 couple that are not so good?

16 RS: There was *A Bright Shining Lie*, Sheehan. I enjoyed that one. *We Were*
17 *Soldiers Once... and Young*, which was General Moore. I enjoyed that. *After Tet*, by
18 Spector. Then there was a follow up to *A Bright Shining Lie*. It says, *After the War was*
19 *Over* and that's another Sheehan book. I've read those. There are a bunch of kind of
20 Marine type books, stories and things like *Semper Fi: Vietnam*. I've read that.

21 LC: *Semper Fi*, the book that kind of gives us of sort of operational overview of
22 Marines in Vietnam?

23 RS: Yeah. It's a fair number.

24 LC: Are there some you've read that you think were pretty bad?

25 RS: I've tried to stay away from them.

26 LC: Is this one of the things that you and some of the other 3-1 Veterans talk
27 about on the Internet?

28 RS: On occasion. We don't really talk about the books that much.

29 LC: What about movies?

30 RS: I thought Oliver Stone was horrific.

31 LC: Which film please?

1 RS: This was, I don't know, *Platoon*. I thought that was disgusting.

2 LC: Why?

3 RS: Because he used what were realistic emotions. He transferred them into
4 sensational savagery. I understand the dichotomy between good and evil and the players
5 who were in on this thing and all the rest of that garbage, but that's been played over a
6 hundred and fifty thousand times with a hundred and fifty thousand different subjects.
7 His portrayal of drug abuse by a combat unit to me was just off the wall, the savagery of
8 going into a village and killing people. You know it was a play on My Lai. After My Lai
9 happened there were the pundits who were out there. "Well, this is just the tip of the
10 iceberg. There were thousands of them. Everybody was out there murdering." That is
11 such a great disservice to veterans all over. To veterans who went over and had really
12 good motives for being there and were very moral people and very ethical people. They
13 were looking to treat people as they would want to be treated themselves. I think Oliver
14 Stone just did a horrible job.

15 LC: Do you think that the stereotypes that he relied on in that film, was he doing
16 that just to sell tickets or was there some larger commentary on the war that he was
17 making?

18 RS: I have no idea what his commentary on the war is. I just thought that it was
19 such a disservice to the greatest majority of people who served honorably.

20 LC: And it made you mad.

21 RS: Oh, it infuriates me.

22 LC: Any other films about Vietnam that stick out?

23 RS: *Apocalypse Now* I think is absurd.

24 LC: Can you say something about that?

25 RS: Not much positive.

26 LC: That's okay.

27 RS: I mean, it just—you've got this kind of like cowboy atmosphere. This guy
28 who gets off—I mean, it's just weird. I forget the book that it is based upon, but it was
29 not Vietnam. He took another incident out of some other book that was relating to a war
30 in the Middle Ages or something. I forget the name of it, but he was taking it and creating
31 a modern day version of this whole thing and it was just not realistic. I thought that *The*

1 *Deer Slayer* thing with the Russian roulette was just—I mean talk about something that is
2 so far from reality and to try to pin that on Vietnam. You have people who believe that
3 garbage. If it's just a story and everybody knows that this is just an absolute blathering
4 fiction then fine, do your story, make your movie, whatever it is, but don't try to portray
5 it as some sort of possible or factual happening. This is how it was when it wasn't. Those
6 are the three that I'm not real happy with. Well, I don't know if any war films with any
7 era are in any way realistic. I did enjoy *We Were Soldiers*. That was the Hal Moore
8 movie. They weren't making a political statement right in there.

9 LC: Yeah. Do you think that's the failing of the previous three movies,
10 *Apocalypse Now*, *Deer Slayer*, and *Platoon*?

11 RS: There's an agenda. There's a political agenda. Where as *We Were Soldiers*,
12 there's no political agenda. It basically showed what happens during a battle. I mean, yes
13 there was a little bit of blood sensationalism at times, but that's not unlike *Saving Private*
14 *Ryan*.

15 LC: Yeah, what was your appraisal of that film?

16 RS: I thought it was interesting. I thought it was unrealistic.

17 LC: In what way because your father was involved in events that—?

18 RS: Well, I mean running after this one private.

19 LC: So the premise of the story.

20 RS: We'd do that, I tried that in Vietnam, running around trying to get this one
21 person, I know, to satisfy the press.

22 LC: So the whole premise was kind of—

23 RS: Yeah, the premise was bad. I think the invasion scene gave a very graphic
24 description of what it could have been like to try to land in that kind of situation.

25 LC: The scene at the beginning.

26 RS: Yeah, exactly, but then the rest of it was fiction.

27 LC: Do you, as a result of not liking, for example the *Deer Slayer* or *Apocalypse*
28 *Now* avoid other films that have Robert De Niro or Francis Ford Coppola involved?

29 RS: No. No, I want to hear what people have to say. I especially want to hear
30 what people have to say who disagree with me.

31 LC: Because that's more interesting to you.

1 RS: It's interesting, but I also, it generally buoys my opinions.

2 LC: It buoys your own opinion.

3 RS: Yes.

4 LC: Let's talk about your interest in the Far East that you developed as an
5 undergraduate. At some point, did you go to China?

6 RS: I've been to China twice.

7 LC: Did you go as a tourist or as a businessman?

8 RS: Tourist, just purely wanted to see it.

9 LC: Where did you go?

10 RS: The first time was with my younger daughter's class out at Saint Paul's.
11 Their History teacher was organizing a trip over spring break. They were looking for not
12 only students to go along but they were hoping they could get chaperons so I jumped at
13 the opportunity.

14 LC: Did you and your wife both go?

15 RS: No, just my daughter and I, along with Alan James who organized the trip
16 for Saint Paul's and a number of the other students, some of whom were of Ann's group
17 so she was very comfortable.

18 LC: Of her friends, her close friends.

19 RS: Yeah. Actually two of the girls who went were from our neighborhood right
20 here. One lives about a block from us and the other lives about two blocks from us. Ann
21 and these two girls had been to elementary school and middle school together and then on
22 to Saint Paul's. They went and they were having trouble finding enough kids to go. To
23 me it was crazy because the price was right and the opportunity was incredible. You've
24 got all these people that have more money than sense. Their girls were worried about
25 going down to Florida and working on their tan. I'm like okay. Let's go to China. Let's
26 do something that is really neat. We went to China. We landed in Shanghai. One of the
27 purposes of the trip—and we went with the head mistress of the school, of Saint Paul's—
28 and we visited a school in China, a girls school in Shanghai that was a sister school to a
29 Japanese girls school, which was the sister school of Saint Paul's. They were trying to see
30 if they could work out some sort of exchange with the Chinese school. I think they're still
31 working on it, but it hasn't come to fruition yet.

1 LC: What year was this?

2 RS: This would have been about 1999, I guess, or probably '98. We stayed in
3 Shanghai for a day or so and then we went to Wuhan. We did the trip up the Yangtze. We
4 wanted to do that before they were flooding it.

5 LC: Before the big project

6 RS: Then we went up to Chongqing. From Chongqing we went to Beijing and
7 then on home. So that it was really an abbreviated trip just because it was spring break
8 and we didn't have enough time to do all the things that we wanted to. We saw the Great
9 Wall and went to the Ming Tombs and got a pretty good overview of what was going on
10 there.

11 LC: Was this your first visit to Asia since being to Vietnam?

12 RS: Yes.

13 LC: Did you have any kind of echo from having been to Vietnam when you
14 landed in China?

15 RS: No.

16 LC: Nothing?

17 RS: Nothing really. I mean I spent probably the month and a half or two months
18 before pulling out the old tapes and getting some new tapes so that I could get used to
19 listening to the tonality of the language and perhaps refreshing some of my vocabulary.

20 LC: How'd that go?

21 RS: Well, it was interesting. Here I am driving down the road speaking Chinese
22 to myself. It's pretty bizarre. I found that I could understand much more than I could
23 speak because my brain wouldn't get in gear fast enough to try to respond.

24 LC: But you could hear—

25 RS: But I could hear things and get gists. So it helped in that respect. The second
26 trip was two years ago. This one came about because we have an interim pastor of our
27 church. He wanted to take a trip to China and asked if anybody was interested in going. I
28 had given such a glowing report of it. I told Deborah, I said, "You've got to go too."

29 LC: Is that your wife?

30 RS: Yeah. So Deborah and I and both of our daughters went this time.

31 LC: How long did you stay there?

1 RS: We spent, I guess it was sixteen or seventeen days. We did a lot of the same
2 thing. This time we landed in Beijing. We spent a little bit more time there. We saw many
3 of the same things, but also some additional things. Then we went down to Wuhan and
4 did the trip up the Yangtze again. It was a different tour service up there so on our stops
5 up the Yangtze we actually stopped at different places, which was good so I wasn't
6 repeating everything that I had seen before. Then we went and saw the terra cotta soldiers
7 in Xian. That was really neat. That is something else. By this time our daughters were old
8 enough that they could get a fair amount of independence in moving around. Our tour
9 guide was a guy who his parents had been art historians and artifact appraisers and lived
10 in Xian. So once he got to Xian, which is his home territory he could kind of take off his
11 hat of being tour guide when he was on his own time and got a bunch of his friends
12 together and brought by and picked up our girls and a couple of other girls who were
13 traveling with us. They all went out to some Chinese nightclubs and things.

14 LC: They sounds like a great trip.

15 RS: They had a great time. It was really wonderful. Then we went from there to
16 Guangzhou and spent a couple of days at Guangzhou and took the train to Hong Kong,
17 couple of days in Hong Kong and then home.

18 LC: On either or both of these trips, how was it for you to be in a Communist
19 country? Did you think about it?

20 RS: I thought about it, but I also recognized that China, especially Beijing is
21 probably the most capitalistic place I've ever seen except for Hong Kong.

22 LC: Can you describe that?

23 RS: Well, everything is for sale. I mean, everything is for sell and everybody's
24 out trying to make a buck.

25 LC: Do you mean people in the street peddling things?

26 RS: People on the street, the business. It's a really thriving place in terms of trade
27 and what they're selling. When I first went over they still had the government stores.
28 They've gotten away form that. That really doesn't exist anymore. So actually some
29 pricing power has hit the private sector, unfortunately, because I wanted to buy a couple
30 of the silk rugs. They quintupled in price in two years.

31 LC: That's the free market?

1 RS: That's the free market aspect of it, which is good for them. Things had
2 changed while I was there, but I think that the Communist government is holding the end
3 of the tiger's tail and they're in trouble.

4 LC: Why do you say that?

5 RS: Just because capitalism is really *de facto* how the place works. They've got a
6 country of how many billion people that they are trying to keep under control. At some
7 point they aren't going to be able to roll the tanks through Tiananmen Square and knock
8 off everybody. They're either going to have to change or they're going to be run over. I
9 don't know how long it'll take and with the Chinese, their concept of time is a little bit
10 different than ours.

11 LC: Can you say something about that?

12 RS: Well, they tend to be a lot more patient than we are. We tend to be in a
13 culture of immediate gratification. I see it, I want it and what do I see next and then I
14 want that. I think that they see the things that they're trying to obtain and they're a little
15 bit more patient in figuring out how to obtain it and probably do it in a more effective
16 way than we would.

17 LC: You think that that kind of can form some of the processes of political
18 change there?

19 RS: Yes.

20 LC: Well, have you thought about going to Vietnam?

21 RS: Yes.

22 LC: I should ask you if you've actually done that and gone back?

23 RS: No.

24 LC: What are you thinking about it?

25 RS: I'd like to go. I understand that there are some tours that you can get yourself
26 connected with and go back. I'd love to do it. The thing that I think is holding me back is,
27 well, first we had the two trips to China and last year my wife wanted to go to England
28 and Scotland and we did that. Then I told you about our relatives in South Africa and
29 they've threatened to come over and pull us over there by the fingernails if we didn't go.
30 My kids want to go to South Africa because they met their cousins and they all hit it off
31 real well. So they want to interact with the cousins there. I think that there are a few

1 things that we've either accomplished already or that are on the horizon that have taken
2 priority over Vietnam, but at some point I will go back. Now I thought I was going to go
3 back a couple of years ago because some friends of ours were in Bangkok. He was the
4 head of—what's the company that makes diapers?

5 LC: Kimberly Clark?

6 RS: Kimberly Clark. He was the Head of Asian division of Kimberly Clark.

7 LC: Do you know, just out of curiosity, can you tell me his name?

8 RS: It's Jon—wait a minute.

9 LC: I'm putting you on the spot.

10 RS: It's spelled J-O-N.

11 LC: Well, I have a family connection to Kimberly Clark, pretty much at that level
12 and I was just wondering.

13 RS: They have a house across the lake from us up in the Adirondacks.

14 LC: Oh, okay. Anyways, you were thinking about going up to Bangkok since
15 they were there.

16 RS: Yeah. They had a house there so that I would have the ability to—Larkin,
17 Jon Larkin.

18 LC: Very good.

19 RS: You're trying to pull all of this stuff out. Gah, let's extract it. That just didn't
20 happen. They've actually now been transferred to, and they're living in South Korea.
21 They're over there, but we just didn't make a connection.

22 LC: If and when you do go back, where would you like to go in Vietnam?

23 RS: Well, I would like to spend most of my time probably—I'd love to go up to
24 Hue because I think that would just be fascinating to see the old city.

25 LC: You never got there?

26 RS: I never got there. I'd like to go to Hanoi and I understand that they have
27 some great pottery. Those big pottery pieces, that's west of there. I know that my wife
28 would love to see that because she's big into pottery. I don't know if she'd be as big as
29 those things are. It would be kind of fascinating. Then I'd like to spend a good deal of
30 time around Da Nang. I'd like to be able to get a jeep and take off. I don't know if that's
31 possible, but just drive some of the roads.

1 LC: Do you think you'd look for things that are familiar or would you just like to
2 be there again?

3 RS: Well, I would like to be there again. I'd like to look for things that are
4 familiar, however through the network, 3-1 network, some of the people have been back
5 and their commentary was if you're looking for the things that are familiar, don't because
6 it's been thirty-five years and everything's changed. Some of the roads would still exist
7 and some of those villages, I'm sure are still there. I don't know if any of the people
8 whom I met are still alive or what has happened, but I would like to just be able to walk
9 through them again.

10 LC: What do you think that would do for you? How do you think that would
11 affect you?

12 RS: You know I don't know. I wouldn't have the slightest idea of what my
13 reaction would be. You know—right now I don't believe I'm big into flashback so that I
14 don't think that that would really affect me, but who knows. I don't know.

15 LC: But you'd be interested in finding out?

16 RS: Yeah.

17 LC: Let me ask you about how your Vietnam experience affects your thinking
18 about current events. You've alluded to this, but I wonder if you had anything to say
19 about the deployment of U.S. troops to Iraq and any parallels or things that that
20 deployment makes you think about Vietnam or how Vietnam makes you think about
21 Iraq?

22 RS: There are similarities that I think are being set up by the press coverage of
23 what is going on in Iraq. The similarities would not only be the media but also, once
24 again, the politicians. I think that Hillary Clinton going over there to Afghanistan and
25 then going into Iraq saying what she said to the soldiers there about the people back in
26 this country not really kind of supporting what Bush is doing, but they're there anyway. I
27 think that's tantamount to Jane Fonda's sitting on an anti aircraft weapon and saying I'm
28 an American, but we don't support you.

29 LC: How did you feel about—?

30 RS: I think—

31 LC: Go ahead.

1 RS: I think that that undermines what the soldiers are trying to do. Then having
2 Hillary Clinton, just think about this, Hillary Clinton giving military advice. Now is there
3 any greater oxymoron that ever existed? What does she know about anything military,
4 but she's a politician so therefore she knows it all so therefore she's gonna—once again I
5 would defend to the death her right to say it, but I think she is being such a horse's ass
6 that it's unbelievable.

7 LC: You're drawing a parallel to her and Jane Fonda. Can you say something
8 about how you felt about the Jane Fonda's trip to Hanoi was?

9 RS: Well, I think that they should have executed her.

10 LC: You think who should have?

11 RS: We should have.

12 LC: The United States?

13 RS: Yeah, I think she should have been charged and criminally exposed for what
14 she did. I think that it was absolutely unforgivable.

15 LC: Was it aid and comfort to the enemy?

16 RS: Yeah, I think so. I think absolutely it was.

17 LC: Have you heard her speak about what she did? Do you recall seeing, for
18 example, her interview on ABC's (American Broadcasting Company) program?

19 RS: You know, you asked me a question earlier, did I look at a couple of films
20 and things like that afterwards and I said sure. She's the only person I will not—I don't
21 care what she's doing, I will not listen to her. I will not look at her. My detestation for
22 that woman, she is on her own pedestal with how much I dislike her.

23 LC: And nothing she could do at this point—?

24 RS: There is nothing that she could do at this point.

25 LC: Would you say that you are alone in that feeling?

26 RS: No.

27 LC: That degree of disgust with her persists?

28 RS: Yes. I know it exists.

29 LC: How do you know?

30 RS: Through the 3-1 network.

31 LC: And guys talk about it still?

1 RS: Oh, yeah. Yes. Absolutely.

2 LC: You see sort of Hillary Clinton, some of the things that she's done with
3 regard to the deployment in Iraq as—

4 RS: Of the same ilk. I mean, I think that she does it out of total ignorance. I mean
5 for the smartest person in the world, she's the stupidest person I've ever seen.

6 LC: Do you think she is very intelligent?

7 RS: I think that she is intelligent. I don't think that she uses her intelligence.

8 LC: How so?

9 RS: I just don't believe that anybody can come to the conclusions that she comes
10 to if they thought about them. She is a politician and when she goes to a place like Iraq
11 and makes statements like she made, she, I think, is in the process of cutting her own
12 political throat which I don't necessarily object to. I'm glad to see that she does things
13 like that. What she said is going—if she runs for further office, is going to be used
14 against her. I bet to my bottom dollar that what she did and what Jane did are going to
15 come up in the same sentence nationally. I think she is a very intelligent person, but an
16 intelligent person whose thinking wouldn't have done or said what she said.

17 LC: Do you think she will run for office, outside of the office that she presently
18 holds?

19 RS: Yeah. I mean, she got that office because she ran against somebody that
20 nobody ever heard of and that was because what's his name cut his own political throat
21 by getting divorced. It wasn't his fault that he had cancer.

22 LC: Pataki?

23 RS: Yeah, was it Pataki? No, it wasn't.

24 LC: It was the former governor. I can't remember.

25 RS: My mind went blank. I think that's the only reason she won there. So
26 therefore she won in office. She is now a senator. She's trying to bide her time. I don't
27 think she is going to try to run this time around. I think Howard Dean has too much
28 momentum especially after Al Gore gave the endorsement. I think that his stance on a lot
29 of things is going to come back and get him so I think that Bush will win again. After
30 Bush is out, I think that she will run. I think she'll try to make a run for the presidency.

31 LC: Do you think that the parallel to Jane Fonda will be an effect?

1 RS: I think it will.

2 LC: Particularly with veterans.

3 RS: Yes, very much so.

4 LC: Let's talk about the veterans' community. You're hooked in a bit because the
5 way the Internet has created kind of on-line communities and particularly with your unit.
6 You did mention earlier that you had gone to a reunion. Do you see yourself going to
7 reunions as the years go along?

8 RS: Occasionally. There's one that is going to take place in October of '04 in
9 Saint Louis.

10 LC: Is that a 3-1 reunion?

11 RS: Yeah. I'm going to go to that. There's another corpsman from 3-1 whom I've
12 been corresponding with and evidently he does have some PTSD (post traumatic stress
13 disorder) problems. Through the Internet I've been trying to lend support to him and he
14 wants to go to that reunion, which would be his first. He would like it if I was there. So
15 I'd like to go and I'd like to see him again.

16 LC: Is this someone that you actually remember from in-country?

17 RS: Yes.

18 LC: Was the reunion that you attended very difficult? I know that you said you
19 saw someone that you had worked on who I believe was a double amputee. Was it
20 difficult for you to go?

21 RS: It was not difficult for me to drive up there.

22 LC: Was it difficult for you to be there?

23 RS: It was difficult. I saw a fair number of people. I was happy I went, otherwise
24 I wouldn't be considering going to St. Louis. I enjoyed speaking with the people, seeing
25 some of the people again. It reminded me of how old I am. I'm going oh my god, do I
26 look like that?

27 LC: It's a little frightening there.

28 RS: Oh, man, talk about a picture of reality. It was good to see them. It was tough
29 to see some of the people. I mean it was tough to see Bob. Especially since I was
30 convinced that he was not alive, but I went through it, did it.

1 LC: Might it be easier to go to the next one because of the time you've spent on
2 the Internet kind of connecting with people in a different way?

3 RS: It may be.

4 LC: The Internet is changing everything. It's making it possible to find people as
5 well as communicate with them once you found them. Have you used the Internet to try
6 to locate other people who you knew in Vietnam who you thought you might like to catch
7 up with?

8 RS: Yes, I have.

9 LC: Have you actually succeeded in finding anyone?

10 RS: Yeah, I've run into another corpsman who was over there. I've talked
11 occasionally a guy who was a radioman from our platoon. I've run into, I would guess
12 about half a dozen or so people. I wonder other than Vietnam how much we have in
13 common.

14 LC: You sort of felt that way when you were there too. You felt like an anomaly
15 I think you said.

16 RS: Right.

17 LC: Some of that still is there?

18 RS: Some of it is still there a little bit. I mean you try and get rid of it because
19 that just creates an artificial barrier, which shouldn't exist.

20 LC: Let me ask you in general about the United States government's relationship
21 with veterans. You said you don't have anything really to do with the Veterans
22 Administration. Do you think that the United States has recognized and treated well its
23 Vietnam veterans?

24 RS: Probably not. I think that although I understand that there have to be certain
25 budgetary constraints on any program, I think that the Veterans programs should carry
26 one of the highest priorities.

27 LC: In the national budget?

28 RS: In the national budget. These are the people who are willing to put their lives
29 on the line to make sure that this country exists and that it is there for future generations,
30 et cetera, et cetera. That it should be just an absolute high priority for the veterans to be
31 treated appropriately. If they have medical problems, anything related to service they

1 should be covered by. I think that if anybody needed a National Medical Program for
2 when some of these guys are retiring and reaching the twilight of their years that they
3 should have a place that respects who they are and what they've done and recognizes it. I
4 was at a mall I guess about a month ago, a month and a half ago. I was there. It was the
5 middle of the week and I had gone out and visited a client and was coming back in. Had
6 to pick up something at a hardware store that was in the mall and then grab some pizza. I
7 was out in the common area in the middle of the mall and was looking for a place to sit
8 down so I could chomp down on the food. There was this guy sitting there at the table
9 and he recognizes that I am looking for a place. He says, "Hey, have a seat." I thanked
10 him and sat down. He was wearing one of these hats from some USS something or
11 another, I forget what the ship was. I asked him if he had been in the Navy and yeah he
12 was. He had been in World War II and all the rest of this. It was really neat talking to the
13 guy. He was kind of this old gomer who I'm sure that I will be one day. The people who
14 are walking by don't pay a bit of attention to them or whatever it is. They don't recognize
15 what this guy's been through, what he's done and I think people like that deserve
16 absolute respect. I mean he was living a fine life and all the rest of that. He went to the
17 mall and he walked around the mall to get his exercise. He and a couple of his friends
18 would meet up and they would drink coffee and BS and then go home. It was part of their
19 routine. It was good to see that they had a great routine and enjoyed each other's
20 company et cetera. But I've also seen in some VA Hospitals, because there is one that is
21 not too far from us, where some of these guys who are in the twilight of their years, the
22 situation isn't that great. I'm sensitive to this because we've just moved my mother into a
23 nursing home. The amount of time and effort that we have put in trying to find the right
24 place so that she is comfortable, so that psychologically she can deal with her now
25 situation which is one where it's not going to change. That sort of respect—and we have
26 some finances to cover it, which makes a great deal of difference, but I think there should
27 be a way to, when you're looking at veterans, out of appreciation saying we can do better
28 in terms of the facilities that are available to you and the care that you're going to be
29 given.

30 LC: Is it your sense that there's been kind of a chronic for many years of under
31 funding of, for example, medical care for veterans?

1 RS: Yeah, I think so.

2 LC: Are you thinking that they should have, they including you, should have
3 some guarantee from the government in terms of medical care that goes beyond what's
4 currently offered by the VA?

5 RS: I think that it could be done on a need base criteria. I'm not generally in
6 favor of need-based things. When our daughters were looking for schools I thought that
7 the need base criteria as the only criteria didn't reward kids. I didn't care if it was Bill
8 Gates. If Bill Gates has a kid who is getting straight As in a tough school and has a
9 challenging curriculum that that person on their own merit should be able to get a merit
10 scholarship somewhere. It doesn't work that way. I mean Boston University had merit
11 scholarships. That's one of the reasons that Sara chose that. She said, "You know there
12 are going to be some bright people going to this place. This is where I want to go." So
13 need based in terms of veterans who apply for benefits I think that it should be there so
14 that they can apply and that they can receive the benefits that they deserve.

15 LC: Do you have any—?

16 RS: I mean I don't want it for myself. I'll take care of me.

17 LC: But you recognize that there are people who aren't in that position and if
18 they're veterans they, perhaps, particular recognition from the government is not
19 inappropriate.

20 RS: Right.

21 LC: Do you have any observations to make on the continuing search by the
22 United States government in cooperation with Vietnamese and Laotian governments for
23 men who did not come home from Vietnam?

24 RS: I think for the families of these people, a final resolution is desirable, but is
25 there a point when you say enough's enough? I don't know. I would imagine that if I
26 were looking for somebody in particular that I wouldn't want it to go on forever.

27 LC: Over the years have you followed that U.S. policy on engagement with the
28 Vietnamese government even before diplomatic recognition—?

29 RS: I've read about it.

30 LC: There was no one from 3-1 that you know of who did not come back?

31 RS: Not that I'm aware of.

1 LC: I wonder if that's something that the 3-1 Internet group ever mentions or
2 talks about.

3 RS: I have not seen it.

4 LC: Is that right?

5 RS: Yeah.

6 LC: What would you say are the principal issues that the guys on the web talk
7 about? Were they talking about their families or what's going on in their lives now or are
8 they talking about Vietnam?

9 RS: They're mainly talking about Iraq. Some of them have sons who are there
10 and—could you hang on just a sec?

11 LC: Absolutely. Sure.

12 RS: My other phone is ringing.

13 LC: Dev, what was the most significant thing that you learned while you were in
14 Vietnam?

15 RS: Most significant thing.

16 LC: It could be about you or it could be about the war.

17 RS: Well, I think it was about me. I try not to be totally egocentric.

18 LC: That's all right. Actually, that's okay.

19 RS: It was a greater degree of self-reliance that I could accomplish a lot of things.

20 LC: Was that something that you carried forward?

21 RS: I think so, yeah. I mean I could react to things quickly. I found out that I
22 have a good decision making ability in a stressful situation and can react pretty quickly
23 without having to debate and generally come up with the appropriate response.

24 LC: You said earlier, I think yesterday, that the war has affected your entire life.
25 Can you just talk about that for a second? How do you see that, it's affected everything
26 that has come afterwards?

27 RS: Well, I think that it's made me, gave me greater cognizance of global
28 situations and things and created a need for me to understand the dynamics of global,
29 political decisions and how people arrive at them.

30 LC: That you wanted to pay attention to.

1 RS: That I want to pay attention to. It has made a change in that I have a desire to
2 pass on to future generations a sense of what I believe the United States is and represents
3 and our responsibility as a nation, and as individuals within that nation to a global
4 community. I mentioned that I taught a couple of classes. I taught one over at another
5 school, I guess about a month, a month and a half ago.

6 LC: This is you lecturing to a class?

7 RS: It's lecturing to a class. I've done this several times. Alan James, whom I
8 went to China with, I went to several of his history classes and talked with the kids about
9 Vietnam. It's not the personal experiences. I mean the personal experience at this point
10 are really anecdotal. Those are just stories. What's important is where we are now and
11 where we go. That's always been important. History is history. You learn from history.
12 You learn from things in the past. You constantly learn from the things in the past. What
13 you learn, it changes. It doesn't mean what happen changes. It means your view of what
14 happened changes. You use that history to see where you are and where you want to go
15 and what is important and what is not important. For me, trying to relate to younger
16 people who are at an age where they can understand the distinctions I try to make, that is
17 very important to me.

18 LC: Those are the reasons really for looking back at the war now?

19 RS: Those are reasons for looking back at it so that I can understand it more
20 fully.

21 LC: Yes, your understanding is very different in 2003 than in 1983 or whenever.

22 RS: But it changes so very much from 1973, to '83, to '93 to 2003. It's a process.
23 I've written some things down that you know back in the mid 1980s or actually early
24 1990s when I was first beginning to talk about it and really think about it. I look back at
25 what I've written down and then I see where I am now and I see an evolution of thought
26 that has been bolstered by study of the situation, reading the books, listening to my
27 friends on the internet, looking at today's situations, today's history, which is not an
28 oxymoron. Seeing where I've come and the evolution of it. So for me, yes it has been a
29 very important part of my life, but it's more for the ability to transmit the information that
30 I have to people, hoping that they can begin to understand the love that I have for this

1 country. It may sound corny. What has happened recently, the things that John Ashcroft
2 has done to freedoms in this country, I'm really a civil libertarian at heart I think.

3 LC: This is Attorney General John?

4 RS: Yes. In terms of the restrictions on freedom, I think are counterproductive to
5 what this entire country was about.

6 LC: Are you talking about the Patriot Act?

7 RS: Yes.

8 LC: And what specific element of it?

9 RS: Oh, it affects me everyday of my business when I'm trying to deal with my
10 clients.

11 LC: How?

12 RS: The paperwork that I have to go through. I tried to open up a brokerage
13 account for my daughter for her twenty-first birthday, where I could buy her some stock.
14 I couldn't do it because she was down in Florida and I couldn't get her signature on the
15 documents. I couldn't verify who she was because I didn't have her driver's license. I
16 was only there at her birth. I know who she is. I can't open an account because of the
17 bureaucratic mishmash that I have to go through.

18 LC: Are there other pieces of it too that concern you?

19 RS: I went up to see the Liberty Bell.

20 LC: In Philadelphia.

21 RS: In Philadelphia. Hadn't been up there in years and we decided to take a day
22 trip up there, or actually an overnight with another couple and go out and have a nice
23 dinner and see the historic places within Philadelphia. They've got these metal detectors
24 to go in to see the Liberty Bell. I almost had to undress in order to get into the place to
25 see it. I didn't know what was setting their metal detectors off. I had no clue.

26 LC: How did that make you feel?

27 RS: It made me feel—I was really angry. When I finally go through to the place,
28 I walked through it, didn't even look at the bell and just walked outside. I just said,
29 "Liberty Bell, right." I said, "Give me a break."

30 LC: Yeah, there's a little irony there.

1 RS: You have invaded my person so that I can go in and see this thing which
2 declared liberty throughout this country. Yeah, that does not work for me.

3 LC: Do you take as a given the purposes behind the new, much more intensive
4 sort of body search security?

5 RS: I understand that, but in this day of political correctness, they have taken
6 what might be a responsible response to the situation and turned it completely
7 unreasonable.

8 LC: How?

9 RS: I've done a fair amount of flying through the course of the last few years.
10 Going down to Florida to visit our daughter there, to Boston to see our other daughter,
11 you know whatever. We fly around a bit and you see who they're searching in airports.

12 LC: Who are they searching?

13 RS: I've seen them search little old ladies. Yeah, right, this woman is a terrorist.
14 There is no common sense that is being used or guiding it because the guiding principle is
15 now political correctness. I used to think that being a discriminating individual was a
16 positive connotation. Now if I discriminate, my God, I'm the worst criminal this country
17 has ever seen.

18 LC: When you say the political correctness as sort of informing, for example,
19 who's getting heavily screened at airports and so forth, for people twenty-five or more
20 years from now who aren't using our vernacular, what does that mean?

21 RS: What, political correctness?

22 LC: Yeah and how that plays out in this era.

23 RS: Political correctness is, I guess, it's more of a speech or how you use
24 language and how you conduct your life in terms of your references to people of other
25 races, religions, origins. Political correctness is an over sensitivity. Several times during
26 this interview I've made reference to God. God is not politically correct.

27 LC: Why?

28 RS: If you try to do this in a school setting, in a public school setting, then it's a
29 violation of church and state. It's not politically correct to make a reference to a deity or
30 whom you believe in because you might be possibly offending somebody who doesn't

1 believe in that deity. It's a matter of how you speak and how you act that can offend
2 absolutely nobody. Well, that means that nobody is allowed to speak.

3 LC: How does that play out, for example at the airport example where they're
4 searching little old ladies in wheelchairs and such?

5 RS: Well, if they try to discriminate and isolate somebody who might look to be
6 of Arab decent and say, "Okay, you are more likely to be a terrorist than an eighty-five-
7 year-old white haired lady," then you've discriminated against the Arab and it's not
8 politically correct to do so. Now if I were Arab and was being searched, I might be a little
9 bit irked on this thing, but I would also have to be smart enough to realize that there's a
10 reason behind it. The reason behind it might be that people of my appearance would be
11 more likely to blow up a plane than a little old lady in a wheel chair.

12 LC: Or at least have in the past have done so.

13 RS: Right. So that our experiences has said that I would be more likely—now to
14 me, as an Arab, I would go back to the word of responsibility. I would say, "Well, maybe
15 I as an Arab should take it along with other Arabs who do not blow up airplanes upon
16 ourselves to try to correct this impression by blowing the whistle on those who would
17 blow up planes or taking responsibly for our group," whatever that might be. We had a
18 guy who is from an Islamic temple in Baltimore or mosque in Baltimore, come and speak
19 at our church. This was right after 9/11. He was trying to make the point that the greatest
20 majority of the people in Islam do not believe in what the extremists are doing and that it
21 is an extreme arm of Islam that is carrying out the war for the Jihad against the United
22 States and saying that this is not the general belief that most people in Islam are as a
23 matter of fact quite passive in their beliefs and are probably more akin to Quakers than
24 they are to somebody who is willing to blow anything up. I asked him the question, I
25 said, "Well, don't you feel that you as one who professes Islam, isn't it your
26 responsibility or part of your responsibility and those who are like you, who are pacifists
27 in nature, to take responsibility for what is happening to your religion and do something
28 about it?" "Oh, well, that's against our religion because that would be"—I'm going okay,
29 fine. If that is their attitude, then they should bare the brunt of the searches at airports. If
30 they do something about it, then perhaps in the future they might not be searched. It's
31 their responsibility to do it.

1 LC: More broadly you have concerns about this patriotic act, impact, on personal
2 freedoms here?

3 RS: Yes.

4 LC: Do you see that receding or do you see it continuing?

5 RS: I think it's—with my wife being a librarian, and the library community has
6 gone nuts about this thing because they passed into law, or part of the law, the Patriotic
7 Act was an ability to go in and screen the reading habits of any of the patrons of various
8 libraries without having a search warrant.

9 LC: How did they do that?

10 RS: How did the government do it?

11 LC: How would the government do that?

12 RS: Well, I don't know. The libraries aren't cooperating with them. According to
13 the law they would have the right to do that. Ashcroft's response to that is, "Oh, we aren't
14 going to do that. It's there, but we're not doing that. Nobody's ever done it in the past,
15 why would you think we would do that in the future?" Well, gee Mr. Ashcroft, I wonder.
16 If you have the ability, somebody's going to do it.

17 LC: This presumably rests on utilizing the Internet and book checkout, records,
18 and all that sort of thing.

19 RS: Correct.

20 LC: The librarian that your wife is familiar, now she works at John Hopkins
21 University, and the librarians in her community are kind of not being cooperative?

22 RS: They're hoping not to be. I mean, they've never really been confronted with
23 it, but the fact is that it's in the law and that's what they're objecting to.

24 LC: They have concerns about—

25 RS: They have tremendous concerns about it. I mean the whole library
26 community does. How do you protect the confidentiality of your patrons? The ability to
27 gain access to those already exists if they have a judge sign off on it.

28 LC: Right, get a warrant.

29 RS: Yeah. They can get a warrant and they can look at it. They have that ability.
30 So why do you need the ability to wily neally search all the records. You could go on

1 witch hunts. You talk about McCarthyism. I mean, this is opening the door to that kind of
2 witch-hunt.

3 LC: As a veteran, particularly, do you feel this is just a really sharp attack on the
4 things that you were interested in fighting for and that you did fight for?

5 RS: Absolutely.

6 LC: Dev is there anything else that you would like to say or add to this
7 interview?

8 RS: I don't know. I think we have covered a lot.

9 LC: We've covered quite a bit, but there may be something that you know about
10 and I don't know which questions to ask and that happens. That you think really would
11 be of interest to people as the years go by and this interview becomes part of a historical
12 record about the war and about how it's affected people's lives. There maybe something
13 that you would like to kind of toss in that I haven't poked you with the right stick, you
14 know what I'm saying.

15 RS: I think that the main thing is when I go back to the word responsibility. That
16 it is up to us as the people of this country to look at what goes on around us and
17 understand that everything that happens around us affects us. We have to, at some point,
18 take responsibility for either approving of or disapproving of some of the activities that
19 do occur. People talk about drug abuse in this country. Well, if everybody in this country
20 who is against the misuse of drugs did something about it, I think that drug abuse would
21 abate. We look at crime as it happens, especially in Baltimore and Washington which are
22 two of the most crime ridden places in the country. If people take responsibility and I
23 don't mean a passive responsibility, I mean an active responsibility. My wife goes nuts
24 when I start talking about this one. I walked into a bank about five years ago and it
25 happened to be being robbed at the time.

26 LC: Was this in Baltimore?

27 RS: Yeah, it was in Baltimore. I realized what was happening when I recognized
28 the tellers were distracted. I saw the guy who was doing it. He saw me see him and I just
29 started running at him.

30 LC: You just ran right at him?

1 RS: Yeah and all of a sudden he grabbed as much money as he could. He starts
2 running out the door. There are dollar bills and twenties flying all over the place. I'm
3 screaming that he robbed the bank. My knees are shot. I can't run fast. All of a sudden
4 people out in the street who saw, started running after this guy.

5 LC: Was he armed? Could you tell?

6 RS: I don't know.

7 LC: You didn't know?

8 RS: I didn't know.

9 LC: Okay, so he could have been.

10 RS: He could have been. Eventually, I mean he was the most unfortunate robber
11 that ever existed because a class at the county court was letting out with undercover
12 police officers and he ran into about twenty of them.

13 LC: Like a Darwin of orders.

14 RS: Yeah, exactly. So he was captured quickly. We took him to court and I was
15 asked to testify, which I did. We put him away for life because he was a three time loser.

16 LC: For again, for people later on, three time loser means—in Maryland you
17 must have a law that—

18 RS: Third time and you're in jail for life.

19 LC: Third time committing a felony?

20 RS: Felony. Things like that, but it didn't take thought. It took reaction.

21 LC: In fact, if you had stopped and kind of really thought about it—

22 RS: If I would have thought about it I would have said, woof, that's not a good
23 idea. The bottom line is, if you try to imbue in yourself and others around you that this is
24 what the reaction should be, then the crime, I feel, would be far less than it is now. I
25 mean tremendously less, and the costs to our society would be less, in terms of trauma, in
26 terms of money, in terms of everything.

27 LC: Not just crime, this reminds me of you blowing the whistle on the corrupt
28 county down there in North Carolina. Same kind of thing where you just said look this is
29 wrong and I'm going to do something about it. Do you think that that's really a key to
30 what future security of the United States, the future—?

1 RS: If the people of this country don't take responsibility for what's happening in
2 our society then we have to rely on the John Ashcrofts and that is a threat to our society.
3 It's a threat of the constitution.

4 LC: Well, shall we leave it there Dev?

5 RS: Sure.

6 LC: Okay.