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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with David Eichhorn  
Conducted by Richard Verrone, Ph.D.  
March 29; April 12; May 5, 2005  
Transcribed by Eunice Lee**

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. David D. Eichhorn. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special  
3 Collections Library interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University. Today is  
4 March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and it's 1:06 PM central standard time. David, you are in Fleming,  
5 Ohio. Is that correct?

6 David Eichhorn: That's correct.

7 RV: Okay. Dave, why don't we start with some biographical information on  
8 yourself? Can you tell me when you were born, where you were born, and a little bit  
9 about your early childhood?

10 DE: Okay. I was born in Noble County, Ohio, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1950. I was the  
11 youngest of eleven children.

12 RV: Wow. That's a big family.

13 DE: It was a big family. My parents, you know, they started housekeeping  
14 during the Depression. Like I said, they didn't have anything back in the '30s and of  
15 course I was—by the time I come along things had improved. Grew up on a farm. We  
16 all worked.

17 RV: So you all lived out in the county, out away from the city?

18 DE: Yeah. Like I say, when I was four years old we moved to Washington  
19 County, Ohio, which is roughly forty miles from where I was born. Like I said, I grew up  
20 on a farm, grew up in a house that didn't have indoor plumbing, grew up with an  
21 outhouse. Like I said it was on a farm and we milked cows and separated the milk, sold

1 cream, and fed the skim milk to hogs, and raised chickens. I always kind of felt like I  
2 didn't have as much as the kids whose fathers worked in the factories and stuff, but I had  
3 a good childhood. I had to work growing on the farm, but grew up with it, and it's not  
4 like something that you had and lost. So I had a good childhood. Like I said I grew up  
5 early on with a strong work ethic.

6 RV: Was it a working farm, Dave? What kind of a farm was it?

7 DE: Well, like I said we had cattle and chickens and hogs and grew a big garden.  
8 My mom did a lot of canning. She baked bread. It was fairly self-sufficient. This is, you  
9 know, kind of like Appalachia through here, southern Ohio. It's hill country. So I guess  
10 it was—I wouldn't classify it as poor, but we always had electricity and plenty to eat and  
11 plenty to wear and stuff.

12 RV: Tell me about your brothers and sisters. You were the youngest out of  
13 eleven.

14 DE: Right. There was six boys and five girls. As far as military service my dad  
15 was too young for World War I and too old for World War II so, but I had some uncles in  
16 World War II on my mom's side and had an uncle killed in Italy. My oldest brother, he  
17 was in Korea in 1950. There was eighteen years between my oldest brother and I. Then  
18 the other brother, two brothers in the Air Force and two brothers in the Army.

19 RV: Wow, lot of military experience.

20 DE: Mm-hmm. Like I said my dad's brother, he was in World War I, but he died  
21 before I was born. Never got to met him.

22 RV: Did your family members talk to you about their military experiences? Did  
23 you ask them?

24 DE: No. It wasn't really discussed much because, you know, I was really  
25 probably junior high age before I realized that my uncle was killed in Italy. Like I said,  
26 my paternal uncle, my dad's brother who was in World War I, he wasn't much, he  
27 committed suicide. That wasn't—it just wasn't talked about. Like I say, growing up, the  
28 kind of unwritten rule around the house was shut the hell up and get to work. That's just  
29 the way I was raised.

30 RV: Right. Well, what was your—tell me about your dad. What was he like?  
31 How would you describe him?

1 DE: Quiet. The only thing my dad and I ever did together was work. Yeah. He  
2 was quiet. He didn't go to town. As far as physical affection, I mean, we never told each  
3 other we loved him, but we knew it. It was, I mean, it was kind of hard to describe but I  
4 can never remember my dad ever telling me he loved me or my mom or anybody. We  
5 just worked and that was it. But I had a good father. Like I said, that's probably the way  
6 he was raised.

7 RV: What about your mother? What was she like?

8 DE: My mom liked to get out and talk a little bit more. She would go places and  
9 my dad would stay home. I mean, the only—well, we did go to my maternal  
10 grandparents once a month. One Sunday a month we'd go—they lived back up in Noble  
11 County. We'd go up there about once a month and that's about the only socializing my  
12 dad ever did. I mean he didn't go to any school functions or anything, but my mom did.  
13 She would get out and gab and what not.

14 RV: Right. Did you get along with all your brothers and sisters?

15 DE: Most of the time we'd be fighting one minute and the next—like I said me  
16 being the youngest always just kind of thought my exploits and adventures didn't quite  
17 measure up but they did. We got along. My closest brother was four years older than me  
18 and I have a sister three years older so yeah.

19 RV: Do you guys see each other today?

20 DE: Not much. Let's see there's my sister next to me, she just passed away here  
21 a year ago in November. I've had three brothers deceased and two sisters, but we don't  
22 really visit much today. I suppose my sister in Colorado and I is the closest. There's  
23 eleven years between us. But that's just happened in the last ten years that we become  
24 closer, visiting and talking.

25 RV: So you grew up, sounds like, really working hard on that farm. What kind  
26 of things did you do on the farm?

27 DE: Okay. Well, drove tractor from eight years old on. You know, milk cows  
28 by hand from eight or nine. That and then hire out to the neighbors in hay season. Then  
29 fence, and of course you had daily chores, feed the animals, start to take care of animals  
30 because that was our livelihood, I guess. Then my mom, she did take a job as a cook at  
31 the school when I was in like the second grade or so, so had a little bit of extra income.

1           RV: Tell me about your schooling and going to school as a young boy. What  
2 was that like for you?

3           DE: Well, got my butt beat. I suppose today they'd put me on Ritalin or  
4 something. But I was just a typical boy. If what the teacher was trying to teach, if I took  
5 an interest in it I did okay. If I didn't, you know, I just didn't, but I didn't have any  
6 trouble. I guess been blessed with better than average intelligence thing. I could just  
7 pick up enough to get decent grades and never have to apply myself. But I was kind of a  
8 class clown and what not a little bit.

9           RV: So you were kind of naturally smart and picked up on things relatively well,  
10 what I'm hearing.

11          DE: Well, yeah. Basically. But I never really had to apply myself either. I mean  
12 just kind of picked up naturally, I guess.

13          RV: Did you have any favorite subjects, Dave?

14          DE: Yeah. More or less history and geography and science. I'd get As in that,  
15 but English and writing and spelling would be down to Cs. But you know like history  
16 and geography interested me so I guess that's why I did better because I was interested in  
17 it. If I wasn't interested I didn't really apply myself.

18          RV: Did you go to the same school all the way through twelfth grade?

19          DE: Well, more or less. They built a new school when it was after the fourth  
20 grade. I mean my first four years, it was like—well, my second and third grade was in a  
21 one room school, but there was one building with three grades in it and then there was  
22 another building with one grade in it. It had outside toilets. But then they built the new  
23 school and went there from the fourth through the eighth, and the new high school was  
24 built the same time as the new grade school. The same school district, yes.

25          RV: Okay. Did you continue working on the farm as you were going through all  
26 your school years?

27          DE: Pardon?

28          RV: Did you continue working on the farm as you—?

29          DE: Oh yeah, yeah. I'd have chores to do in the morning and chores to do in the  
30 evening. I wanted to play sports, but my dad—of course, older brothers got to because

1 there's more kids at home, but my dad, his health was starting to fail and so I couldn't  
2 play sports.

3 RV: But you wanted to?

4 DE: But yes. I wanted to. I did play one year. I talked my dad into it and then  
5 got pissed off because I wasn't playing enough football and, I guess, so I quit that. But  
6 yeah, I continued working on the farm right up until the day I left.

7 RV: Do you, today do you look back, Dave, and resent that a little bit that you  
8 could've been a good athlete and done that kind of thing?

9 DE: Well, I probably resented it for a little while, but I've come to term with it.  
10 As I've gotten older that's just the way things was. I can understand it more now, but it  
11 was a big disappointment at the time as a fourteen year old and what not.

12 RV: Tell me about girls. Did you have a girlfriend?

13 DE: Yeah.

14 RV: Did you have time for that, I guess, is what I'm asking?

15 DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was kind of shy, but back then they had a little of what  
16 they called three-two beer in Ohio. You could get that eighteen so there's always  
17 eighteen year olds in high school, who'd start drinking beer, fourteen, freshman in high  
18 school. That helped with girls or helped me with the girls I guess. You know, kind of  
19 allowed me to be more relaxed and not as self-conscious and shy. I guess maybe I had  
20 low self-esteem or something they'd say, I don't know. But then there was a girl that I  
21 pretty much dated all the way through high school who I actually wound up marrying ten  
22 days after I got back from Vietnam.

23 RV: Oh, really?

24 DE: Yeah.

25 RV: Wow.

26 DE: So yeah, I did okay with the girls, I guess.

27 RV: Well, tell me a little bit about growing up in the 1950s in America. What do  
28 you remember about popular culture and President Eisenhower and all that kind of thing?

29 DE: Well, I wanted a Davy Crockett coonskin hat. Remember that. Didn't get  
30 one but I wanted one. Went out to the neighbors, neighbors had a TV, we didn't you  
31 know when I was seven or eight. I was, what, twelve years old before we got a TV. So,

1 we'd go out to the neighbors to watch TV. But I can remember we listened to Gun  
2 Smoke and the Lone Ranger on radio with my dad and mom and older brothers and  
3 sisters and stuff. Even after we got a TV my dad never watched TV. Mom did and the  
4 other kids when they were still home, but Dad, he didn't change. He still listens to the  
5 radio, never watch TV.

6 RV: Did you all ask him to come join in and—?

7 DE: Yeah. I might go watch Cincinnati Reds when they was playing on TV. He  
8 followed the baseball on the radio every summer. Then there'd be some neighbors come  
9 in and play cards. We played a lot of games outside growing up, hide and seek and what  
10 not. We'd go down to the creek and swim. We just—we didn't all work, had a lot of  
11 fun. I mean growing up on a farm is a great place for a kid.

12 RV: It sounds like it. Both has its advantages and disadvantages, I guess, as  
13 every situation does. Well, so tell me a little bit about—you mentioned the Cincinnati  
14 Reds and I wanted to ask you about that. Did you follow pro sports as a boy or did that  
15 come later?

16 DE: No. I started right probably ten, eleven years old listening to the Reds. My  
17 older brother, he took me down to a ball game when I was fourteen or fifteen. My dad,  
18 we asked him to go, he wouldn't go. I mean, yeah, it might go three weeks or four weeks  
19 and my dad would never leave the farm. You know, go to town about once a month and  
20 get groceries.

21 RV: Now, was he from that area?

22 DE: Basically, yeah.

23 RV: Okay. Dave, tell me about your high school years. You're still working on  
24 the farm. Your grades, are they okay? Are you a good student?

25 DE: Yeah. My grades got better in high school for some reason. I don't really  
26 understand that. I was a freshman, sophomore year, you know, honor roll being A, A and  
27 B, but I took a more general course. Like I said, my freshman year, they thought well  
28 maybe give it a college since my grades were good. I got switched over to a college prep  
29 course and well, I did okay in the Spanish because I took an interest in it. In algebra I got  
30 left behind and my grades went down but still passed with a D. But then I went back to a

1 general course. I was just wanting to get through school and get off the farm and get a  
2 job and make money, I guess.

3 RV: So you did want to get off the farm?

4 DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

5 RV: You didn't—I guess one of your older brothers or more were going to work  
6 the farm when your dad passed or retired?

7 DE: No. It was never discussed. Matter of fact I bought the farm that I grew up  
8 on right now. That's where I'm sitting. My dad died in '74 and I bought this place in  
9 November of '75 and still here.

10 RV: Wow. Wow. Okay.

11 DE: Run a few cows, got me a horse. I work out, shift work.

12 RV: Tell me, Dave, about your memories there during your high school years and  
13 what was happening in the world and what was going on with Southeast Asia and  
14 Vietnam. What years were you in high school?

15 DE: '64 to '68.

16 RV: These are crucial, very active years for the Vietnam War. What do you  
17 remember about that and what did you hear in high school and what'd you guys think  
18 about it?

19 DE: Well, we thought, it's the Domino Theory. We had to make the stand, keep  
20 it, as basically everybody was for it. I remember, probably '65 or '66 they saying well  
21 we'll have it settled within—before the election. That's when my brother, he got drafted  
22 in '65 and he went to Vietnam. He was there '66, '67 in Saigon there.

23 RV: Did he make it through?

24 DE: Yes. I think he had some pretty good duty. I wanted to have it. I never got  
25 to see Saigon, but I've heard stories of it and I've heard stories early on, some of the  
26 pretty good duty, some of the earlier advisors had before it really got hot. But basically  
27 everybody was, you know, making a stand or was for it. Then the hippies in the peace  
28 movement come in and I never really thought about it much.

29 RV: I mean, what did you think of the draft? I mean, you know that if you guys  
30 didn't go on to college after you graduated then you were—

1 DE: Oh, they wouldn't draft me. Yeah, I could've went to college. My dad, I  
2 remember he even said to me, he had enough money to send me if I wanted to go. My  
3 oldest brother, he was in the Air Force went in Korea and matter of fact he got twenty-  
4 three years in the Air Force and then retired. He wanted me to sign up Air Force send me  
5 to college then I do the six years. But you know that was too long a time at eighteen  
6 years old. So, I just figured, well, looking back I wasn't too bright. I just didn't think it  
7 would happen to me, I guess.

8 RV: Right. Did your parents want you to go to college? Did you have  
9 aspirations to go to college?

10 DE: No. Not real strong. I mean, yeah, they would have wanted me to. Like I  
11 said, Dad said, he would pony, he had some money to pony up to go if I wanted to, but  
12 I'd have just partied and flunked out if I had went. It just wasn't a big thing for me, I  
13 guess, so I just wanted to get me a job and make some money.

14 RV: So, tell me what happened in '68 when you did graduate?

15 DE: Okay. Got off the farm. Well, actually, I was still seventeen when I  
16 graduated so nobody would hire me. I couldn't find a job that summer or fall. So  
17 actually I just bummed around and worked on a neighbor's farm here and then the  
18 following spring, which was '69, then went on a farm silo crew because I didn't really  
19 want to stay on a farm. There wasn't that much money in it. I wanted to get away from  
20 my parents. Like I said growing up my dad never drank or anything. He kind of looked  
21 down on it and I wanted to get out and drink and raise hell and have fun. With my father  
22 there I just kind of get, I felt like I wasn't doing the right thing. So, I wanted to get away  
23 from the farm and get to the big city. So I went out on a silo crew.

24 RV: A silo crew?

25 DE: Yeah. Building farm silos. Got to travel over in Pennsylvania and Maryland  
26 and New York. Then that June my sister come right back from Colorado for a visit and  
27 said there was plenty of work out there. So I went back to Colorado with her in June and  
28 got a job while they was building Interstate 25 there between south of Denver. So I got a  
29 job right off the flagman with general labor right off the bat and then got this letter before  
30 my nineteenth birthday to report for pre-induction physical. Well, I was kind of  
31 homesick too, I guess, a little bit, wanted to come home. So, I could've took my physical

1 out in Colorado, but I come back to Columbus and took my physical, and of course  
2 passed with flying colors. So then that was in September. I went to work with this silo  
3 crew that built industrial silos and worked for them a couple of months. Then I got my  
4 draft notice there in December of '69. Then three days later I got a notice that it had been  
5 rescinded because they went to the lottery and was going to draw numbers. My birthday  
6 was number four, so come January I got another draft notice. So that kind of was a  
7 downer.

8 RV: You had hopes, I guess, of avoiding that.

9 DE: Yeah. You know, and the thought never occurred to me to go to Canada. I  
10 mean, it was, I guess, duty to do it, I guess.

11 RV: Did you feel that? I mean was that something very conscious for you that  
12 you were serving your country in that bit or were you like well I don't have a choice, I  
13 have to do this?

14 DE: Well, it was more like I don't have a choice. I mean, my choice was to go to  
15 Canada, go to jail, or go to the military. So, I really didn't have a choice, but what I did  
16 do is I went and took the, went to the Army recruiter and got a two-year enlistment  
17 because the guy I went to school with had got drafted two months ago into the Marine  
18 Corps. There were, I don't know, a lot of people weren't aware of it, they were drafting  
19 into the Marine Corps, but at least I wasn't until I found out he got drafted into the  
20 Marine Corps. I didn't want to go to Marine Corps so I took the two year enlistment in  
21 the Army. The only thing, I had to leave at least two days before my induction date.  
22 That's how I wound up in the Army.

23 RV: How'd you feel about it when you got that draft notice, that second draft  
24 notice, what were you feeling at that point?

25 DE: Wasn't feeling good. It was sad. I guess sadness would describe the feeling  
26 more than anything.

27 RV: Were you living there on the farm with your folks?

28 DE: Back and forth. I was working out on the road, but I was coming back. It  
29 was the home base here on the farm.

30 RV: How'd they feel about it?

1 DE: I don't think they was real happy. I mean I know my dad said something  
2 about all the kids, like in Marietta, which is the county seat. You look around at the kids  
3 that were getting drafted and the ones that weren't. It's, well, just plain ain't fair.

4 RV: Right. Was your mom and dad, were they for the war or against the war or  
5 indifferent? Do you remember?

6 DE: I can't really remember. They never really said a whole lot about it as I  
7 recall. I know they were worried a lot, but of course you know they had sent two sons,  
8 older brother through Korea, my brother next to me through Vietnam. So I'm sure they  
9 was thinking, you know, our luck is going to run out.

10 RV: Right. Did your older brother who went to Vietnam, did he talk to you  
11 about what he did?

12 DE: No. Not really other than the drinking and the partying. He never really  
13 talked that much about it.

14 RV: How about the brother that went to Korea? Did he talk about his stuff that  
15 happened to him over there?

16 DE: No. It was never really discussed.

17 RV: Okay. Well, what did you think—before we talk about going forward there  
18 after you got into the Army, what did you think about the anti-war movement that was  
19 happening in '68, '69, '70 before you went in?

20 DE: Well, I thought they was a bunch of losers. I thought they needed to shut up  
21 and get behind the troops I guess. Stay in the main, and but I didn't have much use for  
22 them, I guess.

23 RV: Okay. Well, did you think that you would do well in the military in that  
24 kind of lifestyle or was this something that you weren't sure about?

25 DE: I really wasn't sure about it. I had enough sense to keep my mouth shut and  
26 do what I was told. I mean, I didn't know if I could take all the harassment and what not  
27 or, you know, I didn't know how I would do.

28 RV: Right. Any of your friends get drafted around the same time or were you  
29 pretty much by yourself?

30 DE: I went by myself because there was another kid from Belpre, you know,  
31 there are two of us from the county went the same time. But there was others that I went

1 to school with that were drafted and some enlisted in the Air Force and Navy. I couldn't  
2 see spending the four years. I could've probably got into the Air Force or Navy, but I  
3 couldn't see spending four years. That was a long time back then. Today it's nothing.

4 RV: Well, tell me where you did your basic training? You took off in, this is in  
5 January '70?

6 DE: February of '70.

7 RV: February 1970. Where did you go for your basic?

8 DE: Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

9 RV: Wow. Okay. So what was it like there at Bragg? What were your first  
10 impressions when you got there?

11 DE: Holy shit. Well, I was scared, but, you know, I was still—it hadn't been that  
12 long since I've been yelled at at home and what not so it wasn't like I'd been out on my  
13 own for a while and then being pulled into basic. As soon as it got from the reception  
14 station to our barracks the first person the DI (drill instructor) hollered for was me.

15 RV: Why?

16 DE: Well, he was from this area. So, you know, I lucked out right then.

17 RV: But that was a good thing or a bad thing?

18 DE: Well, it was a good thing. Plus, you know, in basic they—I went in pretty  
19 good shape. I think I went in weighing 183 pounds, come out weighing 181. They  
20 picked on the ones that were dumb and the ones that were physically out of shape. I  
21 mean at least in the—I was at—and then like I said Sergeant Parson there, he didn't  
22 harass me a lot, but some of the other DIs did, but I got through it okay. At least they  
23 didn't make me a squad leader or anything.

24 RV: So you did not want to be a part of that?

25 DE: No, I didn't want to be a leadership position. I just wanted to graduate and  
26 get on. Get my two years in and get out.

27 RV: What do you remember most about basic? What do you see when you think  
28 about it right now?

29 DE: Double time march. I always did a lot of, you know, marching and running  
30 and a lot of silly—well, I guess some of them I thought were silly harassment things like  
31 you're foot locker and stuff. Being, you know, called out in formation at 5:30 in the

1 morning and all this stuff. The physical, like I said, I come out in lot better shape than  
2 what I thought. I think going in on the PT (physical training) test you had to score three  
3 hundred to pass or three, I think, and I got—first test was about three fifty and I only  
4 lacked two points from maximum when I graduated. The 500 was the max, I guess, and I  
5 got a 498. The mile run did me in. I didn't max the mile run. But the physical training I  
6 remember about it and the harassment, I guess.

7 RV: Did you do well with that harassment? I mean were you able to deal with it  
8 okay?

9 DE: Yeah. One time I just almost physically lashed back, but I was smart enough  
10 to know that wasn't the thing to do. I mean I have lost my temper a couple of times in  
11 life and one time there I come close.

12 RV: What happened? Do you remember?

13 DE: It was like going—it was on the hand grenade range. If you threw it, like  
14 they had the façade of a face of a building and if it went through the window you scored  
15 higher than if it just hit the window or something. One of the DIs, he called back over  
16 here and wanted to know what I got on that and it actually went through the window. I  
17 was supposed to get the highest score. Of course you have other trainees scoring you, so  
18 he had him mark my score down.

19 RV: Why?

20 DE: I don't know if he was pushing me to see what I'd do or what but we got—  
21 he got my face a little bit. I think he said, "You want to hit me, don't you trainee?" I  
22 think I said, "Yes, drill sergeant, I do." He says, "Well, why don't ya?" I said, "I don't  
23 think that'd be a smart move on my part, I think." But it was just right there. Some of  
24 that—I don't know, I suppose it's just bullshit.

25 RV: Yeah. Had this guy been to Vietnam?

26 DE: I think this one had maybe.

27 RV: Did he talk to you all about his experiences?

28 DE: No, no. None of them. Well, Sergeant Parsons had. He talked to us about it  
29 a little bit.

30 RV: What did he tell you? Do you remember?

1 DE: I don't know. Charlie's going get your ass or something. I can't remember  
2 what he said there. I can't really remember. I know we had like a night ambush thing  
3 and he said we would have lost probably five guys out of the squad. But he was a pretty  
4 good shot. I remember out on the firing range he shot from the hip about fifty yards and  
5 drilled it. With the M-16 he's kind of showing off a little.

6 RV: What kind of shot were you? How were you with the weapons?

7 DE: Fair to lousy.

8 RV: Oh, really? Had you not handled some weapons on the farm?

9 DE: Yeah, yeah. I mean I qualified easy enough but, you know, I just wasn't that  
10 good a shot as some. I guess I would panic a little bit maybe.

11 RV: But you graduated.

12 DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

13 RV: Got through. Now, were they telling you all in basic that you're going to  
14 Vietnam or was this when you went through advanced?

15 DE: No. They were saying you could be, of course you know they had a lot of  
16 National Guard and Reserves going through training with us. They said there was a  
17 possibility, but nobody knew for sure.

18 RV: So when you graduated there at Bragg where did you go for your advanced  
19 training?

20 DE: Ft. Sam Houston next. They stuck me in the medics.

21 RV: Now, why did you get into the medics? Tell me about that.

22 DE: I have no idea.

23 RV: Really? You didn't volunteer? They didn't think you'd be quite adept at  
24 that?

25 DE: Well, you know, when I took the test, I scored good. They offered you to,  
26 well they offered me OCS (officer candidate school), different schools. I qualified for  
27 any school but I'd have to enlist for another year or either three, four, or six to go to some  
28 of the other schools. I said no. I just want to do my two years and out. So, I did not  
29 want to be a medic.

30 RV: Why not?

1 DE: A lot of responsibility. It's just—I would've been much better off being  
2 straight infantry. I mean, personally, but sometimes I like to think I make a difference  
3 but there's not that much you can do sometimes.

4 RV: Did you feel like you weren't going to be able to help enough people being a  
5 medic or was it the medical part of it that intimidated you a little bit?

6 DE: That I wouldn't do a good enough job or if I would do something that caused  
7 more harm than good, I guess was part of it.

8 RV: Okay. When did you go to Ft. Sam Houston? What month was this in  
9 1970?

10 DE: That would've been in May.

11 RV: Okay. Did you get any time off? Were you able to go back to Ohio?

12 DE: No. I just went straight from Ft. Bragg to Ft. Sam.

13 RV: Okay. Dave, why don't we take a break for a moment here?

**Interview with David Eichhorn**

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

**Date: April 12, 2005**

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. David Eichhorn. Today's April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005. It's 1:37 PM central  
3 standard time. I'm again in Lubbock, Texas, and, Dave, you're in Fleming, Ohio. Let's  
4 pick up where we left off and tell me about advanced training. You were sent down there  
5 to undergo training as a medic. Tell me about that.

6 Dave Eichhorn: Well, I was kind of surprised at it. It wouldn't have been the  
7 schooling I picked. I figured go infantry, but basically I got to Ft. Sam Houston and I  
8 guess the first, like a zero week, you either go get a military driver's license or they had a  
9 leadership preparatory course where you could be acting cadre, wear the stripes or  
10 whatever. It was supposed to be volunteer, but they wasn't getting enough volunteers so  
11 I got stuck in that. But then again, I guess like I said I did good on the test and stuff.

12 RV: They thought you were competent.

13 DE: Yeah. So, got that and that was just a humongous harassment course and  
14 class on leadership skills. Then, like, your bunk would have to be real tight and your  
15 foot locker and stuff. You squared away the first day there and went to class that day.  
16 While you was at class the DIs come in and tore up the bunks and the foot lockers and  
17 throw your stuff from one end of the bay area to the other and yelled at you a lot to get it  
18 back in shape, how awful it was. So I endured that for four days and dropped out because  
19 I really wasn't that gung ho, you know. So, then I got to my training class.

20 RV: Dave, let me ask you a question real quick. I'm sorry. Do you regret today  
21 not sticking with that or do you think you made the right decision?

22 DE: It's a wash. I should have just sucked it up and went on but, you know, I  
23 don't really regret it. In another way I wish I would have pushed myself and got through  
24 it, but it really didn't—real no regrets about dropping out of it. It'd been nice if I  
25 would've completed it but.

26 RV: And this is the leadership course?

27 DE: Yes. In fact, the one DI said I would regret it someday, but after I got back  
28 from Vietnam I run into a guy that did go through with it and he was an E4 and I was an

1 E5. So it didn't help me, I mean it didn't hurt me. So I guess that's—maybe if I hadn't  
2 have made E5 and he had I'd have had some regrets but probably not.

3 RV: Okay. Where did you go after you got out of that after four days?

4 DE: Well, I just hung around there the rest of that week and then went to the  
5 training class. Basically that was—there was very little PT in the medics AIT (advanced  
6 infantry training). It's all march from one class to another. Everything from giving  
7 shots, putting somebody on the bed pan, real stuff. The videos they had were from the  
8 Brown Army, the Korea area. Of course you had frostbite and stuff. I mean, just run the  
9 gamut of the medical field, I mean the training. But really I felt incompetent as a medic  
10 because for some reason I don't know. But I did good in the class. I was a graduate with  
11 honors.

12 RV: Really?

13 DE: Yeah. So, yeah I got all the certificates. I think it was like a thousand points  
14 and if you scored 925 it was an honor. I think I wound up 940. I did good.

15 RV: Had you had any experience before this medical technology or first aid or  
16 anything?

17 DE: No. None at all. It was the furthest thing from my interest. If I was really  
18 going into the military I'd probably went combat engineers construction because like I  
19 said growing up on the farm around tractors and been around equipment and I worked  
20 construction before I got drafted. So it was completely out of the blue and off the wall.

21 RV: But you did well?

22 DE: Yeah.

23 RV: Can you tell me some of the types of classes you took? What kind of  
24 training was the Army offering for your basic medics in 1970?

25 DE: Well, like I said, some of it was kind of outdated from the Korean War.  
26 Took notes because it was, become kind of hypochondriac too. We'd study about certain  
27 disease, any illnesses and then, man I'd get that. I mean it wasn't drastic, but it played on  
28 my mind. I mean because I didn't want to do something to screw somebody up. There  
29 were a couple that washed out that didn't make the grade too. But training, some of the  
30 instructors were fairly good and competent, some weren't. Just typical, I suppose, run of

1 the mill Army things. It was, I'd say, decent training. It didn't prepare me at all for  
2 Vietnam but—

3 RV: Really?

4 DE: Not really. I mean other than—it was pretty basic, I mean, as far as first aid,  
5 you clear the airway, stop the bleeding, treat and protect the wound. There's only so  
6 much you can do.

7 RV: Did they talk to you about specific wounds and how to treat a stomach shot  
8 or arm wound from a rifle round, things like that?

9 DE: Yeah. They got in to the treatment—well, like sucking chest wound and just  
10 getting hit. But three days in the field I'd run across one of them and come back to tell to  
11 treat it. I mean I recognize it and treat it. There's very little blood just pink froth, frothy  
12 around the wound. Yeah, there was things how to treat specific wounds. One of the  
13 instructors said he—back then they was putting tourniquets on. He's seen, or so he said,  
14 cases of trying to put a tourniquet around the neck to stop a head wound from bleeding. I  
15 mean, which was no but I mean and some different things. It's been a long time ago. I  
16 hadn't really thought about the training, but before we went they did give us a one week  
17 RVN (Republic of Vietnam) training like thing.

18 RV: Oh, really? Kind of what to expect in South Vietnam?

19 DE: Yeah. See none of the classes were going to Vietnam. This was in '70, June  
20 of '70. Oh, I'm going, but my class, all the two year RAs (Regular Army) and U.S.  
21 draftees got orders for Vietnam. There was like fifteen of us. They took us out to Camp  
22 Bullis, which is right there close to San Antonio somewhere. We was out there three or  
23 four days. They had a mock village set up and stuff, but I did get some extra week  
24 training there.

25 RV: What did they tell you about the Vietnamese?

26 DE: What did they say? I can't really remember other than—I can't remember  
27 what the training was.

28 RV: Do you remember if you thought that really strange or very, very different  
29 culture or was it something that okay, this makes sense to me, this is not going to be  
30 totally foreign?

1 DE: It was kind of different. It was a total foreign culture because they kind of  
2 mask their feelings and stuff, told us different things. Then when we got in-country they  
3 give us a little training on the people too. Their cultures was different.

4 RV: How about language training?

5 DE: None as I remember

6 RV: Did they encourage you all to do civic action to work on the civilians? You  
7 know, medically work on the civilians?

8 DE: Yeah. I did in the field, yes. Yes, I worked with them.

9 RV: Dave, tell me what about your medical training there. What was the easiest  
10 part to you there at Ft. Sam?

11 DE: Easiest, I don't know. I can't really say what was easiest.

12 RV: Sounds like a lot of it was.

13 DE: Well, I mean as far as—there wasn't—I can't really say anything would be  
14 easy other than—like I said, the class was easy enough. I think that stuff doesn't score on  
15 the test.

16 RV: Do you remember anything particularly difficult about it? What was  
17 something that you had trouble doing, do you remember?

18 DE: Stomach and some of the videos were pretty graphic. I could do—and the  
19 anal temperature thing. We had to take each other's temperature.

20 RV: Did you really?

21 DE: Yeah. That was different. One guy, he wanted to kind of like on me instead  
22 of up in the anus he went across more.

23 RV: That's very interesting.

24 DE: Some of the training was, I don't know, just wasn't—and how to make beds  
25 too. I remember that we spent time on that. How to make beds, put the hospital corners.  
26 Then we had to give each other shots, how to aspirate in case you get a vein or artery or  
27 something.

28 RV: Did you have any fear of needles?

29 DE: Not unhealthy fear. A little bit. The main thing when you give a shot, don't  
30 hesitate. Just jab. A guy that was giving me one, he hesitated and, of course, that's just  
31 worse, because of the pain. Just stick it in there and when you push it in there slow it

1 hurts. Like I said, I did good with schooling, picked it up. It felt—I can't really describe  
2 the feeling I had. Like I said inadequate for the job. That was always there.

3 RV: You felt inadequate for the job?

4 DE: Yeah.

5 RV: Like you didn't know enough?

6 DE: Yeah. I didn't know enough, I wasn't—I couldn't remember enough really  
7 to help anybody. That was always an underlying feeling. It was just an uneasy feeling  
8 underneath the going to the school as a medic thing. It just wasn't my interest.

9 RV: Did you communicate this to anybody?

10 DE: No. Not then. Not through there.

11 RV: Were you able to talk to anybody there at Ft. Sam Houston? Were you able  
12 to kind of talk to the counselor about some of these fears and unknowns that you might  
13 be facing and were facing there and might face in Vietnam?

14 DE: No. No counselor or nothing. Couple of the guys would talk about in the  
15 bay area overnight. Looking back a couple of the other guys, I was friends, with they had  
16 the same apprehensions, they'd do something to screw somebody up or something.

17 RV: Right. It's a lot of responsibility.

18 DE: For a nineteen year old.

19 RV: Yes. Well, when you received your orders to go to Vietnam you're there at  
20 Ft. Sam?

21 DE: Mm-hmm.

22 RV: How did you feel Dave when you got that piece of paper and you knew you  
23 were going over there?

24 DE: It's definitely a downer. Just sinking, low pit in the bottom of my gut. Just  
25 wasn't pleased. I didn't want to go.

26 RV: How about the rest of your members of your unit? How did they feel? Do  
27 you remember?

28 DE: Couple of them same thing and couple of others full of bravado. Maybe it  
29 was a show or what not but we really didn't let each other know what we did feel. I  
30 mean I know I was down, but I didn't really say nothing just went through the thing, but a  
31 couple of other people were gung ho and ready to go.

1           RV: Were you all given time off?  
2           DE: Yeah. I got two weeks. I think most of the other guys did too. I got two  
3 weeks leave.  
4           RV: What'd you do?  
5           DE: I come home and spend it at home with my parents and the girlfriend, we  
6 went out a couple of times. Did some partying.  
7           RV: Yeah? What did your parents think about this?  
8           DE: They weren't too happy, but they really didn't say much. We just really  
9 didn't talk about, never really talked about not coming back. I mean it just wasn't talked  
10 about, what could happen or anything.  
11          RV: What about your brothers?  
12          DE: We just—well, we just didn't talk about it. Just go and do your time and  
13 come back. I mean it really wasn't talked about  
14          RV: And your girlfriend? Same thing?  
15          DE: Yeah. About the same thing I think. Although once I got back from  
16 Vietnam she said a promise we'd get married when I got back. I remember that.  
17          RV: She did say that?  
18          DE: Yeah.  
19          RV: Did she keep that promise?  
20          DE: Oh, when I got back? Yeah.  
21          RV: Well, I guess that would've given you something to look forward to there.  
22          DE: Yeah, it did. I mean there was never no doubt in my mind that I wasn't  
23 coming back. I mean, I knew I was coming back. I had that belief, faith, that—there was  
24 some faith there that I would get back. Yeah I was scared, but I just had the feeling I'd  
25 get back.  
26          RV: Well, tell me, you mentioned faith. Where were you spiritually? Was this  
27 something that was a part of your life at this point?  
28          DE: Not a lot but when it got down to it I did pray. I mean I made a deal with  
29 God. God kept his deal. I didn't.  
30          RV: What was the deal you made?

1 DE: I get back I'd do right. I'd live my life right if He'd get me through it. So,  
2 like I said, there was a little faith there. Like growing up, we weren't forced to go to  
3 church. My mom went to church and went to church a little bit but wasn't required to.  
4 Once I got teenagers then didn't really have any time for church, but the orders for  
5 Vietnam kind of threw me closer to God for a little bit.

6 RV: Did that stay with you while you were in-country?

7 DE: No. I mean only on occasions, but no it didn't really stay. I mean I didn't  
8 sleep at the foot of the cross.

9 RV: That's an interesting way to put it. Okay. Well, tell me about leaving the  
10 United States and going to Vietnam. Where did you depart from and what'd you fly  
11 over?

12 DE: Flew out of Travis there. Went to the Oakland Army Replacement thing or  
13 whatever there and was there like, what, a day and a half or so, like the last twenty-four  
14 hours you're in this room. You go there. They take your clothes and give you five new  
15 sets of jungle fatigues. It was like in that room to make phone calls, but couldn't leave.  
16 There was a big room there with bunks and it was all in there. So, got my jungle fatigues  
17 and stuff and then on a bus out to Travis Air Force Base. Of course everybody was—  
18 most everybody was cocky and gung ho. Well, not gung ho but it was a light mood.  
19 Everybody was kind of making going to Vietnam a big deal. But there was like one or  
20 two kind of down. So we left Travis and we landed in Honolulu. It was on a commercial  
21 flight, TWA (Trans World Airlines). We got off the plane in Honolulu. I think we hit  
22 the bar or maybe not. I don't think we did there in Honolulu. But anyway we stopped  
23 there and was there a couple, three hours. Then we stopped at Wake Island just for a  
24 little while and then from Wake to Guam. Then I think we got on from Guam right into  
25 Tan Son Nhut there.

26 RV: Okay. Do you remember the mood on the plane when you left Guam and  
27 that was your last stop and going into Vietnam?

28 DE: It wasn't as noisy as when we left Travis. Of course this is like a seventeen,  
29 eighteen, nineteen hours from then, been going. So it was pretty quiet.

30 RV: What was it like flying into Tan Son Nhut? Can you describe that? Do you  
31 remember?

1 DE: Can't really remember too much.

2 RV: Was it daytime or nighttime?

3 DE: It was daytime. It was daylight. We got off there into buses. It was hot.  
4 The heat hit me. It was hot and humid. The big buses, they had wires over the, mesh  
5 over the windows and stuff. So, got on a bus there and went to the replacement battalion  
6 or something there in Long Binh, I guess, or Binh Long. I don't know if it was Long  
7 Binh or Binh Long and what not, and got there to replacement thing.

8 RV: Did you know exactly where you were going, which unit, or you were  
9 waiting?

10 DE: No.

11 RV: You were waiting for your assignment?

12 DE: Waiting for assignment. I don't know, I was there probably two days or so.  
13 In the meantime there—because like I say going over there it's probably ten or twelve  
14 guys I went through training with on the plane that I knew. While I was there I lost  
15 contact with all, but one other guy that, well, we went through training. But we got  
16 orders for the same battalion. 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 21<sup>st</sup> up at Chu Lai. So, there we were. They  
17 bussed us back out to the airport and put us on a C-130. While I was there, standing  
18 there, I remember looking at this guy, Air Force guy, and he was on a forklift loading the  
19 plane. I said that guy looks familiar and it was a guy I graduated with.

20 RV: From high school?

21 DE: From high school. He had joined the Air Force and there he was working  
22 there. I hollered at him, got to talk with him. He got off the forklift and come over here  
23 and got to talk to him for about four or five minutes. Wanted to know where I was  
24 heading. I said, "Heading up north to Chu Lai." He said, "Ah, you poor son of a bitch.  
25 You don't want to go up there." I said, "Okay."

26 RV: Why did he say that? Do you know?

27 DE: I guess because it's further north. I don't know. Of course you heard  
28 rumors that they got overrun like last week or something, which maybe a fire base did,  
29 but in our mind we was all thinking it was Chu Lai itself. So, we got on a C-130, which  
30 was the first time I was ever on one of them.

31 RV: What was that like?

1 DE: That was scary.

2 RV: Why?

3 DE: Well, couldn't see out. Strapped in a little nylon webbing seat that had two  
4 rows down the side and two rows back to back down the middle and had a duffle bag  
5 with you and stuff with it, with all of our fatigues and not much of any personal gear.  
6 Had that all in one duffle bag and it was closed up. It was noisy and rough riding,  
7 couldn't see out. So it was kind of scary but kind of exciting too. So we landed at Chu  
8 Lai and I think we went on a deuce and a half. There wasn't no buses there. There was  
9 trucks. So they trucked us to the Americal Replacement Center, I guess.

10 RV: Where was that? Do you remember?

11 DE: It was there at Chu Lai.

12 RV: Okay. At Chu Lai.

13 DE: Wound up—of course, really I guess I didn't know what unit or anything I  
14 was going to go to for sure, but was there and I think they had like a three day in-country  
15 training thing there about the people and booby traps. Then they had some former Viet  
16 Cong give some of the, help give some of the classes and presentations and stuff.

17 RV: What was that like? That must have been strange for you.

18 DE: Well, yeah. Like I said, it was a—I don't know. I can't remember. One  
19 thing I do remember like, they had instructional bleachers like down the sand thing. We  
20 was up there sitting there listening and still listening to what the instructors were saying.  
21 Some of us we had to use M & Ms and was feeding them to the lizards down below,  
22 watching them.

23 RV: Oh, really?

24 DE: Yeah. I mean, funny the things you can remember, but, you know, there was  
25 all kinds of lizards there and some of them were fair size, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, a  
26 couple feet long or so. They gave us rudiment things. Like if you're waving at them that  
27 means come hear. Like we wave to somebody, to them that's the sign to come here.  
28 Like if we'd see two teenage males holding hands we'd think they're queer, but that's not  
29 to them. I remember that. A couple of little things like that.

30 RV: What was it like with the men? I mean, were you all with new people going  
31 through this training?

1 DE: Yeah. It was all new people.

2 RV: Are you bunking with them as well?

3 DE: Yeah, it's just temporary bunks. Like I said, I can't really remember any  
4 one person from there because we was just together there, what, three or four days.

5 RV: I'm wondering if people were saying, "Hey, Eichhorn, let me tell you what's  
6 going on here," or, "You better watch out," or, "Here's the deal." Anything like that?

7 DE: Well, once I got to my unit there was a lot of that. Once I got to my unit  
8 there was a lot of that, but like I said we was all newbies and they was telling us things to  
9 watch out, the instructors too. Like I said most of us were distracted by the lizards.

10 RV: Well, tell me about getting to your unit. What was that like?

11 DE: That was an experience. Left Chu Lai on my truck up Highway One through  
12 Tam Ky. That was really the first seen any village people. But I also recall the other  
13 Vietnamese we seen were on the Army compound. It's weird seeing them, how they  
14 lived and different.

15 RV: Yeah? What do you remember seeing?

16 DE: Just dropping their drawers and going right, ditch by the side of the road. I  
17 remember that. That's basically it. It was a bigger shock I guess. Then we got to Hawk  
18 Hill and from there went on a Chinook, the double bladed helicopters. Of course we  
19 called them shit hooks. They weren't fun to ride on. They were kind of like C-130s,  
20 noisy and rough.

21 RV: Did you say Hop Hill?

22 DE: Hawk Hill. Yeah. It was a—

23 RV: H-O-P?

24 DE: Pardon?

25 RV: H-O-P as in papa?

26 DE: Hawk as in hotel.

27 RV: Oh. Hot. Right, H-O-...

28 DE: H-A-W-K, Hawk.

29 RV: Gotcha. Hawk. Okay. That's for my transcriptionist right there.

30 DE: Pardon?

1           RV: That's for the person who's going to be transcribing. I wanted them to be  
2 sure to spell that correctly and be able to understand it. Okay. So you get on the  
3 Chinook and you're out to your unit.

4           DE: Out to LZ (landing zone) Center. So, of course there's, I don't know,  
5 probably fifteen or sixteen guys. We're all new seeds. There's me and the one other guy,  
6 Don, he was in (inaudible). He was the other medics. We got sent to the aid station and  
7 then, I don't know, the other guys what their MOSs (military occupational specialty),  
8 whether it was infantry or—they went somewhere else. So got to the aid station and  
9 checked in. Was there, I don't know, three or four days. They said I'd be assigned to a  
10 flying company. My first night there they said they need someone at battalion, where  
11 they keep the radios, need the medic there for the night. I was it so all I had to do was  
12 just, while men slept there the TOC (Tactical Operations Center) instead of on the  
13 bunkers there at the aid station, just right there on the firebase.

14          RV: What unit was this Dave?

15          DE: This was the 3<sup>rd</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>/196<sup>th</sup> at the LZ Center at the time, which is a firebase,  
16 had artillery there and mortars. Usually a line company would be on bunker guard  
17 around the firebase. The other three line companies would be out in the field. There was  
18 four line companies, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, and Delta. Echo company was a recon, had a  
19 recon platoon that was the mortars. I said, "Well, this wouldn't be too bad duty staying  
20 here," because they had a mess hall on the hill. They had nice—nice (laughs)—they had  
21 bunkers built. Well, when compared to some places I wound up later.

22          RV: Describe the nice bunker in Vietnam. What was it like for you?

23          DE: Well, it had a wooden bunk with an air mattress and had a few rats.

24          RV: Well, I've heard about the Vietnam rats. Tell me about them for you. What  
25 were they like?

26          DE: They didn't bother me. Like I said, I grew up on a farm and was always  
27 around rodents. I mean, some rats were bad. You killed them and went on, but I  
28 remember this was what, one of the bunkers down on the bunker line, I woke up. I was  
29 sleeping on my stomach with my hands above me and I looked up and there was a rat  
30 right on my arm. That's what woke me up. They're just rats.

31          RV: Okay. So it's a relatively comfortable mattress, nice wooden bunk.

1 DE: And dry.

2 RV: Okay. How many men in there with you?

3 DE: There was four or five, usually four, I think four in that bunker. I mean it  
4 was built, sand bagged nice, and felt safe there.

5 RV: Okay. How long did you stay there at LZ Center?

6 DE: I think it was about three days. Then I'd go out to a resupply bird and go to  
7 Charlie company.

8 RV: So, that's—you were attached to Charlie company?

9 DE: Yes.

10 RV: This is going to be your first time going out into the bush. How were you  
11 feeling?

12 DE: Well, like I say, I was scared, but I was okay. I mean, after—I'd been in-  
13 country now, what, ten days, two weeks or so. The guys were friendly there at the aid  
14 station. I really wasn't excited about going out, but I really wasn't dreading it like I was  
15 when I first got my orders to go. But like I said I was neither excited nor dreading it.

16 RV: What did you have with you? Describe your uniform. What would you  
17 typically carry with you into the field as a medic?

18 DE: Okay. Well, those five new sets of fatigues they give me in California, once  
19 I got to Vietnam that's the last I seen of them. You went out with the fatigues on, pants,  
20 jacket, t-shirt, and towel, two pairs of socks. Didn't wear any underwear.

21 RV: Okay. Why not?

22 DE: Bunch up and sweat and. I mean, it was just something you didn't need. I  
23 had an M-16. I carried one bandolier of ammo. Had my aid bag with, I think it had two  
24 or four pints of saline, IV solution, numerous bandages, morphine, pills, numerous pills,  
25 lot of bacitracin tabs, and stuff for the—I mean any cuts or scratch infected in a minute, I  
26 mean in the jungle. You don't realize how much dirt's there until you're there living in  
27 it. Plus my C rations, rations for three days. I think I had five quarts of water in my  
28 canteen. So, I carried a heavy rucksack.

29 RV: How much do you think your whole rucksack and your uniform and  
30 everything weighed? What were you humping out there weight wise?

1 DE: I was probably right at a hundred or ninety pounds, I'd say. Maybe, I don't  
2 know, maybe eighty to a hundred somewhere. It depended on the water. I think  
3 sometimes I did carry six quarts of water.

4 RV: It's hard for people to realize nowadays how heavy that is and the climate in  
5 which you're in and also the terrain and you're in a war zone. I mean how do you do that  
6 physically?

7 DE: Well, I just turned twenty. I was twenty years old. Like I said, I was in  
8 good shape physically. Basic put me in—in AIT there wasn't much PT, but you know, I  
9 was in physical good shape. I just did it. But like I said when I went out with the  
10 resupply bird, of course the medic that was there, he could have jumped on a pluck bird  
11 and went back to LZ Center, but he stayed with me three days.

12 RV: Why did he do that?

13 DE: To break me in. They'd just hit some shit the night before, a booby trap.  
14 It's a good thing he did because we hit one the next day, or they. Got to treat my first  
15 casualty the next day so it was a good thing he was there.

16 RV: What did he tell you, before the casualty came in the next day, what was he  
17 doing to prep you? Was he saying like here's the most common kind of wound or what  
18 did he tell you? Do you remember?

19 DE: Now I can't remember exactly what he said other than—one thing he did  
20 say, "Don't get close to anybody."

21 RV: Why did he say that?

22 DE: If they get hit it affects you. You lose it. I mean, that's one thing he did say,  
23 "Don't get close and real pals," because if something happened to them—this is jumping  
24 on ahead. I didn't cry for the losses for twenty-two years.

25 RV: Really? Did you get close to some people?

26 DE: Oh, yes. How in the hell could you not?

27 RV: What was—what enabled you to do that after twenty-two years?

28 DE: I quit self-medicating after twenty-two years. That's when I guess. But, you  
29 if you become emotional you couldn't do your job. Like I said, I got there. I was scared.  
30 Then there was a period from like two months through seven or eight months just, you  
31 know, it don't mean nothing. Just didn't care.

1           RV: Was that what you all would say?  
2           DE: Yeah. Everybody was saying don't mean nothing. You know?  
3           RV: And you knew better.  
4           DE: Pardon?  
5           RV: You knew better inside or were you really able to turn that stuff off?  
6           DE: I was able to because I went through it. I guess deep down somewhere in  
7 my subconscious, I was taught not to kill and all this stuff. I don't know, get through it.  
8 It was a rush. Okay? I don't know if you ever—I mean talked to anybody, but there's a  
9 period in there that was, for lack of a better word it was a rush.  
10          RV: To be in a fire fight?  
11          DE: Yeah.  
12          RV: Or to kill?  
13          DE: Well, I never got into the killing. I mean I was a medic. I kept my head  
14 down. When guys would get the body count it was all right. You just—I don't want  
15 people to judge me here but it was like scoring a touchdown in a football game. I mean  
16 as far as this and that, I hated the Vietnamese. We called them dinks or I called them  
17 dinks. I didn't care for them. But there was another side of them too.  
18          RV: You what?  
19          DE: There was another side too. They were human beings.  
20          RV: Well, these were the bad guys and you guys were hunting bad guys.  
21          DE: Yeah. Were they really bad guys? I mean, I thought so at the time.  
22          RV: I was going to say, did you all believe that then at the time?  
23          DE: At the time, yeah, or I did at the time. Why were they there because when  
24 you run into somebody, it's supposed to be a free fire zone. There'd be a mama san and  
25 three or four little kids and VC (Viet Cong) crocodile papa sans. He'd be there. He'd  
26 take pot shots at us later in the day, you know. I mean, but I guess this is where these  
27 people grew up and raised and they didn't know anything different now. I don't know.  
28          RV: Right. You want to go back to the first casualty that came in? These are  
29 your first ones to treat in Vietnam. Do you remember the day? What happened?  
30          DE: They had a patrol out and they hit a booby trap.  
31          RV: What kind?

1 DE: I think it was just like a grenade in an empty tin can that they tripped and  
2 pulled out of there. It was something that they tripped with the wire, grenade somehow.  
3 They weren't that far from our day logger. So we run to them, the other medic and I, and  
4 three or four other—another squad, we just didn't take off for them. I mean, we had  
5 some cover and support. We got there and the other guy he put the first one and I went  
6 and looked at this other one that had the sucking chest wound, which you've got to seal  
7 off so it doesn't collapse. The air gets in lie, that's what's happening. It's sucking air in  
8 and get it sealed. We got a special bandage for that and habit, remembering my training.  
9 I guess I did okay. Got the dust-off and got him out of there in half hour or forty minutes  
10 time or so.

11 RV: Did you talk to him?

12 DE: Yeah. Yeah. He was talking. I said, "Now, you can be all right. You're  
13 going to be alright. Just lay still, lay still. Just lay still. You've got a million dollar  
14 wound. You're going back to the world."

15 RV: Was he able to talk back with you?

16 DE: Yeah. He was talking low. I think he may be, but I don't want to know. It's  
17 just something—

18 RV: You didn't find out what happened?

19 DE: No. I would say he did because usually—well, they come back and told me.  
20 This one guy didn't make it, which I kind of figured. This is later on. I never heard  
21 anymore about him. He didn't come back. A couple of the other guys, I guess it hit three  
22 of them, the other two guys—nah, it was a different incident. But there was, I think,  
23 three of them hit with that booby trap.

24 RV: This is your first time. Was it different than you thought it would be or was  
25 it similar?

26 DE: I don't know. I can't really describe it because it's like when something  
27 happen, like on that you just react and just like something takes over instinctively—it's  
28 not instinct. I don't know, the adrenaline rush or whatever. I guess I can't have that  
29 good a memory of what happened in that time.

30 RV: Yeah. You just did what you were trained to do.

1 DE: Yeah. Where would you all walk, I mean if you're out walking a trail were  
2 you all spaced throughout the company or were you one with each platoon?

3 DE: Well, very seldom we moved as a company, usually as a platoon. Like  
4 medic, I'd either be walking either third or fifth because there'd be the platoon leader and  
5 the RTO (radio/telephone operator) and then me. I was either third or fourth it seemed  
6 like—or third or fifth because the RTO had to be by the platoon leader. We'd space out  
7 say twenty feet or tried to. Once in a while we'd get bunched up. We try not to—well,  
8 we did move on trails and old trails and walked through the rice paddies instead of the  
9 dikes.

10 RV: Can you describe, Dave, just looking in general of your time there out in the  
11 bush, what was your typical day like from morning to dark and then back again?

12 DE: It would—get up in the morning. Like I said, I had daily that from malaria  
13 pills and then hand them out to the guys. Then on a Monday you had the big yellow  
14 malaria pill that everybody had to take, but had a daily one too. Sometimes we'd stay in  
15 that logger and send out patrols. Sometimes we'd move to a, move five hundred meters  
16 or so and set up for the day and send out patrols. Plus, like I said, every guy had jungle  
17 rot that need treated, new bandages and new salve. I'd take care of them. Sometimes I'd  
18 go on patrols, sometime I wouldn't. Usually I'd have a paperback book or something to  
19 read. We'd trade around the platoon, get different books to read. Just lay around and  
20 play cards, played a lot of spades and hearts.

21 RV: This is at night?

22 DE: No. Through the day but if you wasn't out on patrol. Wasn't out on patrol, I  
23 know one squad went with them. See, it kind of changed. When I first got there it was  
24 after body count.

25 RV: After the body count policy was—?

26 DE: Yeah. Was there to bring the war to them. Then when they started to pull  
27 people out in '71 it seemed like it changed. Plus, any support we'd get, artillery or air  
28 strike, we'd always get them. Then it kind of changed from that to not being the last GI  
29 killed in Vietnam.

30 RV: Do you remember about when this was date wise? You get there in August  
31 '70.

1 DE: I would say it was like January or February of '71. I mean, maybe that's just  
2 me. Like I said they got there. You had some good guys and they went home. You got  
3 different—you'd lose guys who get home. Maybe it was the different guys we got. I  
4 don't know. It seemed like it changed. Seems like get back, I went on patrol with this  
5 one guy and he's a shake 'n bake squad leader, went to NCO (non-commissioned officer)  
6 school. I mean he was a draftee, but he went to the school and got sergeant stripes. He  
7 was a squad leader. He just went out maybe a 150, 200 meters and sat down. Said he  
8 wasn't going to look for trouble.

9 RV: This was in '71?

10 DE: Yeah.

11 RV: I imagine. Did you all have a problem with that?

12 DE: Not really. I mean, you know, because I think the VC and the NVA (North  
13 Vietnamese Army) they knew who to—he wasn't messing with them, they wouldn't  
14 mess with you kind of like deal. I mean, it never happened to me, but there was another  
15 guy that got CAed (corrective action) out and stopped. He thought it was a Kit Carson  
16 Scout and waved at him, but it was a VC and he waved back and disappeared. I know  
17 one time I was just getting water and it was just me and this other (inaudible) there. At  
18 last we heard something in the bushes. It was a VC because we got fired on about two  
19 hours later, but it dawns back how many times you walk by somebody and they could  
20 have did you in there.

21 RV: Did you realize it then?

22 DE: Not really. It comes back to me now that there's so many times so many  
23 things could've happened that didn't happen. Like, we went on patrol one time and  
24 found this—one side of the tree had a mark on it. So the squad leader, he kept following  
25 that, and it led us to an NVA base camp. There was just a couple of workers there and he  
26 got them. They pulled us out. The next day they pulled everybody out of there and they  
27 took a battalion in there and, just like I said, what seven or eight guys in that squad  
28 counting me. Hoped they had all been there.

29 RV: So, your typical day is you went out on patrol. Were you walking with your  
30 M-16 out patrolling with the company or were you kind of hanging back or wherever you  
31 were there?

1 DE: When the squad on patrol I'd be up about towards the next to last, but I'd  
2 have my M-16 and my small aid bag, which didn't have all my bandages and no  
3 rucksack. Then early on we'd go just with the booney hat and there at last we took our  
4 steel pots. We never did carry the flak jackets, but it had the steel pots.

5 RV: Tell me about your supplies in the field. Were you able to get your medical  
6 supplies and equipment as you needed?

7 DE: Yes. Yeah. Sometimes they'd run out real quick and this is in honor of a  
8 dust-off pilots. Brought one in at night, happened right at dusk. The other one guy he  
9 didn't make it and the other guy did. We got them, got them on a dust-off, which is a  
10 regular Huey bird. Of course, we stayed right there the next day and said, "Well, I need  
11 some supplies here," and they sent them out on a loach (LOH, light observation  
12 helicopter). Of course, we stayed right there so the LZ was still secure. I remember this  
13 when one pops smokes and popped the smoke to bring the bird in. This is a LOH. He  
14 says, "Do you want me to land there?" LT was on the ready and says, "Hey, we had a  
15 Huey in here last night. What's a matter?" Which the LOH is a lot smaller bird.

16 RV: Yes. Do you want to talk a little bit about the dust-off pilots? Tell me about  
17 them.

18 DE: Really didn't have any contact per se with them other than they would come.  
19 They would come I mean even if—when the monsoons came and they were a bit like not  
20 fly, the dust offs flew. It was like during the monsoons we was five days on three days  
21 rations. Then one time we was on LZ Center and, I don't know if it was Bravo or Delta  
22 Company or who, they was down at the bottom we humped C rats down off the hill to  
23 them because they was out. Because when the monsoons come it was just—I don't know  
24 why we was out there. The activity level went down, I mean as far as VC and NVA.  
25 When I was there during the monsoon we didn't run into anything. So they were holed  
26 up too. Some guys get immersion foot, skin would come off with their socks.

27 RV: Gosh, it got that bad?

28 DE: Mm-hmm. Looking back I can't believe how we lived.

29 RV: How did you live?

30 DE: Like an animal. I mean, slept on the ground, just all you had was clothes on  
31 your back, but we was resupplied a lot better than the Vietnamese were. If we lost the

1 war, I mean, I hate to be on their side because we brought shit on them. I mean, they  
2 took a kicking. I mean you can say what you wanted to do with your, about a solution to  
3 war but I don't think we ever lost a battle so how can you lose the war?

4 RV: What were the worst wounds that you saw?

5 DE: Traumatic amputation. Hitting the booby trap of some sort and blows in  
6 two. A leg here and other body parts over there.

7 RV: How common was that?

8 DE: A couple times.

9 RV: What do you do with that situation? I mean, are you talking to the guy  
10 saying, "Listen, here's what happened," or do you say, "Everything's okay"?

11 DE: The one time there wasn't nothing to say. The other time I just, "Hang on,  
12 just hang on." I knew he wasn't going to make it and the other guy was screaming. So I  
13 just dropped him and went to the other guy and then (inaudible). Just everything waist  
14 down was gone. I mean there's just nothing I could've done.

15 RV: What happened that day? Do you remember the incident?

16 DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

17 RV: Do you want to talk about it or not?

18 DE: Yeah. We can. He's listed on the Wall as non-hostile. I made some peace  
19 with it because—we was together company wise. This was right before I got out of the  
20 field.

21 RV: Really?

22 DE: Yeah. Had a new platoon leader. You need to separate that he was dumb  
23 and lazy. Well, maybe I shouldn't say that, but he even a couple squad leaders said we  
24 shouldn't logger here, we should move on and get some separation from the other  
25 platoon. But he said, "No, we'll logger here for the night." The one squad—we'd set out  
26 mechanical ambushes, which is a booby trap claymore with a trip wire. The one squad  
27 leader sent a couple guys out to set one up on the trail. We'd come in, throw a logger on.  
28 They hit one on the, at the first platoon and put out. Thank God they had the angle of  
29 flow or we'd have had two guys killed.

30 RV: This was friendly fire basically.

1 DE: Yeah. I just I think started eating some pork slices on C rats and when they  
2 hit it. I remember, Ray said, “C’mon doc, we got to go get them,” because you could  
3 hear them screaming. Like I said, they weren’t but eighty meters from us or under. It  
4 wasn’t far. We got right to them. Mike was still alive and he says, “Doc, you got to help.  
5 I’m hurt bad,” and he just moved, went in shock. I looked and basically he was blown in  
6 two from—his legs were gone, his intestines, you could see them.

7 RV: You knew this guy?

8 DE: Yeah. Yeah. His death stayed with me for a few years.

9 RV: I’m sorry, Dave. What did you say?

10 DE: No. His death stayed with me for a few years because I just laughed it off  
11 and went and worked on Don. Don made it. I mean, he had pretty severe wounds on his  
12 legs, but they was all low. Like I said, it stayed with me. It took me twenty-two years to  
13 cry for his death. I don’t know why his death bothered me so much other than looking  
14 back, well, since I found out now he was only eighteen. I knew he was young, but then I  
15 thought he’d be nineteen, a year younger than me, but he was still eighteen.

16 RV: How well did you know him? Was this someone—I mean, this was toward  
17 the end of your tour there. Had you guys hung out?

18 DE: We drank a few on stand down. He was from down in Kentucky, kind of  
19 like a hillbilly probably from me. He wasn’t closest bud but he was, you know, you got  
20 close to a lot of the guys.

21 RV: Dave, tell me what was the most common thing you had to treat on a day to  
22 day basis. Was it jungle rot or something else?

23 DE: Jungle rot because any cut, I mean, you know, it gets infected with the dirt  
24 and high humidity and high temperature, every bacteria loves it. It’s their paradise there.  
25 Plus you’re staying so dirty. There was very little ways to keep clean. So the jungle rot  
26 was the most.

27 RV: When you lost people in the field that you were trying to treat, how many  
28 times did that happen?

29 DE: It was twice that I know of.

30 RV: That you were actually actively treating?

31 DE: Mm-hmm.

1           RV: Did you take that personally?

2           DE: Well, stuffed it and went on. Yeah, I did. It ate at—it was still—well, not as  
3 much today, but it was always there. I used a lot of dark humor to get it, and like I self-  
4 medicated with alcohol through the years too.

5           RV: Well, there in the field did you know that you were doing everything you  
6 could or did you always feel like you could do something else?

7           DE: I always felt I could do something else or somebody else could have done a  
8 better job, I guess, was my feeling I had. But I always had the feeling that somebody  
9 could do a better job.

10          RV: So that feeling never left you, the one that you had during your training?

11          DE: Not really. Not really. It's abated today, but I've done some work over the  
12 last ten years. I did the best I could for what I could there.

13          RV: So you've come to terms with that now?

14          DE: Yeah. Yeah. You know, pretty well come to terms. I did the best I could  
15 for a twenty year old.

16          RV: Dave, do you want to talk about those two times when you did lose  
17 somebody you were working on?

18          DE: Well, I think I just did, didn't I?

19          RV: Okay. Was that both—?

20          DE: No. The other one, it was really I'd say you just throw stuff on the poncho  
21 and went out. Didn't really know him. Booby trap. But like I said, Mike, I knew him  
22 and, like I said, I was there. Got to hear his last words.

23          RV: Mike's?

24          DE: Yeah.

25          RV: What did he say to you?

26          DE: "Help me doc. I'm hit bad."

27          RV: Did he realize how bad he had been hit?

28          DE: Yeah. I think so and then just another guy in his squad told him a couple  
29 weeks before he had a dream and he was telling him that he wasn't going back. I'm sure  
30 you've heard this story, people saying they're not coming back and self-fulfilled

1 prophecies. He told me that a couple weeks afterwards. But I had to blame the platoon  
2 leader for not doing his job right through the years, but I've let that slide now.

3 RV: What about this other time, besides Mike?

4 DE: It really doesn't affect me like Mike. Not much to say.

5 RV: What happened?

6 DE: The guy stepped on some kind of booby trap. I don't know what it was, but  
7 it was an artillery round or something. They would lug old dud already round rounds,  
8 bury them, and sometimes they would go off or something. I don't know what kind of  
9 booby trap it was.

10 RV: What kind of wound did he have?

11 DE: He was basically dismembered like Mike except worse, and I did some  
12 things for him.

13 RV: Worse meaning he died right then?

14 DE: Yeah. Yeah. He never knew what hit him. It was pieces thrown on a  
15 poncho. All the guys did that. I mean there were four guys picking up pieces.

16 RV: Were you ever wounded, David?

17 DE: No. No. When the shooting was going I had my head down low. Matter of  
18 fact, I only fired my weapon one time at Vietnamese and that was by choice. I wouldn't  
19 have had to and it was wasted. They got away. We took a break. We was marching—  
20 not marching—we was moving. We took five, and of course you always bunch up. We  
21 was probably five feet apart along the trail. It was dike like. The guy up in front of me,  
22 there was three of them, they bobbed right up out of the dike area and he was there. He  
23 said, "Dig." There was about, I don't know, probably ten or twelve of us, jumped up and  
24 they went out across the thing there and all of us firing at them and they got away.

25 RV: You didn't hit any of them?

26 DE: Nobody hit any of them. (Inaudible)

27 RV: Right. I understand. Dave, was there any tension in the field between those  
28 enlisted and drafted versus those who were lifers, basically, in the Army as a career?

29 DE: Not in the field. The same way, like race, we had blacks in the field and  
30 there wasn't none. But you get back in the rear there was.

31 RV: Can you tell me about that? What did you see or hear or do?

1 DE: Okay. Well, there in Chu Lai—the stand down thing, which like every, I  
2 think it was twelve weeks or sixteen or fifteen weeks we'd get like three or four days in  
3 Chu Lai and there to re-zero up and what not, but it amounted to a three day drunk for  
4 me, or some of us. Vietnam's the first time I ever smoked any marijuana. I suppose it  
5 was around back then, but it wasn't here. So I was smoking some and it wound up in  
6 with a group of blacks. They took my lighter and I run from them. Then another time a  
7 group of three or four blacks they showed up just as late. We was drunk and they beat  
8 the heck out of a couple guys.

9 RV: Was it just a group of them or how did that operate? Would they walk  
10 around together and you all would walk around together?

11 DE: In the rear, yeah, but out on the firebase in the, out on the firebase and in the  
12 field there wasn't no racial tensions or nothing against the lifers. There was a little bit in  
13 the rear but not in the field. Of course, we had some pretty good lifers. I remember one  
14 stand down. Of course they come out, like I said, we had to give up all our new fatigues.  
15 They had what we called lifer clothes, had their name and insignia, had their own clothes.  
16 Captain Geehey he come out and he had his new clothes and everything on. So I just  
17 poured a beer right all over him. So, they took it pretty good after awhile. We got along  
18 pretty good, but in the rear there was some racial tension and some lifer tension.

19 RV: How about tension between those who were permanently stationed in the  
20 rear and those who were like you all out in the field and back, and out back out in the  
21 field? Did you all have any kind of feelings toward them or them towards you?

22 DE: No. Well, just good natured REMFs (rear echelon mother fuckers). We'd  
23 all call them all REMFs, but see that was the deal. Get your rear job, get out of the bush.  
24 But, nah, it was all, at least on my part it was all in fun. Most of what I'd seen, calling  
25 them REMFs was in fun and just part of the nature of it.

26 RV: Did they think friendly about you all? Were they particularly critical of you  
27 all or anything like that?

28 DE: Pardon?

29 RV: Were they critical of you all, the people who were out in the field?

30 DE: No. Not that I recall. I know—well, see, one time, this was in Da Nang,  
31 once they'd give—they sent the Americal home air in what '70 or whatever supposedly,

1 '71. But they give the LZ Center to the ARVNs (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and  
2 we moved up and took over Marine AO (area of operations). They sent the Marines  
3 home. There was this one PX (Post Exchange) that wasn't at Freedom Hill but another  
4 one near it, Da Nang, they wasn't going to let us in because we didn't have proper  
5 uniforms on. I don't think we did get in if I remember right. There was some bullshit  
6 there in Da Nang.

7 RV: What kind?

8 DE: Like that there, we weren't in proper uniform. I think there at that one  
9 compound they wanted to salute the officers I think. We didn't salute them in the field.

10 RV: Why didn't you all salute them there?

11 DE: Well, if somebody watching and they figure out which one was the officer, I  
12 guess. I never really—in the field it's a whole lot different. There's basically—well, like  
13 I said I was the medic. I was in the CP (command post), you know? We was just about  
14 to get down on first name basis, well, a lieutenant, some of them. His ass is out there on  
15 the line too. More so than a lot of the rest of us.

16 RV: Would that invoke more respect for those who actually would go out in the  
17 bush versus those who would stay back at the base camp?

18 DE: It might. It's hard for me to say for sure.

19 RV: Did you ever hear or see any incidents of fragging?

20 DE: No. Never heard of it. We had one CO (commanding officer) one time that  
21 someone offhandedly made him mad, a comment about fragging, but no, it didn't happen  
22 in my unit or when I was there. I didn't see it. I'm sure it happened. I can see where it  
23 would happen.

24 RV: Overall, Dave, how would you rate the equipment that you had, the medical  
25 equipment? Was it adequate for the job and also your military equipment?

26 DE: Yeah. It was adequate, I guess. Like I said, the M-16 to me seemed like—I  
27 was much more comfortable with an M-14. M-14 seemed more like a rifle to me than an  
28 M-16, but it's what I grew up with. The M-16 was light, too light, and too much like a  
29 toy. Like I said we had a lot better equipment than the Vietnamese.

30 RV: Was there any piece of medical equipment that you wish you had that you  
31 did not have?

1 DE: Not that I can recall. I just wish I had more knowledge, but sometimes  
2 there's nothing more you can do. You got to remember that.

3 RV: What was the most feared weapon from the other side?

4 DE: Probably the AK-47.

5 RV: Yeah? Why?

6 DE: I don't know. I don't know why it would be because most of our casualties  
7 were booby traps.

8 RV: Why don't we break just for a moment?

**Interview with David Eichhorn**

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

**Date: May 5, 2005**

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history  
2 interview for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project with Mr. David Eichhorn.  
3 Today's May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and it's 1:35 PM central standard time. I am in Lubbock, Texas,  
4 once again. Dave you are in Fleming, Ohio. Why don't we talk a little bit about some  
5 general issues that you had to deal with, I guess, constantly and that's the enemy? I  
6 wonder if you could make some general comments on what you thought while you were  
7 over there about the North Vietnamese Army, the Viet Cong, and other things or other  
8 ways that the enemy could be present such as booby traps and things like that. But what  
9 were your general impressions of the enemy?

10 David Eichhorn: Well, kind of hard for me to say. They were, I don't know, they  
11 weren't dumb, but they were kind of creative in their booby traps and stuff. They were  
12 hard core. They lived a pretty rough life as far as their supply was seen. They were  
13 under supplied. Like I said, I was there in late in the war and they were understaffed too.  
14 I mean, we never run into anything like they did in Tet of '68. I think I mentioned before  
15 the majority of our wounded were by booby traps. They stayed out of sight.

16 RV: Right. So the stereotype or the general idea that they kind of would do hit  
17 and run tactics, was that consistent with what you saw?

18 DE: Mm-hmm. Yeah. They wouldn't come out and fight. They would hide. Of  
19 course they were there, but never seen them. For me being a medic, any time there were  
20 any shooting, I was always down and I couldn't tell where the fire was coming from or  
21 nothing. So they were hid. They used snipers a lot. One sniper would hold us up, hold  
22 up the whole platoon a whole day.

23 RV: How could that happen? What would happen in that situation?

24 DE: Well, they'd stop moving and set up kind of like a temporary perimeter or  
25 something and send out a patrol to try to find the sniper. I'd just be a squad or so. The  
26 rest of the platoon would just be hanging around day logger.

27 RV: Just waiting to see if they could find him?

28 DE: Mm-hmm. Just a lot of boredom and waiting

1           RV: Really? So the hurry up and wait thing is the saying of the Army, is that  
2 true?

3           DE: Yeah. That's true.

4           RV: Okay. What would you say was the biggest strength of the enemy?

5           DE: It was their country, I guess, was their biggest strength. They spoke the  
6 language, but they would—they were sending—peasants living there, they would scarf  
7 them up and have them walk point to you. Same as we would because they'd know  
8 where the booby traps are or should. But I guess their strength was it's their country and  
9 I guess we were the outsiders.

10          RV: What do you think were the major weaknesses? I guess you touched on the  
11 supply problem.

12          DE: Yeah. The supply and the under—they didn't have the material that we had.  
13 Our supply and fire power was much greater than theirs.

14          RV: What do you think that fire power did to them psychologically? Was that  
15 something that you think was very effective or was that something that, as far as what the  
16 enemy saw and felt, it wasn't effective?

17          DE: It was effective and it wasn't. I guess they become used to it. They had  
18 their tunnels and bunkers to—they dug in where it really had minimal effect on them I  
19 guess.

20          RV: Is there—actually I've heard that from veterans before that you can kind of  
21 get used to the noise and the bombing and hearing it. Is that true?

22          DE: Yeah. It just was for me. Like I said, just got in with it and went with it.  
23 Like I said, I think I touched on it before, there's the middle months of my tour that just, I  
24 don't know, you become animal like, I guess, and it didn't matter. Kind of hard for me to  
25 describe.

26          RV: What would you say was the most feared weapon that, from your standpoint  
27 looking at the United States military force and what you saw on the field, what was the  
28 most feared weapon that the enemy had?

29          DE: Anything I guess. I mean, like I said, most of our casualties were by booby  
30 traps. Like I said, mortars and the rockets, I guess.

1           RV: Okay. Dave, how would you rate when you're in the field the  
2 communication that went on within your unit and the communication between your  
3 leaders there in the field and back to the base camp?

4           DE: Well, we had the prick twenty-five (PRC25) radios and sometimes it was  
5 piss poor.

6           RV: How so? What would happen?

7           DE: I don't know. We'd be down in the jungle, a low spot, couldn't get out. I  
8 remember guys climbing up the trees trying to talk to higher, higher. But, you know, we  
9 had good communication when the planes were there and the helicopters. But sometimes  
10 it'd be—there were some problems establishing communications with my radio.

11          RV: What about intelligence? You think you guys had good intelligence or was  
12 it—how did you use it?

13          DE: Well, like I said, from my viewpoint I didn't know what the hell was going  
14 on. I don't know. I don't think we had real good intelligence. Maybe the powers that be  
15 might have had but down where we was at, or where I was at, I couldn't really, I didn't  
16 know what the hell was going on or where we was going or anything.

17          RV: Was it a day by day war for you, Dave, or were you guys able to look at the  
18 kind of bigger picture?

19          DE: Nah. It was just a day by day, count my days, get the 365 in and get home.

20          RV: Did you have a calendar at any point?

21          DE: Oh, yeah. I had the short time calendar.

22          RV: Yeah? What'd yours look like?

23          DE: It was just a sheet of paper and it had the days and when the day was over  
24 I'd mark it out, color it in. Then some people put a draw in their, lining on their steel pot.  
25 Like I said, a lot of guys, this is spring '71. We're getting like thirty and sixty and ninety  
26 day drops. That was—so some guys was going home early. That picked my spirits up.

27          RV: See what? Seeing them go home or being the chance to go home?

28          DE: The chance that I might be going home early but wound up staying the full  
29 year. Some guys extended, but I'm one that gets—they would get discharged when they  
30 come back. I think I'd had extended forty-two days, but I didn't want to chance it,  
31 anything could happen anywhere. I mean a rocket or mortar or anything.

1           RV: How was your morale over there, Dave, personally?

2           DE: I was down to begin with and then it was kind of up and kind of outstanding  
3 for a while. It'd go up and down.

4           RV: What would make it go up and down? What kind of things would affect it?

5           DE: Oh, it's hard to say. Somebody getting hurt would put it down. We'd get  
6 some body count that'd put it up.

7           RV: What do you think of the body count policy and did you think that it was—  
8 how did you guys work it there in the field? What'd you think of it overall?

9           DE: Well, I thought it was kind of a piss poor way to keep score. Some of it was  
10 over inflated and some of it was under. You had to have the body. A lot of times there'd  
11 be some blood trails and you know they couldn't make it. It still wouldn't count. I kind  
12 of think, I guess, the ROK (Republic of Korea) Marines, they didn't take body count so I  
13 kind of agree with the way they do. Just don't take it because—like I said some of it I  
14 think was over inflated too.

15          RV: Really? Did you ever see that yourself?

16          DE: No. Not my end. But then again it might not have been that.

17          RV: Okay. Well, what did you think of the South Vietnamese military forces—  
18 the ARVN and other units?

19          DE: Well, I didn't think much of them, but I wasn't around them much after, like  
20 we kinda hated the Vietnamese. But that's like the little village, Nui Loc Son, right down  
21 from the firebase here. There's a guy, got him a rear job and he was like liaison between  
22 the PFs there and the firebase and what not. We come through there and got to talk to  
23 him and his whole ideal of the Vietnamese had changed. Of course, he was spending a  
24 lot more time with them. But from my personal point, from what I've seen, I didn't think  
25 a whole lot of them. But like I said I wasn't with them much. I mean we had a couple  
26 Kit Carson Scouts, a couple—well, one of them was outstanding and the other ones I just  
27 kept my eye on them. I didn't trust them. But like I said they wasn't too high in my  
28 opinion, I guess, as a whole, but like I said I wasn't around them much.

29          RV: Tell me about the Kit Carson Scouts.

30          DE: They were former VC who come to the ARVN side and they'd be like  
31 interpreter and help us out. But like I said a couple of them, they were just there. They

1 really didn't do much. One of them, he was pretty well gung-ho. He would get out and  
2 walk point. He could be pretty rough on some peasants when he interrogated them too.

3 RV: How so? What do you mean?

4 DE: Well, I seen one getting a little physical with an old mama san because she  
5 wasn't telling him the truth he said. But he would be a little physical towards some of  
6 them sometimes. They never did tell him anything I don't think. But like I said we had  
7 one that was pretty good and the other two we had were, were just there I guess.

8 RV: Yeah. Okay. Dave, if you don't mind, and you don't have to talk about this,  
9 but I'd like to know how your—well, just some of the things personal to you while you  
10 were there. First of all, your spiritual beliefs, can you comment on anything that  
11 happened in that sense to you in Vietnam? Did Vietnam, did the war there change or  
12 alter your spiritual beliefs, if you had them, at all?

13 DE: Yes and no. I mean it kind of made me more cynic, I guess. It's kind of  
14 hard—basically just stuffed a lot of feelings and stuff and never shared with anybody and  
15 just sucked it up, went on, and did the best I could. But I did pray on a daily basis.

16 RV: Did you? What, you said—I'm sorry, go ahead.

17 DE: But you know, didn't let anybody see it.

18 RV: Yeah. Why not?

19 DE: Well, just seemed kind of hypocritical praying for good things and turning  
20 around and trying to kill. But just kind of like , I can't explain it. It's just feeling one  
21 thing and doing the exact opposite I guess.

22 RV: Did you feel that you would be looked down upon if you were caught  
23 praying or if you admitted spirituality or your spiritual interests?

24 DE: Yeah. I think I took to that same way as like if you break down and cry  
25 when somebody got killed or something. Just wasn't macho I guess. Or in my case I feel  
26 if I did let down I could never regroup.

27 RV: So you felt like you had to stay strong the whole time and not let yourself  
28 get, I guess, soft?

29 DE: Yeah. No.

1           RV: Was this stuff ever spoken about or was it this was just the expected  
2 behavior, you guys would not cry over fallen comrades and you would stay outwardly  
3 strong?

4           DE: Just kind of unspoken, didn't happen or I mean—

5           RV: Go ahead.

6           DE: Like I said it just wasn't spoken about. You just went on. We used a lot of  
7 dark humor I guess, gallows humor or whatever you want to call it.

8           RV: Tell me about the humor. How would that—what role did humor play for  
9 you in Vietnam?

10          DE: Well, kept me from going crazy, I guess. It kind of lightened up a real dark  
11 situation. I mean, well, we had one guy. He was in a night logger and the VC come in.  
12 He hollered at him. He turned and well he shot him, but we didn't find him till the next  
13 day. Of course, he had shot him right in the eye and the right buttock and went up  
14 through the intestines and got him in the—he was feeling kind of bad. He was there,  
15 squad leader and five or six of us there looking at him the next morning. Then the other  
16 guy said, well, when you get back Chu Lai we was going to have him right on the  
17 blackboard a hundred times “{I will not shoot Dinks in the ass anymore.” Of course  
18 yeah, he felt bad but it broke the spell and we went on. It just little silly, stupid things  
19 like that.

20          RV: Can you give me any examples besides that one? What do you remember?  
21 What do you see in your mind's eye when you think about humor in Vietnam? What are  
22 you thinking about now?

23          DE: Well, about that one time when, he was writing on the blackboard there, that  
24 there. It was kind of humorous. Just a bunch of other silly things like that one guy  
25 was—we'd been humping around out like fifteen, twenty clicks or so. It was hot. We  
26 broke. He took off his rucksack and stood up and says, “Dinks, we come in peace,” like  
27 that or something. “We're your friends, come on out.” I mean, silly stupid things. I  
28 can't really tell the stories. I mean, some guys can make a great big story out of it, but I  
29 can't. But we did use humor and some of it was pretty sick humor.

30          RV: But it got you through.

31          DE: Right.

1           RV: Can you comment on fear? How did fear play a role for you?

2           DE: Kept me alert. It was really, it was really all in my mind. I mean the fear  
3 was in, it was there, but when something happened it was just—I don't know, the  
4 adrenaline rush or whatever, the fear was blocked out you just reacted and I wasn't scared  
5 until afterwards.

6           RV: Oh, really? After a fire fight or after you got home to the United States?

7           DE: Both. Both. About the scariest I ever was once, I don't know. I didn't tell  
8 this earlier, did I?

9           RV: I don't remember. I don't know what you're going to say.

10          DE: I went out on the night ambush. It was pigs that I heard something in the  
11 grass. I was on watch. There's three guys up by the trail road and two ups and back.  
12 There's some pigs squeaking around in there. I could hear some movement, but I didn't  
13 hear them grunting or anything. The fear in my mind started racing and thought they  
14 were sneaking in. They seen us move in there at dusk, but here it was pigs and they were  
15 moving around. But like I said, most of the fear was when something wasn't happening.  
16 When something happened, somebody hit a booby trap, I go bandage them up, I wasn't  
17 scared, but afterwards I'd start shaking and be scared afterwards. But seemed like when  
18 something happened the fear wasn't there. I mean that's the best I can explain it.

19          RV: You said the time when you heard the pigs rooting around and all that, you  
20 said that was the most scared you'd ever been?

21          DE: Yeah. Because it was racing—I had time to think and my mind was racing.  
22 But as far as when something would actually happen I don't know if the adrenaline rush  
23 would block out the fear, but yeah, there was fear. But the worst part was when  
24 nothing—I mean the fear was worse when something wasn't happening.

25          RV: Right. That's interesting. It's ironic that people would probably think that  
26 you'd be scared, maybe in the moment, but I guess you're thinking of survival and other  
27 things, doing what you need to be doing. What made you so scared that night with the  
28 pigs? Was it just because of the unknown, not knowing what's going on?

29          DE: Yeah. The unknown and the time to think the worst.

1           RV: How do you deal with that? I mean what kind of affect with that have on a  
2 man? Every day, almost, I guess, having to deal with this kind of a situation. Like you  
3 said, any time a rocket could come in, a sniper could shoot. How do you deal with that?

4           DE: I don't know. I was just young and dumb and did. I can't explain it. It's  
5 just like after you're there awhile you know if you, like an arty round or an RPG (rocket  
6 propelled grenade) or something there, if you hear it, it ain't going to—it's already by  
7 you. If it's going to get you, you know, it's traveling faster than the speed of sound so  
8 once you hear it it's by you or it's not going to hit you. But that's, I don't know, that's  
9 what they said but I guess there's some truth to that. But early on it would scare you, but  
10 then there was a period in there that it didn't scare me. When it got short it would scare  
11 me again.

12          RV: Did you act differently when you were short?

13          DE: Pardon?

14          RV: Did you act differently when you were short?

15          DE: Yeah. Yeah. I went back out in the field when I was short for four days  
16 and, man, I was really up scared.

17          RV: Really?

18          DE: Yeah. But one thing, when it was a bunch of—there's nobody left there that  
19 I knew that was with, in the field two months earlier, three months, and I was getting  
20 close and all the horror stories you hear about people going eleven months and three  
21 weeks and then getting hit, but I got through it so.

22          RV: Yeah. Apparently you did. Dave, what about bravery? What role did this  
23 play? Can you comment on that?

24          DE: Didn't play much on mine because like I said when they're shooting down I  
25 kept my head down. It wasn't—I didn't want to be a hero so, but I think there was a  
26 couple guys who said a lot of bravado and bravery. We had a couple guys that were  
27 pretty good.

28          RV: What do you mean?

29          DE: As far as booby traps and seeing them before they'd hit them and being good  
30 infantry men, I guess.

31          RV: Did you see men who were good soldiers by just natural instinct?

1 DE: I think there were some that were just born to do it and others just, like me,  
2 just stuck into it and doing basically the best he could at the time I guess.

3 RV: What made a good soldier in your opinion?

4 DE: Didn't panic, could put up with the bullshit and follow the good orders from  
5 the kind of, let lot of the stuff slide off, didn't get too upset, just kind of hard to say, for  
6 me.

7 RV: Well, Dave, let's talk a little bit about what you guys did when you were not  
8 out there walking the field or dealing with the sick or wounded. How did you entertain  
9 yourself? What'd you guys do for entertainment?

10 DE: Well, we'd drink and smoke dope every chance we got.

11 RV: Really?

12 DE: Well, yeah, except out in the field. When we get on the firebase they could  
13 usually get some beer, but I don't remember. No, we didn't—I don't think we got much  
14 piled on the firebase either. Back in Chu Lai there's always a bunch of marijuana and  
15 then some heroin. Some guys, dopers, got on it, but most of the guys didn't mess with it.  
16 Most of the guys would smoke or drink.

17 RV: You want to talk about what you did?

18 DE: Well—

19 RV: You don't have to. I'm just asking.

20 DE: Yeah. Like I said, I would—anytime, they would once in a great while  
21 they'd send us out beer and pop. It would be warm but if there was guys who didn't  
22 drink beer, I'd drink their beer warm. Then they had what we call stand down back at  
23 Chu Lai every six, eight weeks or so, which supposedly would re-zero weapons and this  
24 and that. Get poor money and poor shows. Had like an R&R (rest and recuperation), in-  
25 country R&R rec center there. It balanced to about a three day drunk for me so I would  
26 just—let's see. I would buy two fifths of whiskey and then the EM (enlisted men) club, it  
27 was open. You could drink there from like seven till ten in the evening, or maybe it was  
28 seven to nine, I don't know. Actually, myself, I just try to drink as much as I could to get  
29 to where I wouldn't feel anything.

30 RV: Did it work?

31 DE: Oh, for a while. Worked for a few years after I come home too.

1           RV: What about the drugs? What did you do and what did you see, most of all?  
2           DE: The only drugs I did was smoke some marijuana, but I've seen some guys  
3 get into heroin and stuff. I just kind of—they run the different pack from what I was in.  
4 Seemed like the dopers and the drinkers didn't mix back in the rear. It was like—  
5           RV: What did—I'm sorry. Go ahead.  
6           DE: It was kind of like the whites and the blacks didn't mix in the rear.  
7           RV: Right. We talked about the racism and the separation. Were drugs and  
8 alcohol ever a problem out in the field?  
9           DE: Not in my unit.  
10          RV: What would happen if someone brought out any dope out to the field?  
11          DE: Well, I suppose it'd be on the squad leader if he'd find it or—well, I don't  
12 know. Like I said it never happened that I was aware of.  
13          RV: Okay. Did you guys keep any pets with the unit?  
14          DE: No, but some people on the firebase there, a couple of them have a monkey  
15 and a couple of them had a couple dogs, but we didn't. In the infantry company none of  
16 us had any pets.  
17          RV: Okay. How much contact did you have with home?  
18          DE: I'd get a fair of share of letters from parents and girlfriend and brother,  
19 sisters, they wrote a couple letters. So I did quite a bit letter writing.  
20          RV: You did yourself?  
21          DE: Yeah. Yeah. Write, wouldn't write much but write a little bit.  
22          RV: What would you talk about in your letters?  
23          DE: Oh, how many more days I had left and that's about it. Or I might mention  
24 get up in a rear job.  
25          RV: Would you tell them what was going on really? How dangerous it was or  
26 what kind of trouble you were in?  
27          DE: Naw. Just superficial stuff like tell them about some of the wildlife scenes.  
28 Nah. I never got into any of the losses or anything.  
29          RV: Why not?  
30          DE: Didn't really want them to know that. If I started writing about it I'd  
31 probably start feeling stuff, just avoidance of it.

1           RV: Did you ever make any MARS (Military Affiliate Radio System) phone  
2 calls?

3           DE: Yeah, I did make one MARS call. That was my sister. My dad got sick and  
4 something about getting a compassionate reassignment for something. I did make one  
5 call and my oldest brother, he was home, he answered the phone because it's morning in  
6 Vietnam, but it's evening back here. So I did make one MARS call. I know some people  
7 who made quite a few of them.

8           RV: Were you able to keep up with news from the United States?

9           DE: Well, not really, looking back, except for what was in the *Stars and Stripes*  
10 but most of that was stuff happening over there as I remember. Once in a while  
11 somebody would send a clipping from home newspaper, but didn't really keep up on  
12 what was happening. Remember who won the Super Bowl and stuff like that.

13          RV: What did you find yourself missing most about the United States?

14          DE: Well, indoor plumbing, real food to eat, I guess, and real clothes, sleeping in  
15 a bed.

16          RV: All the basics.

17          DE: Yeah. Just electricity, I guess. Well, I guess we had electric on the firebase.  
18 Just little simple things, cold water.

19          RV: Cold water?

20          DE: Yeah. Drinking water.

21          RV: I see what you mean. Yeah. Okay.

22          DE: Ice water.

23          RV: What was the food that you guys were eating? Can you describe it?

24          DE: Well, the C rations were just, regular old C rations. Some of it was, like the  
25 beanie weenie, it was good but we'd get a case of them every four days I think or three  
26 days. The ham and lima beans, would pitch them.

27          RV: How come everybody pitched them? I keep hearing this over and over.

28          DE: They weren't good. There was a time I wished we had some.

29          RV: Yeah?

30          DE: Yeah. Like the monsoons, we wouldn't get resupplied. Would go, you  
31 know, five days, six days on three days rations. So you kind of wished you had

1 something to eat that fifth day. The pork slices were good. I can't remember. But like I  
2 said they were nourishing, I guess. I survived on them. But then they'd pick up like  
3 some wild bananas once in a while and stuff. Some other kind of little fruit, a cross  
4 between an orange and a tangerine or something. I don't know what they were. I ate a  
5 bunch of them one time I remember. Then on the firebase they had a mess hall there and  
6 they cooked food. Get hot food there. Then once in a great while they'd send hot food  
7 out in the field in these big cooler things. Very seldom. I think we only got them two or  
8 three times. One time we got the spaghetti. That's all. We got spaghetti and somebody  
9 else, other unit, got all the sauce. So, even when they did try to send us good food they'd  
10 screw it up.

11 RV: Okay. Dave, tell me about what you listened to as far as music was  
12 concerned and what role did music play in Vietnam for you.

13 DE: Well, we weren't supposed to have radios in the field. No transistors or  
14 sometimes mate logarithm with an ear jack, got to turn it on. Of course I listened to  
15 country music. I think they only had like an hour show of country music. Most of it was  
16 some rock and roll, which—

17 RV: So you were a country music fan?

18 DE: Yeah. I listened to that and I liked when the firebase slot them. It had a reel  
19 to reel tape with a bunch of sounds on it. But we'd crank her up on the firebase, tape  
20 players and stuff.

21 RV: Do you remember any of the songs that you like that you listened to?

22 DE: Oh, Simon and Garfunkel. I remember "Bridge Over Troubled Water," and  
23 Charlie Pride, he was big on the country side. Jerry Reed and Lynn Anderson, "Rose  
24 Garden," I guess was big then.

25 RV: What was the most popular kind of music overall there?

26 DE: Rock and roll. Like Simon and Garfunkel, they were big then, I guess. And  
27 what was that? In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida—I can't think of them now. I can turn on the old  
28 rock and roll and think of some tunes. Scott McKenzie, Flowers in Your Hair in San  
29 Francisco. That was big. Of course, "We Gotta Get Out Of This Place." That song was  
30 played quite a bit. I don't know. The Animals and (Inaudible).

31 RV: What about R&Rs? Were you able to get one?

1 DE: Yes I was.

2 RV: Tell me about that.

3 DE: Gosh to be twenty years old in Sydney, Australia again. Yeah. I had to wait  
4 ten months in-country because Sydney was one of the more popular ones. I couldn't see  
5 going to Taipei or Hong Kong or Bangkok. I wanted to see a round eye. So I spent a  
6 week down in Sydney. The Aussie girls, they like the GIs because we had some money  
7 to spend and we had fun.

8 RV: What'd you do? You knew I was going to ask you, didn't you? Of course  
9 you don't have to talk about it, Dave, but if you want people to understand what you guys  
10 did on R&R in Australia. I mean, we could all use our imagination but—

11 DE: Okay. Well, I won't get graphic then. I'll share in general.

12 RV: You go right ahead. Do whatever you want to.

13 DE: Okay. I was a red guard at this one bar. They had like a happy hour at  
14 seven o'clock to eight, all the drinks were free. About seven o'clock there'd be fifty,  
15 seventy women hit that place and about nine o'clock it'd be empty. We kind of pair up  
16 or something. I hooked up this one gal. We went to her place that night and she had to  
17 go to work. We did some drinking and dancing, and I think we danced, but I did some  
18 drinking anyway and so left their place. That morning she had to go to work and I was  
19 supposed to meet her back there at night, but she didn't show so I hooked up with this  
20 other one and kind of spent the next four days. She'd come back to my hotel and we kind  
21 of hung out, and went out, seen the sights of Sydney, and ate. At the time it was the  
22 tallest building south of the Equator and had a revolving restaurant in it. Went to the zoo,  
23 out across the harbor, and stuff, and did write a couple letters after. Come back and that  
24 was it. But like I said, I wound up coming back with some money, but then other guys, I  
25 guess there were some prostitutes there, but I didn't get hooked up with them.

26 RV: Didn't need it.

27 DE: Well, no because like I said there's a lot of—the Aussie girls, they like the  
28 GIs because they had money to spend and it's been one night. What every Aussie guy  
29 was making a week or more so I guess they kind of like it. It was fun.

30 RV: That's definitely the PG version. (Both laugh)

31 DE: I guess we'll leave it that way.

1 RV: Okay. That sounds fine. That sounds fine.

2 DE: But it was enjoyable.

3 RV: Did it provide you rest and relaxation or recuperation? I mean did you feel  
4 better when you got back?

5 DE: Oh, I was so down when I got back. I mean, even though it was—it wasn't  
6 America. They still talked a little funny, but I mean the weirdest things. Like I  
7 remember coming out of this bar at night and looking up there and seeing this Kentucky  
8 Fried Chicken sign and just sitting down laughing like crazy because here we are Down  
9 Under and there's Kentucky Fried Chicken. So it was just—I don't know. Like I said  
10 instead of R and R, it was rest and relaxation, it was I and I, intoxication and intercourse  
11 for me. But once I got back, of course I had my rear job, but it was a downer coming  
12 back in-country. Bu I only had like six weeks left.

13 RV: You were still the aid station medic. You're still working that.

14 DE: I had a—yeah, in Da Nang. I was in Da Nang. I wasn't on the firebase.

15 RV: Okay. Tell me about the transition. What happened? How did you get back  
16 to Da Nang?

17 DE: Well, they sent some new medics over. So some of the guys that—the group  
18 I was in, we wound up spending eight, nine months in the field. They were only  
19 spending two or three then getting rear jobs. It's kind of like seniority. You got bumped  
20 from the firebase. Of course, like I said, they gave LZ Center to the ARVNs and we went  
21 to this other hill. I don't think we had a full—yeah, there was some artillery there and  
22 mortars. But there wasn't a flying company there providing bunker guard all the time  
23 like Center. So there wasn't a need for as many, much support there as there was on  
24 Center. So a lot of us got back to the battalion—I guess you would call it battalion—at  
25 Da Nang. Like I said, they sent a bunch of medics over so basically I worked sick call,  
26 which was like from seven to nine in the morning. That's all I'd have to work for the  
27 day.

28 RV: That's pretty nice. What'd you do the rest of the time?

29 DE: Go up to the Freedom Hill PX. Hang out up there. Like I said, the EM club  
30 wouldn't open up till seven in the evenings, but I did some trading to get something to  
31 drink and would read a few books too.

1           RV: This seems like a much better situation for you than what you had.

2           DE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. It was, like I said, it was—well, in a way it was good  
3 duty.

4           RV: It was what?

5           DE: In a way it was good duty. Like I said, only had to work two hours. I got  
6 drunk one night and still drunk and still going at it at seven the next morning. They kind  
7 of frowned on that a little bit but didn't get in too much trouble.

8           RV: Who frowned on it? The MPs (Military Police)?

9           DE: No, the platoon sergeant. Like I said, I could have got a lot more trouble  
10 there in Da Nang with the booze and the drugs are there and boredom.

11          RV: Did you miss being out there with the unit as far as the relationships with the  
12 men?

13          DE: Looking back I did, but I didn't realize it at the time. There was  
14 something—it was a change, something different. The guys that I was in the field with  
15 that got new jobs, there's new people out there. Of course, like I mentioned earlier, I  
16 went out there with about eighteen days left. It was the same company I was with before,  
17 but there wasn't anybody I was in the field with three months earlier, two months earlier.

18          RV: Why would they send you out there being that short?

19          DE: Well, it was like, I was getting in trouble drinking too much. Like I said, I  
20 didn't show up for work that one morning. They frowned on that. So I said, "Well, just  
21 send me back to the field."

22          RV: And they did.

23          DE: And they did for four days.

24          RV: For four days and what happened?

25          DE: Well, then the company come back because they was pulling bunker guard  
26 there on the ridgeline back of Da Nang. So they told me to come back and they sent  
27 another medic up with him. I had to work I think one day, which worked the whole  
28 twenty-four hours. Then the rest of the time I was off getting ready to process out.

29          RV: What'd it feel like to be going home?

30          DE: Well, it felt great and—yeah. It was great. But then once I got on the plane  
31 there was kind of like an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. I was on a planeload of

1 strangers, not anybody to serve with or anything. Then it did feel, it was great, but there  
2 was still something null deep down but looking back it was just I wasn't coming home  
3 with somebody that I spent a lot of time with.

4         RV: Dave, a couple other questions. When you were coming back—well, a  
5 couple of other questions before we talk about what happened when you got home—but  
6 what was that mood like on the plane? I mean how do you leave a situation like that?  
7 What did you feel?

8         DE: Like I said, it was elation. I was going home, but then again there was a  
9 little empty feeling somewhere. I mean, but it was great. I mean going home so looking  
10 forward to it.

11         RV: Were you scared in any way?

12         DE: No, I wasn't scared. But there was a, just a—I can't describe the feeling.  
13 Just like an emptiness or something.

14         RV: Why the emptiness? Was it you felt you were leaving something behind?

15         DE: I guess that's it. I mean I can't really explain it but there was something. It  
16 felt great going home, but also there was something that I can't describe it other than a  
17 kind of little empty twinge or something. From looking back I think it was just because I  
18 wasn't coming home with any of the guys that I was there with. Yeah.

19         RV: Well, when you got back into the United States how was your transition to  
20 life at home and being away and transitioning, really, into civilian life?

21         DE: I guess it—well, like I said I got to come home and landed in McChord Air  
22 Force Base in Ft. Lewis and got home from Seattle, Sea-Tac Airport to Chicago to  
23 Columbus, and got home about seven o'clock the next morning. From about twenty-two  
24 hours after I landed in-country I was in Columbus. My sister and girlfriend picked me up  
25 at the airport and. I said, "Well, I want to drive, but let's get out of Columbus first,"  
26 because I hadn't driven in a year. So once we got out of Columbus I got behind—it felt  
27 good to get behind the car and drive. Then come home and drove in. See mom, my dad,  
28 then partied for a couple weeks.

29         RV: What did you say to your parents? Do you remember what they said to you?

1 DE: Nah, but I can't really remember. I remember Dad meeting me at the back  
2 door. That's more or less—well, we didn't really hug. We just put our hands on each  
3 other's shoulders, I guess. Didn't really say a lot. But he was glad I was home.

4 RV: So your dad didn't say too much?

5 DE: No.

6 RV: You said he was a man of few words anyway.

7 DE: Yeah. He didn't say much.

8 RV: How about your mother?

9 DE: Nah. She didn't really say a whole lot.

10 RV: Was it like welcome home or was it I need some help out here with the  
11 hogs? I mean was it warm?

12 DE: Yeah. It was in August.

13 RV: Was the mood warm?

14 DE: Oh the mood, oh, okay. Yeah. Yeah. It was—they was glad I was home.  
15 Like I said didn't really ask any questions, what I did, just glad to have me home. Like I  
16 said, I partied for two weeks and got married and had to go to Ft. Polk for two and a half  
17 months, and then they discharged me.

18 RV: You had to finish up your obligation?

19 DE: Mm-hmm.

20 RV: Okay. Who'd you party with?

21 DE: Oh, just some locals down at the local watering hole or anybody that would.  
22 A couple of them was doing the tour a year or two ago and did some drinking with my  
23 brother next to me.

24 RV: Did people talk to you about Vietnam? Did they want to know?

25 DE: No. No.

26 RV: Why not?

27 DE: I suppose just thought—I don't know. If you didn't mention it, it didn't  
28 happen but the mood was warm and everything. I wasn't, like I said, when I got home  
29 there I remember getting in the airport at Chicago. Got in there like late, maybe midnight  
30 or one o'clock, about twenty minutes before the bar closed.

1           RV: So you were looking to drink when you got home? I mean you weren't  
2 going to deal with being sober in the United States at this point.

3           DE: No.

4           RV: Had people warned you and talked to you about maybe what might happen  
5 when you go home or did you have any inclination about that?

6           DE: No. No, there was nothing about what to expect when you get home, as I  
7 remember.

8           RV: No decompressing or anything like that.

9           DE: No. Nope. But getting back to the bartender there at Chicago, there was  
10 about five or six of us GIs. Of course, he started wanting to know if I was twenty-one. I  
11 said no, because I was still twenty, but he went ahead and served me anyway. I think,  
12 three or the other four guys there they were twenty-one. He carded us all, but he served  
13 me anyway, which I'm glad he did because I'd have probably really got pissed or  
14 something.

15          RV: Were you in uniform?

16          DE: Yeah. I was all in the class A uniforms. Nobody spit on me or nobody  
17 shook my hand or spit on me or nothing. They just kind of ignored me. I mean, well, I  
18 just kind of blended in. Some people said they were spit on, but I wasn't.

19          RV: Well, if you would, can you give me your thoughts on a couple of these  
20 issues that really affected the whole country? It's interesting to see what your individual  
21 experience was and what you thought. Can you tell me what you thought about the anti-  
22 war movement?

23          DE: Well, I didn't think much of them at the time. Just really didn't have a good  
24 opinion of them. If I would have had a contact with them I would probably got violent  
25 with them. So I guess it's a good thing I didn't have any contact.

26          RV: Do you still feel that way today? I mean are you bitter about that or has  
27 your view changed?

28          DE: It's changed some because I've become friends with a war protester and they  
29 didn't realize the hurt and damage that they were causing, which I believe they did.

30          RV: You think they did know.

1 DE: No, I think they did do some hurt and damage, provided comfort to the  
2 enemy, I think.

3 RV: Can you elaborate on that? What do you mean?

4 DE: Well, go back to Tet before, that was a military defeat for North Vietnamese  
5 but with the war protesters in this country it turned the table on us. Like I said, America,  
6 love it or leave it at the time. But looking back, like I said, my attitude has softened some  
7 because a lot of them didn't realize what they were doing. It's kind of hard to separate  
8 the politics from the warrior.

9 RV: Dave, what did you think about the war after you came home? Did you keep  
10 up with what was happening there?

11 DE: Not really. Like I said, I kind of drank. I had nightmares the first six  
12 months and then they stopped.

13 RV: What kind of nightmares, if you don't mind me asking?

14 DE: Well, always being surrounded by a bunch of VC. They had weapons and I  
15 didn't. I mean like then I'd wake up. But that ceased after a while. But like I said  
16 there's always a feeling there that, lost the war or something. Didn't do the right job or, I  
17 don't know, I just really didn't have that good a feeling about my service to my country  
18 at the time.

19 RV: What do you think about it now? How do you feel about it now?

20 DE: Well, I guess I'm glad I served my country. I wish I hadn't have, but I can't  
21 change the past.

22 RV: What do you mean you wish you hadn't have served your country?

23 DE: Well, Vietnam, see, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent it's part of me  
24 because I was there. How much would I have been any different without Vietnam? Like  
25 I said, stuff stayed with me and there's just like an emptiness that—I can't describe the  
26 feeling, I guess.

27 RV: You still have that emptiness?

28 DE: Not as acute as it used to be. Like I said, I went to a veterans group and got  
29 talking to other veterans and hooked up with some guys that I served in Vietnam with,  
30 went to reunions, and made friends with other vets that I didn't, that was in America,

1 that I didn't serve with but I've been going to reunions for five years and become friends  
2 with them.

3 RV: Has that helped you heal a little bit?

4 DE: Yes. Yeah, it's been therapeutic.

5 RV: Is this—the emptiness that we're talking about—is this the same emptiness  
6 that you felt on that plane leaving Vietnam or is this something different?

7 DE: Well, it's kind of. It is. Like I said, I can't describe it other than being a  
8 kind of emptiness feeling. What it is, is like the camaraderie or brotherhood we had that,  
9 we can't recapture it. I wish I could explain it, but I can't.

10 RV: No, that's okay. I think you are explaining it in your own way. Is that  
11 something that you think is always going to be with you no matter what you do?

12 DE: Well, it's been thirty-five years so I figure it's here for keeps. The mental  
13 health professional, they call it post-traumatic stress. I think, you know, as myself I've  
14 gotten more mellow as I've aged so. I've noticed other people as they've gotten older  
15 they seem to get more mellow and sentimental. I'll say it'll be with me till at least three  
16 days after they bury me.

17 RV: Can you describe, Dave, what it feels like, I'm talking about describing for  
18 the civilian whose never been in combat, never been in a war who might be listening to  
19 this a hundred years from now or just people listening to this in general now, can you  
20 describe what that PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), if you will, feels like. What  
21 does it feel like to carry that war with you? Is it something that's thought about a lot or is  
22 it something you think about every now and then? Is it kind of a weight on you or is it  
23 a—what is it for you?

24 DE: Well, it can be pretty much a daily thing. Things will trigger it like items in  
25 the news.

26 RV: Such as what?

27 DE: Well, April 30<sup>th</sup>. Anniversaries triggers it, any stressful situations in my life  
28 stirs it up. It's not—I'm not crazy, but it affects my mood and it's something I've got to  
29 live with. By sharing it with other vets and somebody in safe places it lessens the load.  
30 I'm not alone.

31 RV: Definitely not.

1 DE: A lot of time I thought I was. But it affects relationships with the ex-spouse,  
2 with my ex-wife, with my kids, but it's hard to recognize. It's just part of me and it  
3 affects people different.

4 RV: Yes. Why are you doing this interview with us, with me? Is there a reason  
5 specific or is it part of this process?

6 DE: Part of the process and I suppose specific to get some perspective of what it  
7 was like down on the low end. But it's—I just wish I could be more articulate about how  
8 I feel about it.

9 RV: I think you're being perfectly articulate, Dave.

10 DE: Just kind of hard to describe the feelings that I have. For a long time I  
11 carried a lot of anger but my anger was misplaced. It wasn't against—my anger really  
12 wasn't against the Vietnamese people it was against my own government. I mean the  
13 government did sell us out. I don't care what they say. Like I said, I really don't hold  
14 that much anger against the anti-war people. As for Jane Fonda, I wouldn't walk across  
15 the street not to meet her, but I wouldn't walk across the street, you know, I wouldn't go  
16 out of the way to meet her and I wouldn't go out of my way not to meet her. I mean, you  
17 know, I don't give her that much power in my life.

18 RV: Right. What did you think—do you remember where you were April 30<sup>th</sup>,  
19 1975?

20 DE: Yeah. I was sitting in my basement drinking beer.

21 RV: Were you watching TV?

22 DE: I turned it off.

23 RV: So, you knew what was happening?

24 DE: Yeah. I knew what was happening. But I didn't want to watch it.

25 RV: How much of it did you watch? Like when did you turn it off? Do you  
26 remember?

27 DE: Probably a day before or something. They said they was just, they was just  
28 coming right down the country. The handwriting was on the wall. So I don't think I  
29 watched any that day.

30 RV: So you knew, you didn't actually watch the fall and the evacuation and all  
31 that?

1 DE: No. No. I watched up until the day before or something.

2 RV: Well, what was it like last Saturday for you, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary?

3 DE: It was okay. It was okay. Like I said, it didn't really—it was okay. It didn't  
4 really hit me like it did some guys.

5 RV: How did affect other guys? Did you talk to some people?

6 DE: Yeah. It just stirs up old memories.

7 RV: So, it did not have a big affect upon you?

8 DE: No, no. No. Not this time.

9 RV: What about other April 30<sup>th</sup>s?

10 DE: It has in the past, stirred up more memories.

11 RV: Okay. I wanted to know what you thought about lessons for the United  
12 States. What do you think as a country we have learned from that experience in  
13 Southeast Asia or not learned, either way?

14 DE: Well, by the Gulf War I thought we learned a lot. Of course, we got Iraq. I  
15 don't know if we learned much or not. Of course, like I said, I guess we're doomed to  
16 repeat history. I would like to think that the country would not get involved again unless  
17 we got the support to see it through. If we never get into another Vietnam I guess then  
18 it'd be worth it. I don't know. Kind of hard to get into the politics of it. I mean, for me  
19 everybody's got their opinion. I don't know. I guess Ho Chi Minh one time tried to get  
20 the United States to back him.

21 RV: Yes, he did against the Japanese in World War II and we actually assisted  
22 with the precursor to the CIA. What did we not learn? I mean are there things that—you  
23 talked about stuff that you didn't quite get or you would've maybe done differently.  
24 What do you think? Do you think the country has learned its lesson? You see  
25 differences today with what's happening with the Iraq and the Afghanistan wars?

26 DE: I don't know if they ever will. Time will tell. I wish we weren't in Iraq, but  
27 we're there. Let's see it through and come home. But like I said I wish we weren't there,  
28 but too late for that, I guess.

29 RV: Why do you wish we weren't there?

30 DE: Well, I hate to see people get killed. In some ways the one who gets killed  
31 might be the lucky ones. I mean, I hate to see lives ruined but guys come back all messed

1 up physically and mentally, emotionally. I hope they're looking at them and helping  
2 them better than they did us.

3 RV: Why do you think you all were treated like that? I know that the politics of  
4 the day definitely affected things, but why do you think that happened?

5 DE: I guess it'd been the politics and people didn't really understand what was  
6 going on. Hell, I didn't understand what was going on. I was there so. I guess that was  
7 it, just people didn't realize what was going through.

8 RV: So, a misunderstanding was part of that?

9 DE: I would say. That's like today. You and I are going about our lives and did  
10 we stop and think what some of the guys in Iraq are going through? That's not a shared  
11 sacrifice.

12 RV: What do you think you most learned in Vietnam about yourself?

13 DE: Well, I guess I learned that I can survive about anything.

14 RV: That what? You couldn't survive—?

15 DE: I can survive about anything, I guess. I can get through some pretty tough  
16 stuff. Also, like I said, I've learned that I'm not as tough as I once was or thought I was.

17 RV: What do you mean?

18 DE: Just, like I said, I've gotten more emotional and softer in my old age.

19 Mellow.

20 RV: What do you think about Vietnam today? Would you ever want to go back?

21 DE: I don't have a real burning desire to go back, but I wouldn't entirely rule it  
22 out after talking to a couple people that's been back. I mean, there's some—like I said, I  
23 don't have no anger towards the people, Vietnamese people, like I did have at one time.  
24 There is some pretty country there. Well, like I said, if it happens it happens, if it don't it  
25 don't.

26 RV: Do you watch movies on Vietnam, Dave?

27 DE: Some of them, yes.

28 RV: Do you want to comment on the ones you've seen? Do you remember  
29 which ones you've looked at and that you felt were worthwhile?

30 DE: Well, *Platoon* stirred up a bunch of stuff for me. *The Deer Hunter* I couldn't  
31 really—see, that's the one where they played the Russian Roulette, wasn't it?

1           RV: Yes, it is.

2           DE: That one didn't—I couldn't really relate to it or, I mean that was—yeah, I  
3 couldn't really relate to that one. But depending, like I said, the language and the dress  
4 and the action, except when there's fighting among themselves.

5           RV: That didn't really—that wasn't realistic, you thought?

6           DE: Nah. Not to me. Their den or whatever and what was it *Apocalypse Now*.  
7 That was kind of stretched a little for me.

8           RV: Tell me, what was it about *Platoon* that rang true for you?

9           DE: Just the way the guys was talking and the dress and stuff early on, I guess,  
10 when he first got there. Stuff like that kind of rang true.

11          RV: Have you read any books on Vietnam?

12          DE: Yeah. I read a few of them. Got a couple to read I haven't read yet, but one,  
13 *Time Heals No Wounds* by Jack Leninger, I think is his name, the infantryman, the 4<sup>th</sup>  
14 Infantry Division, there around Pleiku. His, I could relate to his because he was drafted  
15 and what not.

16          RV: So you don't avoid the movies and you don't avoid reading about it?

17          DE: Nah. No. I went and, nah here five or six—nah, I guess about seven or  
18 eight years ago now, I got the Time Life video thing. I got it and watched it.

19          RV: What'd you think of it?

20          DE: It's fairly accurate, I guess. I mean, they had a guy in there I recognized.

21          RV: Did you?

22          DE: Yeah. Sergeant Ortiz. I had him there on his first tour. He was in one clip  
23 there so that was kind of neat. But like I said, just some of it I can, rings true to me and  
24 some of it don't.

25          RV: Okay. Have you been to the Wall in Washington?

26          DE: Mm-hmm.

27          RV: What was that like for you?

28          DE: Well, the first time I went with the family and I just bit my lower lip and  
29 walked right down by it. Then I went with a group of vets and sat there just bawling like  
30 a baby. Rubbed four names and then I was back again for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion.  
31 That was kind of neat.

1           RV: Have you seen one of the moving walls?

2           DE: Yeah. Yeah. That's how I got hooked up with the Americal Division  
3 Veterans Association.

4           RV: Really? What happened? The moving wall came through and—what is it—  
5 Anderson was the guy that was with it. He was Americal and he said they had an  
6 association, and that's how I joined the association.

7           RV: You weren't looking for that. That just happened?

8           DE: Yeah. It just happened but that's like I said, even if I knew twenty years ago  
9 there was an association I wouldn't have joined then. But like I said, it's one of those  
10 things happens. I guess you can call it a "God" thing.

11          RV: That's what some people might call it. But it clearly has played a role for  
12 you in the healing process. Can you tell me—I want to talk about just briefly the oral  
13 history project that the Americal Division has going on and your participation in that.  
14 Why do you want to participate in that?

15          DE: Well, I like to see history be recorded accurately. I kind of have an interest  
16 in history. I guess that's it. I just enjoy it and I think we can learn from it, but I guess if  
17 we learned anything from it we've learned that it will repeat itself.

18          RV: Dave, a couple other questions and let's finish this up. I really would like to  
19 hear your comments on how you would talk to the younger generation today, high school  
20 students or college students, about the Vietnam War in general and about your  
21 experiences.

22          DE: Well, in general it was—I don't know how I would talk to them.

23          RV: I mean these are kids that that's ancient history to them. They can't find this  
24 on the map. It's very difficult to find it on the map. What do you say to this group who  
25 is there and wants to know about the war?

26          DE: That it was a political war run wrong.

27          RV: A political war run wrong?

28          DE: Yeah. I guess, I guess grandkids just come in.

29          RV: Okay. That sounds like a good noise.

30          DE: Oh, yeah. That's a great noise. It's hard for me to express what to say to  
31 them that it was—myself, I really wasn't that gung ho to go, but it was a duty. I think we

1 all owe something to our country. We still disagree. Like I said, I disagreed with war  
2 protesters, but I'll defend by death their right to protest. I'd tell them beware of the  
3 government. I mean it's—because like I said, government lied to us.

4 RV: How did they lie to us? What do you say to that when someone's going to  
5 say, "Nah, they did the best they could"?

6 DE: Well, they might've but they were whittling away in the Paris Peace talks  
7 giving everything away, I guess, while we were still fighting and dying.

8 RV: Yeah. You were over there when heavy negotiations were going on.

9 DE: Yeah. Like I said before, it changed while I was there from winning the war  
10 to not being the last GI killed. So, I don't know. It's hard for me to explain.

11 RV: Dave, did you guys talk about the fact that negotiations were going on in  
12 Paris while you were over there fighting?

13 DE: I don't remember us talking about it.

14 RV: But you were aware that it was, people were negotiating to end the thing?

15 DE: I can't remember. To be honest I can't remember it very well.

16 RV: Dave, well is there anything else that you would like to talk about or  
17 anything else that you want to comment upon before we sign off?

18 DE: No. Other than, most of the guys that was there weren't there by choice.  
19 That's about the only thing I can, would like to be recorded that I didn't go by my free  
20 will. You didn't have too many options. It was either that or jail or Canada.

21 RV: Okay. All right. Well, this will end the oral history interview for the  
22 Vietnam Archive oral history project with Mr. Dave Eichhorn. Thank you very much,  
23 Dave.

24 DE: All righty. Thank you.