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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with David Taylor  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
April 5, 8, 15; May 4, 2005  
Transcribed by Jessica Harrell

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

1           Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. David W. Taylor. Today is April 5, 2005 and the time is 1:40 PM  
3 Central Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library  
4 interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University, and David is in Medina, Ohio.  
5 And we're going to talk today about your pre-Vietnam times. David, I'd like you to talk  
6 to me about where you were born and when you were born and a little bit about your  
7 childhood and growing up, if you could.

8           David Taylor: Well, I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1946 and when I  
9 was about fourteen months old, the family moved to southern New Jersey to get out of  
10 the city. I guess we were about ten years ahead of our time in terms of the rush to  
11 suburbia phenomena in the country in the late '50s. And so I grew up in a semi-rural area  
12 in southern New Jersey. We had woods and fields around us, and maybe you didn't have  
13 a neighbor next door, but there might be one down the road. Predominantly in an area  
14 that was occupied by German immigrants, many of whom had chicken farms, that kind of  
15 thing. And so that was pretty much...we didn't get involved in a lot of activities as  
16 young children, but we had lots of ground and woods to play in and that kind of thing, so  
17 that's pretty much how we spent our youth.

18           RV: Tell me about your parents. What were they like?

1 DT: My mother was a first generation American. Her parents were born in  
2 Germany and came over, and they had a dairy farm in Perkasie, Pennsylvania or near  
3 Perkasie, Pennsylvania, which is in Bucks County. So my mother grew up on a farm. As  
4 an immigrant, she still wore immigrant clothes even though she was born in the States.  
5 And my father came from Virginia near Cape Charles, Virginia. Not too far from  
6 Norfolk. And his father was a policeman down there, and I'm not sure about the mother.  
7 So both families, not a lot of means but they never...you know, they always had food and  
8 clothing. And so...but fairly basic childhoods.

9 RV: Ok. And what did your parents do as occupations?

10 DT: My father worked for the Curtis Publishing Company in Philadelphia. He  
11 was in the payroll department and worked there for most of his life. My mother never got  
12 through high school. She was in the eighth grade, and then my grandmother pulled her  
13 out of school for two reasons. First, she was needed to work on the farm, and second,  
14 because she still kind of wore immigrant clothes and had a German accent, the people in  
15 her school would make fun of her and that they were like second-class people because  
16 they were immigrants. And my mother didn't mind because she always wanted to be a  
17 teacher, and she really wanted to go to high school and then on to college, but because  
18 she was made fun of, my grandmother was too proud of a person to allow that, and so she  
19 pulled her out. So my mother never made it past the eighth grade.

20 RV: Ok. Tell me about your brothers and sisters, if you had any.

21 DT: Three brothers. I have a twin brother and two older brothers. One brother is  
22 four years older than me and the other brother is eight years older than me, and we were  
23 the – my twin brother and I were the last chance for my mother and father trying to have  
24 a girl and they got two more boys, and so that was the end of that.

25 RV: Ok. How close were you with your brothers?

26 DT: Not too close, because they were you know, a four-year difference. It was  
27 enough of a difference that we weren't that close, although my next-older brother who  
28 was four years older, we kind of as kids would follow him around wherever he went,  
29 which I think is natural. My dad used to say we were like a bunch of poodle dogs  
30 following the older brother. So we kind of idolized him when we were very young in the  
31 '50s and followed him around a little bit. But gradually we just kind of went on our own

1 and did our own thing in the woods and I was not especially close to my twin brother as  
2 well. We kind of wanted our own identity, so we were basically...and we had the kind of  
3 childhood with lots of space and room, and we could do our own thing and find our own  
4 identity.

5 RV: Ok. What about your twin? Were you all as close as twins usually are?

6 DT: No, I think we were more...because my mother made such a big deal about  
7 us being twins. I think early on, we wanted our own identity, and so while we did do  
8 things together, we also kind of did things on our own. So other than a softball game in  
9 the neighborhood area that we might get together or something like that, we did some  
10 things together and other things we just kind of meandered on our own.

11 RV: Ok. Tell me about, Dave, when you look back at your childhood. What do  
12 you see about those times in southern New Jersey? What do you see in your mind's eye  
13 right now?

14 DT: Basic values. Didn't expect much. We certainly didn't have a desire for  
15 material things as much as we valued our independence, our ability to just go out in the  
16 woods and do whatever we wanted to do. If we wanted to take a shotgun and go shooting  
17 squirrels or pheasant, or...I probably built more tree houses in the woods than I care to  
18 think of, and that kind of thing. So we just valued our independence and our freedom and  
19 our ability to be ourselves.

20 RV: So tell me about how you were as a student, about your schooling. What  
21 was that like?

22 DT: I was never really enthralled with school. I tolerated it. I was not an  
23 exceptional student, but I learned early on there are certain things in your life you have to  
24 complete, and so I would go along and you know, I wasn't a bad student. I was not a  
25 disciplinary problem. But I wasn't an exceptionally good student or a smart, intelligent  
26 student. So I got average grades. And that pretty much carried me through high school.  
27 I really never was that in tune with school.

28 RV: Did you have favorite subjects?

29 DT: Yes. I loved history, social studies, that kind of thing. I always had a hard  
30 time with math, but I loved the history side of things and couldn't get enough of it. And

1 science to some degree. But mainly I was...I guess I was a right-brained kind of social  
2 studies, history type of person.

3 RV: Ok. All right. What about sports? Were you into sports growing up? You  
4 mentioned hunting that you wanted to do that, but what else?

5 DT: We did a little of that, but mostly we played up the road. There was a  
6 neighbor that had a very big field that we turned into a ball field. And even though we  
7 weren't a development – a housing development as one thinks of it today, we did have  
8 enough kids to get together on a Sunday afternoon or a Saturday afternoon to get up a  
9 good ball game, and so we played a lot of neighborhood-type ball games. Football  
10 games, baseball, that kind of thing.

11 RV: Ok. What about your relationship with your parents? Were you especially  
12 close to your mother or father?

13 DT: I would not...I would say no. Both of them worked an awful lot. My dad  
14 was Catholic; my mother was Lutheran. I was raised as a Lutheran, and so we didn't  
15 even have...there was a dividing line there even in terms of where we went on Sunday  
16 for worship. But my dad was of the old school, which it was his job to work and provide  
17 for the family. We did go on vacations every year to Wildwood, New Jersey down to the  
18 seashore for two weeks. But other than that, we were pretty much on our own, because  
19 as I said, both parents worked, and so we kind of found things to do.

20 RV: Did you work when you were young?

21 DT: I...no, other than odd jobs here and there. I remember because of the sandy  
22 loam soil in New Jersey, which grew just about everything, once we went out and there  
23 were actually bay leaf plants out in the woods. And we would collect bay leaves and  
24 wash them and put them in little paper bags and go around the neighborhood selling  
25 them. I really didn't work at a steady job until halfway through high school, where I  
26 worked at a discount store down the road to get some extra money after school.

27 RV: Ok. What did you do there?

28 DT: I worked in the toy department and I basically did everything. Stocked the  
29 shelves, received goods, helped people if they had questions on items, those kinds of  
30 things.

31 RV: Ok. Did you do that for what, one summer, or during the school year?

1 DT: I did that for my last two years in high school, especially throughout the  
2 summer I got extra hours and then for two years after that as I was going through junior  
3 college, I would work there in the evenings.

4 RV: Ok. Was there any previous military service in your family?

5 DT: No, not at all. My father was born...when he was born, he was too young  
6 for World War I, and he was too old for World War II. I can remember him telling us as  
7 a young child down there in Virginia, once he saw Buffalo Bill Cody come by in the  
8 circus. So he's seen quite a bit, but he was in that age group that he never served in the  
9 military. Of course, that tends to catch up over time because all four of us boys did serve  
10 in the military.

11 RV: So your older brothers did?

12 DT: Yes. My oldest brother was, in the late '50s in the Army. He was a medic  
13 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, and he served in Korea along the DMZ. My next oldest  
14 brother, who is four years older, went into the Army and he ended up in the 173<sup>rd</sup>  
15 Airborne Brigade, and he went to Vietnam not too long after the Brigade arrived in  
16 Vietnam. Those were the early days when they still had fatigues, white t-shirts, and  
17 everything else. And I can remember my mother sending among other things, green dye  
18 so they could dye their t-shirts into a green color. They didn't even have that. So he was  
19 one of the early people in the war.

20 RV: Ok.

21 DT: And then my twin brother, after high school I went on to go to junior college  
22 and he went into the Marines after high school, and he ended up in Vietnam as a military  
23 policeman up near Da Nang.

24 RV: Oh, so all four of you served. Why do you think that happened?

25 DT: I scratch my head to think about that, because with our family not having  
26 military service, our uncles or my father, and I think it was just a basic understanding  
27 during those years in the '50s that you serve your country, and it was just something that  
28 was done. It was something to be proud of, and until you got your life's bearing on what  
29 you wanted to do, the obvious thing was to go into the military. We looked at it as  
30 having value. And certainly by the time it was time for me to go into the Army, which  
31 we'll talk about maybe a little later, people fought that over pretty quickly because of the

1 anti-war sentiment and so forth, but there was never any doubt in my mind that I was  
2 going to also go into the Army.

3 RV: So there was no doubt that you were going to do this?

4 DT: No, I...when I started junior college, and even here we're talking about I  
5 graduated from high school in 1964. I had to take a year of some prep school courses to  
6 get my math ability up, and then I went to a junior college '66 and '67, early '67. And all  
7 during that time, the anti-war movement was really building, and I was not...it did not  
8 deter me. I knew that that's something I wanted to do. And when I finished my junior  
9 college for my Associate's degree, I decided I was tired of school and I really wanted to  
10 go in the Army, and I wanted to become an officer. If I could not get accepted into the  
11 Officer Candidate School program, I did not want to be stuck with a three-year  
12 enlistment. So I went down to the local draft board and volunteered for the draft, and the  
13 lady there said well, I can go on and complete my four years of college because they were  
14 getting enough people in the Army in my district that I was not going to be drafted. And  
15 I replied, 'You don't understand. I do want to be drafted.' And she said, 'You don't  
16 have to be drafted.' And I said, 'Let me tell you again. I want to be drafted.' And so the  
17 next month I was drafted, and in basic training I applied for Officer Candidate School or  
18 OCS, and I was accepted.

19 RV: Ok. Before we go there, let's back up just a bit. I want to ask you about  
20 what you remember growing up about the 1950s in the United States and then into the  
21 early '60s. What are your memories?

22 DT: 1950s were very idyllic. Lots of core values. We could see around the  
23 edges, or I could see around the edges that because humans are humans. I mean, I could  
24 see a teenage pregnancy here and there and racism and that kind of thing, but it wasn't a  
25 lot of that. It was around the edges, as I would describe it. But other than that, basically  
26 it was a rather uneventful childhood, as I recall.

27 RV: Ok.

28 DT: But lots of...I mean, we couldn't wait to get a little car so we could drive  
29 around, and of course always looking at the girls and that kind of thing. So nothing  
30 unusual.

31 RV: What do you remember about President Eisenhower?

1 DT: I didn't...I just remember that he loved to golf and he was considered a hero,  
2 and really I wasn't involved in watching much television at that time or reading the  
3 newspaper, so he was kind of on the periphery, so to speak. It was not something I took  
4 much interest in.

5 RV: Right. Ok. What about President Kennedy?

6 DT: I remember it very well, because I was a sophomore when he was shot, and I  
7 remember vividly. We were in a social studies class and the teacher was Mr. Teadoro  
8 and he idolized President Kennedy, being a Catholic. And one of the female students that  
9 I grew up with through all classes – in fact you may know the name because she became  
10 kind of a pop star, Patti Smith.

11 RV: Oh yeah.

12 DT: Well I knew her. She went through grade school and junior high school and  
13 high school. I knew her well. And she went down to the office to get some papers for  
14 Mr. Teadoro, and she came up walking in the room crying. Mr. Teadoro was taken  
15 aback. 'What is wrong, Patti?' And she said well, she was down at the office and heard  
16 on the radio that the president had been shot. And at that moment, Mr. Teadoro just...he  
17 went blind. I think he forgot that he had a class and he just walked right out of the class  
18 and went downstairs to the office. The bell rang shortly after that to change class, and  
19 when we got into the next class, which was Language Arts, we just sat there. No one did  
20 anything. It was a warm day. We had the windows open, and outside the window I  
21 could hear the radio playing down in the garage section where they repaired the school  
22 buses, and I could hear the radio. And about halfway through class they made the  
23 announcement on the radio that the president had died and I relayed that to the teacher.  
24 And basically for the rest of the day, we just walked around like zombies.

25 RV: You were upset.

26 DT: Yeah. I mean, it's just...I wasn't particularly fond of President Kennedy,  
27 but the very fact that he was a president and he was killed, I mean it just upset your – the  
28 order of things. Things that you just took for granted. No one...I mean, presidents were  
29 big people and they did what presidents do, and this whole thing of someone being killed  
30 like that was just unknown to us.

1           RV: Yeah. What did your parents think? Especially your father. He's Catholic,  
2 and Kennedy was the first Catholic. Catholic president. Do you remember what his  
3 reaction was when your parents heard?

4           DT: They were both sad. They didn't say much about it. I know that my father  
5 took it hard, but he kept it inside and really didn't say too much about it. So we watched  
6 it on television. That was the...that's one of those few times I really became interested in  
7 television. We all watched it and were glued to the TV set. And the thing that impressed  
8 me the most during that whole thing is that the cemetery when the Green Beret Sergeant  
9 Major took off his beret and laid it down at the gravesite, because Kennedy gave  
10 permission to the Special Forces to wear the green beret, and that was very impressive to  
11 me and I thought you know, this is something I really would like to do some time in the  
12 future is to become a Green Beret, which I ended up doing in the Army Reserve.

13           RV: Right. Ok. Good. Do you remember such incidents as the Gulf of Tonkin?  
14 Oh I mean, not the Gulf of Tonkin, the Cuban Missile Crisis, things like that?

15           DT: Yes.

16           RV: Tell me about that.

17           DT: My oldest brother was on active duty at the time, and I think he was  
18 stationed at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, and they had the trains all loaded up to travel down the  
19 eastern seaboard, and they were basically ready to go. And that is...that is another time  
20 when one of the few times we stayed glued to the television set. And we grew up in the  
21 '50s with the threat of a nuclear warfare and the shelters that people were selling and all  
22 this other Cold War stuff, and I can remember taking drills at school for in case the  
23 bombs fell and those kinds of things, and we did have a few people in our general area –  
24 we lived in southern New Jersey – that actually bought bomb shelters and it made it into  
25 the newspapers because they used that as like a rec room. Doubled up as a rec room. So  
26 yeah, that was something that was very vivid.

27           RV: Ok. Well Dave, let's move forward a little bit past high school. Was it  
28 expected for you to go to college? Did you want to go personally, and/or were your  
29 parents talking about this with you?

30           DT: I think my mother expected us to go to college. My mother wanted all of us  
31 to become teachers because it was a safe, respectable profession. And my counselor

1 thought that I had a disposition towards going into retailing. Well, I hated retailing. I  
2 worked at that discount store and it was a low-end discount store. I hated dealing with  
3 people in the public because I had to deal with a lot of rude people. A lot of people that  
4 were kind of rough around the shoulders. And that was the one thing I did not want to go  
5 into, was retailing, and so I figured I'll just find my own way. So I did go into junior  
6 college and later finished my degree in Business Administration.

7 RV: Ok. So did you consider yourself college material? I mean, obviously you  
8 wanted to pursue this.

9 DT: I did. I did consider myself college material, but I knew that I was not going  
10 to be a standout because of my problems with math, but I definitely wanted to get a  
11 college education.

12 RV: Ok. What do you remember about those two years? How could you  
13 describe that now?

14 DT: My two years in junior college were kind of interesting because we were at  
15 the height of the antiwar movement and the junior college was in Philadelphia, across the  
16 street from the Philadelphia College of Art.

17 RV: What was the name of the junior college?

18 DT: Peirce Junior College. It was on Pine Street. And compared to the  
19 protestors in Berkeley, California, the protestors and the students at the Philadelphia  
20 College of Art were very mild and tame, although I think they probably thought they  
21 were radical. But...so we saw that and felt that every day, and a lot of people were  
22 searching their souls as to which way to go on this, and while I enjoyed tremendously the  
23 folk music—I was very much into folk music and that kind of thing—I could never  
24 embrace some of the sentiment behind it, which is—kind of had a socialist tint to it as far  
25 as I could see. And I do remember, there was a very major demonstration in Philadelphia  
26 one time, and I had a history professor who I thought the world of. He had been an Army  
27 intelligence officer, and I was doing—we had to do a paper, and I decided to do it on the  
28 antiwar movement, and I was going to go down to this demonstration and be a firsthand  
29 witness. And my professor pulled me aside and he said, ‘Didn’t I hear you say that you  
30 eventually want to go into the Army and become an officer?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ And he  
31 said, ‘Well change your paper and stay out of that demonstration,’ because he said, ‘if the

1      FBI gets a picture of you as being part of that, it may hurt you down the road for security  
2      clearance.' And so I changed my paper. My subject.

3            RV: I guess pretty good advice.

4            DT: Yeah. And this was when Frank Rizzo was the chief of police. He later  
5      became the mayor of Philadelphia where they would have the Philadelphia...the  
6      Philadelphia police had these jack boots, reminiscent kind of of Storm Troopers, and  
7      these big hats on, and they would actually be sequestered in buses in different alleys near  
8      the protest areas, and...the windows were all blackened out. And they would have  
9      undercover agents in the crowds, and at some point in time when it looked like the protest  
10     was going to get out of hand, they would make some calls on their radio and you'd have a  
11     bunch of buses all of a sudden open up and all these Storm Troopers would come out.  
12     These Philadelphia police and start knocking heads. Interesting times.

13            RV: Yes, absolutely. What did you think of the Vietnam War at the time, and  
14     what were you...I guess, what were you being fed by the government? What were you  
15     hearing coming out of Washington and was what your opinion of things overall,  
16     especially when the actual shooting war started in 1965 when we had ground troops first  
17     there?

18            DT: I believed in the thinking at the time, the Domino Theory and that we had to  
19     stop the spread of communism and these wars of national liberation, which would be the  
20     means to spread communism. I believed in that. I still believe in that. And also, I did  
21     believe there was enough of a component of the South Vietnamese wanting to be free that  
22     we should be there to help them. Now hindsight in that area, I think that that probably  
23     deserves a lot more introspection on my part, but I do think that the feeling at the time of  
24     the Domino Theory and the spread of communism was reason enough to go over there.

25            RV: Ok. What was the antiwar movement saying? What did you hear them  
26     saying in Philadelphia?

27            DT: That we should not be there, that it wasn't...it was not our war, and we were  
28     just killing innocent men, women, and children and we should simply not fight over  
29     there.

30            RV: And you didn't buy any of that?

31            DT: I did not buy that. I did not buy that at all, and I felt that we had to be there.

1           RV: Of your friends there in Philly at junior college, what would you say was the  
2 breakdown of people who were for and against the war?

3           DT: Truthfully, Peirce Junior College used to be a private business school, and  
4 then it received collegiate status. Truthfully, most of the people there were more  
5 interested in getting their Associate's degree and getting out and getting a job and making  
6 money.

7           RV: Ok.

8           DT: In fact, we had to wear a coat and tie every day. And so it was kind of a  
9 business orientation, and many people there were just interested in getting out in the  
10 business world. That was your goal if you went to Peirce Junior College.

11          RV: Ok. Well, tell me about getting out of school there. You spoke a little bit  
12 about the wanting to be drafted. Tell me about getting out and getting into the Army and  
13 going into basic.

14          DT: Well, I was drafted, and since I lived in southern New Jersey, I went to Ft.  
15 Dix, New Jersey for my basic training.

16          RV: Ok.

17          DT: And it was very interesting because in our basic training company, about  
18 ninety-five, ninety-six percent of the trainees were National Guardsmen who were getting  
19 their basic and advanced individual training and then going back to their National Guard  
20 units. They would not stay on active duty. The balance were RA, that is to say people  
21 who enlisted on their own to go into the Army and they chose what specialty they wanted  
22 to get into. I was the only draftee in my basic training company, and I took the training  
23 more seriously than anyone else. In fact, when we would line up across each other for  
24 things like the pugil pit, where we'd bat each other and everything. People did not want  
25 to face me, and I'm not a big person. They did not want to face me because I took  
26 everything seriously, and the Guardsmen had a bad attitude. They didn't want to be  
27 there, but they knew that that was their ticket not to have to get drafted and go to  
28 Vietnam. And what was interesting to me is even the people who enlisted themselves,  
29 they didn't particularly want to be there either, but they knew that they had desk jobs that  
30 were waiting for them. And at the end of basic training, my platoon sergeant pulled me  
31 aside and he said, 'I put you in for corporal, but the first sergeant would not give it to you

1 because you're a draftee.' And he acknowledged that I was the most gung-ho guy in the  
2 company, but he said, 'I know you're going to OCS, and so you're going to get  
3 sergeant's pay going through OCS anyway. But I wanted to let you know.' And I really  
4 appreciated that.

5 RV: Yeah. I can imagine. Tell me about what you saw there in basic. What do  
6 you see now, looking back on it? Was it difficult for you to adjust to the military  
7 lifestyle?

8 DT: I loved the military lifestyle. In fact, my oldest brother laughed when I  
9 would write him a letter. He told my mother, 'I think Dave has found a home.' I loved  
10 it. I was not in as good of physical conditioning as I had wanted to be, but I did gradually  
11 get up to the level where I needed to be. But I absolutely loved it. I couldn't wait every  
12 day to see what new training I was going to get, and so indeed I did find a home.

13 RV: How'd your parents feel about you being in the military? I guess you  
14 were...you and your twin were the last of the boys to do this. So they were used to it, to  
15 a point. But how did they feel about you going in?

16 DT: I don't think they were comfortable with it for two reasons. First of all, my  
17 twin brother had just come back from Vietnam when I went in. And since my other  
18 brother had been in Vietnam, I think they felt that they were pushing their luck with me  
19 going in. The second thing, which I forgot to mention, when I was in my second year of  
20 high school, I had a heart operation.

21 RV: Really?

22 DT: I had high blood pressure and they couldn't figure it out and one thing led to  
23 another and I had a heart operation. It was a coarctation of the aorta, which means there  
24 was a growth in the aorta. So they took that out and then they tied the two ends together.  
25 And so they were a little concerned about that, although I passed a physical to get into the  
26 Army. And which we can talk about later, because I ended up going to Airborne School,  
27 Ranger School, and everything else.

28 RV: Did you ever have any recurrent problems?

29 DT: No, none at all. I mean, the doctor that performed the surgery, I remember  
30 his name. Dr. Blanco, B-L-A-N-C-O. I mean, I would kiss him today if I ever saw him  
31 because I mean, what he did for me...and back in those days in the early '60s, that kind

1 of surgery was state-of-the-art. It was not an established science as it is today. He did a  
2 wonderful job.

3 RV: Apparently he did.

4 DT: Yeah.

5 RV: So Dave, tell me about going into AIT. You went to Ft. McClellan, is that  
6 right?

7 DT: Yes. I went to Ft. McClellan, Alabama because they had a couple  
8 companies the AIT set up for people that were bound for OCS. And Ft. McClellan,  
9 Alabama, which was the chemical school as well as that is where they used to train the  
10 Women's Army Corps, or WACs. But they set up a number of tiger lands at Ft.  
11 McClellan to give training to people who were going to Vietnam. And so I went through  
12 there. Most of the people in my company were bound for OCS. And I thought the  
13 training was very good. It was as realistic as I could sense. I had still not seen an M-16  
14 rifle, which I would use in Vietnam. We still had the M-14s. But I thought it was good  
15 training.

16 RV: Ok. How long did it last?

17 DT: I believe it was around four weeks. I can't quite remember. It may have  
18 been a little longer than that, but from...I mean, it was hot down there in Alabama, as you  
19 can imagine. And it was...but it was very interesting, and already some of the people  
20 who were supposed to be going OCS were starting to have second thoughts about doing  
21 that because they knew they were going over as infantry officers. I think they were  
22 having some questions about their own competence to do that kind of work. And at that  
23 point in time, they were starting to cut back a little on the OCS program, and so some of  
24 them were able to bargain themselves out of OCS and in exchange get an assignment in  
25 Germany. So I could see some were getting a little weak-kneed, but there was no doubt  
26 in my mind what I wanted to do.

27 RV: So you did not have any lack of confidence, any questioning going on for  
28 you?

29 DT: No. No.

30 RV: Ok. Tell me, what did you do those four weeks? What was a typical day  
31 like there at AIT?

1 DT: Typical day was a lot of road marches, physical stamina, patrolling a lot of  
2 small unit tactics, particularly patrolling tactics, map reading, learning how to fire many  
3 different weapons and do it with skill, everything from the caliber .45 pistol to the 50-  
4 caliber machine gun, M-60 machine gun, grenade launchers, all of those things. So we  
5 spent a lot of time on weapons, first aid, land navigation, and patrolling.

6 RV: Did you have one you really enjoyed?

7 DT: I liked the patrolling and the land navigation. I liked everything. The  
8 weapons and everything, I thought it was very interesting what the capabilities were and I  
9 basically enjoyed, I felt that I was getting a lot of good training and becoming more  
10 knowledgeable to become a good infantryman.

11 RV: Did you have a favorite weapon, or one that you were particularly good at?

12 DT: I liked the M-14. And also the M-60 machine gun. The M-14 was a weapon  
13 that you could drag through the dirt and it would still fire. And people like me, who were  
14 used to using that, it took a real education to get used to an M-16, which required a lot  
15 more cleaning. The other weapon I really liked was the M-60 machine gun. Or what I  
16 would call, 'The bitch of the battlefield.' And it was a very effective weapon.

17 RV: And you were good at all this? I mean, did you have any problems with  
18 shooting, firing, learning these kind of things?

19 DT: No, the only problem I had with anything was throwing the grenade. Hand  
20 grenade. I was never really good at baseball and so that thing kind of made me a little  
21 nervous. I did it, but I was always very, very careful. In fact, I think our instructors  
22 made us nervous by the safety aspects of the grenade training. They almost made us too  
23 nervous, and probably for their own good they didn't want to get blown up themselves,  
24 and so that kind of instilled some fear in me in using the hand grenade. And later in  
25 Vietnam, I never would use it unless I could simply throw it down a hole, a spider hole or  
26 something like that. I would not use it any other time.

27 RV: Dave, did you want to go to Vietnam?

28 DT: Yes. And I say that not as someone who was a warmongerer. I say that as  
29 someone who believed we had a patriotic duty to be in Vietnam and also someone who  
30 knew that this was the war of his lifetime and so many people that I knew had gone to  
31 Vietnam, that I felt that this was something I had to see. I had to witness this; I had to

1 experience this myself because this was part of our times. And I just felt compelled to go  
2 and see what it was all about.

3 RV: You sound a little different from the typical twenty-one-year-old. Especially  
4 the day's generation twenty-one-year-old that you have a tremendous amount of  
5 confidence. You know what you want to do with yourself. What can you attribute that  
6 to?

7 DT: Well first, I think there are a number of people like that today, and you see  
8 them in the volunteer Army over in Iraq. I think they feel the same thing, compelled to  
9 serve, compelled to find out what Iraq is all about, compelled to see, 'Can I do my job  
10 working with others, soldier to soldier?' So I think you still see a lot of that attitude  
11 today in those that have volunteered to go on active duty. Why that was there with me, I  
12 just don't know. Maybe part of it was a feeling that I had to prove myself, which I think  
13 young men sometimes have that feeling that they need to test themselves. And I think  
14 that was part of it.

15 RV: Ok. Tell me, Dave, about your instruction and your instructors there in basic  
16 and advanced AIT. What were they like? Were they Vietnam veterans?

17 DT: I was surprised that most of the instructors were not. And I would have  
18 thought by that point that maybe most of the career drill sergeants would have spent a  
19 tour in Vietnam, but we're talking about the '66-'67 timeframe, and there were still a fair  
20 number of sergeants in the Army that had not been over there. We had a few, but most of  
21 them had not made it over there, but I accepted what they had to say because the doctrine  
22 was the same whether you were there or not. I mean, the doctrine on how to use the  
23 weapons, the equipment, the radios, the patrolling doctrine. Some of that was being  
24 changed based on lessons learned in Vietnam, and we could see that. We were told that.  
25 So even though these sergeants had not been over there, they said, 'What I am telling you  
26 is based on experience that we are getting back from Vietnam.' So I thought the Army  
27 was good at keeping that updated and really imparting the lessons learned as much as  
28 they could for the training.

29 RV: Do you remember specifics that you were told about Vietnam, or was it all  
30 kind of in general?

1 DT: It was all kind of in general as far as the trainers, but starting in junior  
2 college, I had started a significant amount of research on my own, and reading about  
3 Vietnam and the Vietnam War and who was over there, so I would read book after book  
4 about that to educate myself.

5 RV: Do you remember what you read?

6 DT: Just basically *Life* magazine, *National Geographic*, I would send away in  
7 junior college for Army field manuals. In fact, I had a psychology paper to do in junior  
8 college, and I did it on psychological warfare. And so I received a lot of papers from Ft.  
9 Bragg, and I did a, I thought it was a pretty good paper. I got an A. On psychological  
10 warfare. So that, as much as I could integrate Vietnam and Southeast Asia into my  
11 education, I was trying to do that.

12 RV: Wow, so you were really preparing yourself for what you would be doing  
13 over there.

14 DT: Well, I was very interested. I felt drawn to it.

15 RV: Well how were you drawn to it, Dave, besides the patriotism and wanting to  
16 serve? Was there anything else going on?

17 DT: I think it was the fact that it was going to be something very important for  
18 our times, and I wanted to be part of it.

19 RV: Ok. So after AIT, you went to OCS, correct?

20 DT: Yes.

21 RV: Ok, and this is at Ft. Benning?

22 DT: Yes.

23 RV: What was Benning like?

24 DT: Ft. Benning, Georgia, and Officer Candidate School was very tough. I  
25 started in the 7<sup>th</sup> OCS Battalion, and shortly after we started, we were told that that  
26 battalion was going to go out of existence, and so we were going to be transferred to the  
27 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion. And I was also before we left the 7<sup>th</sup>, I was told by our tactical officers that  
28 we were one of the last classes to get into OCS with a non-college degree. Of course, I  
29 had two years. But the needs were starting to change, and so they were going to start to  
30 require four years of college. So I was happy to make it in under the scale there.

31 RV: Absolutely.

1 DT: So we moved to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion and I found OCS very demanding, very  
2 rigid, very tough, but if you didn't fight it and you understood the program, you could get  
3 into a mode where you kind of went with the flow. And that's what I did. And so I just  
4 picked it up, and I enjoyed the tactical part of it. I did not enjoy the study and the  
5 academic part of it, and I did not enjoy the drill and ceremonies. But the tactical part just  
6 kept me going. I mean, it was very, very interesting.

7 RV: Can you give me some examples of what you liked there that you thought  
8 was interesting?

9 DT: Well, we got the classroom work on tactics, weapons, tanks, organization of  
10 the Army from company, battalion, brigade, and on up. I found that stuff very  
11 fascinating, that this whole subject of the Army was opening up to me, and I really started  
12 understanding, having some basic understanding of how the whole thing fits together.  
13 And I found that fascinating.

14 RV: Ok. Tell me about outside of the classroom, what kind of things did you  
15 enjoy?

16 DT: The fieldwork. I enjoyed going to the field. I did not enjoy – I mean, we  
17 would spit shine our floors, not only in the hallway but in our rooms, we would use the  
18 clear shoe polish to spit shine the floors, and it was so demanding you would, for  
19 inspections that we would when we set up our room, there were two of us to a room, we  
20 set up our room so that we came into our room, we would actually walk on the furniture  
21 and then get on the side of the bunk bed so we wouldn't touch the floor to be ready for an  
22 inspection.

23 RV: Wow.

24 DT: And so in hindsight, I think that was a lot of wasted effort that we could  
25 have spent studying, but it was the OCS program at the time.

26 RV: Ok. How did you do with it? I mean, did you stay under the radar, or did  
27 you try to lead?

28 DT: No, you always stay under the radar so your TAC officer doesn't pick on  
29 you to give you push-ups, and sometimes I was not under the radar and I spent hours  
30 outside with a couple other people, doing what we called 'grass drill', which is running  
31 around in circles shouting, and then they'd say 'drop,' and you have to drop and do push-

1 ups and you'd need to get up and move and you'd run around, and we would just do that  
2 for hours. But two things on that. First, I was in excellent, by that time I was in excellent  
3 physical conditioning. So that did not bother me whatsoever. And secondly, I shouted  
4 and sang and acted like I enjoyed it, so I was not going to give them any pleasure of me  
5 doing grass drill. So they knew they weren't going to make me fall out from that,  
6 because I just acted like I enjoyed it.

7 RV: What was this punishment from?

8 DT: I can't remember, probably getting demerits for one thing or the other.

9 RV: Ok. Why don't we take a break for a second, Dave?

10 DT: Ok.

11 RV: Ok Dave, continuing now. At Ft. Benning, this was...this was your most  
12 difficult training period, I take it?

13 DT: Up to that point, yes.

14 RV: Up to that point. Ok. Did you still receive support from your family?

15 DT: Oh yes, I received a lot of letters and goodies and all that other thing. My  
16 mother, of course she not understanding where I wanted to go with this whole thing, she  
17 would write me letters saying, 'If it gets too tough, you can drop out, you can always do  
18 something else, and then when you get out of the Army you can become a teacher.' And  
19 so...but yes, I received letters and support and everything, but I was determined. We had  
20 a good dropout rate, but I was determined to make it through.

21 RV: Ok. Well, you were there at Ft. Benning? This is during your OCS during  
22 the TET Offensive in 1968. Do you remember what your reaction was to that?

23 DT: Just pretty much what I saw in the papers, because we were not getting a lot  
24 of feedback as I recall. I think the Army over in Vietnam was still trying to figure out  
25 what happened to it. We were not getting a lot of feedback. I do remember two  
26 companies down from our company in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion; the entire company were  
27 Vietnamese officer candidates. The whole thing had proceeded to that point where they  
28 were training them on our model, and that was the first time that I ever saw Vietnamese,  
29 and I was surprised at how small they were. But they had translators there, and they were  
30 going through pretty much the OCS program that we were going through, and I asked one

1 of the cadre in that company, 'How are they doing?' and he said, 'In their bookwork, in  
2 their studying, very poor. But when they go to the field, they do very well.'

3 RV: Do you think that was because of a language barrier? Language problem?

4 DT: I think so, partly. And probably there is just a general, not a real strong  
5 educational background, but all of these individuals had been soldiers in the field, and  
6 then they were selected to go to officer school, so they certainly knew their field work.

7 RV: Right, ok. So after OCS, you go to the TAC Officer School? What  
8 was...was that different from OCS in what way?

9 DT: Well, it wasn't a school per se. At the end of each graduating class, those  
10 that get commissioned, there may be one or two or three that are selected to remain in the  
11 officer candidate program as tactical officers, which is basically the equivalent of a drill  
12 sergeant, and I was selected to stay there in the program. And so after a short leave of a  
13 couple weeks, I was transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and I became a tactical officer in the  
14 62<sup>nd</sup> Company.

15 RV: What kind of training did you have for this? Was this simply picked up  
16 from your past own experiences?

17 DT: Right, there was no training for tactical officer. You just went over there and  
18 you started doing to others what they did to you. What was done to you, for the next six  
19 months.

20 RV: How'd you do?

21 DT: I thought I was a good TAC officer. I started with a platoon of forty-five  
22 officer candidates and we commissioned twenty-four.

23 RV: Wow.

24 DT: And I wanted to make sure that I was to the best of my ability, and I had not  
25 been over to Vietnam myself, but to the best of my ability that I was not going to send  
26 someone over there who was not going to do a good job as a junior officer. And I say  
27 that, I wasn't quite sure I knew what was required of a junior officer myself, since I just  
28 became one. The original intent of OCS, the original organization was that a captain  
29 would be a tactical officer and a major would be the officer candidate company  
30 commander. And of course with the wartime requirements, we were down to people like

1 me, just getting out of OCS myself, becoming the TAC officer. And then company  
2 commanders were captains.

3 RV: How did you treat those under your command?

4 DT: I was...I treated them with respect. I would never demean anyone. I did not  
5 think that that was going to get you anywhere. And by demeaning people, I didn't think  
6 that you were really going to be able to call out those who were weak or those who would  
7 not stand the test of pressure. So I tried not to demean anyone because I thought that  
8 would also demean me. But I was tough physically on them, I did shout at them, those  
9 kinds of things. Lots of drill and push-ups and those kinds of things. But in OCS, I think  
10 there sometimes were some very demeaning things that were done, and I stayed away  
11 from that.

12 RV: Can you give me some examples?

13 DT: Dropping their drawers, those kinds of things. Using foul language, that  
14 kind of thing. I didn't see that was necessary.

15 RV: And you could still motivate without all of that?

16 DT: I thought so. And I think the proof was in my OCS platoon. At the end, the  
17 honor graduate for the entire company came from my platoon, and I think there was like  
18 five of the seven awards that were given at the end all came from my platoon.

19 RV: Wow. Ok. That does speak a lot.

20 DT: So I hope that meant something.

21 RV: Yes. Ok.

22 DT: And I have one other thing I found rather interesting was, there was one  
23 candidate in my platoon that just, I was surprised he even got into OCS. He couldn't tie  
24 his shoes. He was just one of these guys that just did not adapt well to military life, and  
25 yet here he was in Officer Candidate School. And it seemed the more screaming I did at  
26 him and the more pressure I put on him, the stronger he...he just put a wall. A wall that I  
27 couldn't penetrate. So I decided to try another tact. I brought him into my office once  
28 and I quietly asked him to sit down. He didn't have to brace himself at a stiff attention.  
29 And I talked to him like an older brother, of how I don't think he was going to be  
30 suitable, and I think in his heart he knew he was not suitable, and there were difficult  
31 challenges to be a leader in combat, and you don't want to have the death of someone

1 else on your conscience, and there's still a life ahead even if you don't make it through  
2 OCS and other things. And after that, he just...he had tears in his eyes, and he resigned.  
3 So I tried the other tact, and it worked.

4 RV: Wow. Ok. Tell me about Army Airborne School. This was next for you  
5 after being a tactical officer.

6 DT: Well, I was a TAC officer for six months, and then they brought in another  
7 cycle for another OCS cycle, and by then I had had it with infantry OCS. And so we did  
8 not fill the entire company, so they made me the physical training officer. I remember  
9 seeing the candidates that were coming in. They were either the very worst of the lot,  
10 people that you wonder how they ever got through basic training, and here they were in  
11 OCS, or there were the very best of the lot, and there were a lot of Special Forces  
12 sergeants that were going through OCS to get their commissions while the getting was  
13 good. So we had two, for the most part I found two exact opposites. Some people that  
14 never should have been there, and others that were just fantastic that could teach me  
15 things. And I remember one of the lower group ones, I was just so frustrated at this  
16 individual and I was so angry that he was in the OCS program, I ended up smacking him.

17 RV: Oh really?

18 DT: And I thought, what am I doing? I cannot be doing this. You know? And I  
19 was just so tired of the whole OCS thing, I said, 'I got to get out of this.' I had applied  
20 for both Airborne and Ranger School before my first cycle finished up, and at that time  
21 you could only get one or the other, because they wanted to spread the slots out. One of  
22 my candidates who made it through...of the forty-five, he was one of the twenty-four that  
23 was commissioned, was a very wealthy individual. But he never wore it on his shoulder,  
24 and he had influence in Washington in congress, and I had mentioned to him when he  
25 was a senior and we started treating these candidates like officers, that they were only  
26 going to give me one or the other, and I wanted both because I was going to make a  
27 career. Unbeknownst to me, he made a phone call to a friend of a friend, and three days  
28 later, the first sergeant came into my office and said, 'There's a congressional on you  
29 about you not being able to get both Airborne and Ranger, and post headquarters said just  
30 sign up for both and you'll get both.' And later in the day, I told this individual what had  
31 happened. He said, 'Oh, yes. I made a phone call.' And apparently a family friend was

1 a congressional liaison between congress and the military. And then I thought, 'Oh my  
2 God, my career is not even started and already I'm going to be labeled congressional  
3 influence.' But nothing ever happened, and I got both Airborne and Ranger School.

4 RV: Wow.

5 DT: Just prior to going in Airborne School, I was called up to post headquarters,  
6 and they said that they noticed in my application that I had had a heart operation when I  
7 was in high school, and they said they didn't think I could get the training. And I said,  
8 'Bullshit. I went through six months of OCS myself, always led the company in runs,  
9 and then I complete another six months with my company.' I said, 'That's bullshit.'  
10 They said, 'Well, you have to get a special physical.' So I got a special physical on post,  
11 and the doctor examined me and he said, 'You're good to go.' He said, 'It beats the shit  
12 out of me why you want to jump out of planes,' but he said, 'You're good to go.'

13 RV: Right.

14 DT: And so I went to Airborne School, which for me was a cakewalk because I  
15 was in such good physical condition. I lived off post with a couple other officers and my  
16 daily routine would be to show up in the morning at formation, march off with everyone  
17 else. The officers would show up, we'd march off with the enlisted people, do our  
18 training. We would break for lunch and we would go down to the Officer's Club annex  
19 for lunch, fall back into formation after lunch and train in the afternoon, and then at the  
20 end of the day the officers were released to go home, and the enlisted men had another  
21 evening of harassment. I would go, stop by the boot black, drop off my boots that were  
22 dirty, pick up my other pair of boots that were clean, and go home and have a steak  
23 dinner and so forth. So Airborne School was very easy.

24 RV: That sounds like it's almost a day job.

25 DT: Right. It was. And I mean, still the hanging harness and jumping out the  
26 plane your first couple jumps were intensified, but all in all it was not very harsh training.

27 RV: What was it like, jumping out for the first time?

28 DT: Well for me, it was a night jump. I closed my eyes. And I remember  
29 landing, and I was so excited that I didn't break any bones, I popped my chute and  
30 gathered it up, and I was yelling, 'Airborne, Airborne!' And one of the instructors came  
31 over and he said, 'Drop, Lieutenant, and do push-ups. You're only one-fifth Airborne.'

1           RV: (Laughing)

2           DT: And so I did that, but I was so happy because I made my first jump, and was  
3 kind of a rite of passage. Very exciting.

4           RV: Did it get easier after that?

5           DT: No. Each jump, I had to...there was a certain amount of tenseness, but it  
6 was just...it was like you were on an adrenaline high. So it worked out well.

7           RV: How long did Airborne School last for you?

8           DT: I think for us, I think it was like three weeks. For enlisted, they go a little  
9 longer. They have to start earlier to get conditioned, but I believe for us it was only like  
10 three weeks.

11          RV: Ok. And then to Ranger school.

12          DT: Right after that, because my orders were for both Airborne and Ranger  
13 School, I don't think I had but a day or two off, and I went up to the other part of Ft.  
14 Benning and reported in to Ranger School, and that was the most intensified training I  
15 received.

16          RV: Can you describe it?

17          DT: At first they started, they wanted to call out the people that really didn't have  
18 it in their heart, and so again it was like OCS all over again with a lot of physical training,  
19 low crawls, harassment, running, you name it. But physically at that point, I was in  
20 excellent condition, and of course I knew the harassment game inside and out, so there  
21 was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to be in it. I do remember part of that first phase,  
22 you have to take a swimming test where you jump off the pool. And here we're talking  
23 about I think the middle of October when I started Ranger school, so it was getting cold  
24 down there at Ft. Benning. And you jumped off the pool with a butt pack on and your  
25 rifle and you had to swim to the other side because they wanted to make sure you could  
26 save yourself when you got down into the Florida phase and if you fell into a hole with a  
27 lot of water, that kind of thing. And I was never a real strong swimmer, so I couldn't  
28 make it the first time I went in there, so I had to get out and get in line and do it again,  
29 and there were a couple others like me, and one of the Ranger school TAC officers was  
30 walking down the line, and I asked him to come over for a minute and in a low voice I  
31 said, 'What's the object here? I'm going to be a career officer. I need to be Ranger

1 qualified.' And he said, 'We're only interested to see if you can save yourself. I mean, if  
2 you drop your weapon in the pool, it doesn't matter. We just want to make sure you can  
3 save yourself.' And so there were like three junior officers all in the same boat, all heard  
4 that, and so we did it again and as soon as we drop in the water, we drop our weapon and  
5 we start swimming. And one of the Rangers had a wetsuit on, and he hated the fact that  
6 he had to go in the pool and get the weapon. So there were three of us, one in a row that  
7 did that. But we met the requirement.

8 RV: What was your typical day like there at Ranger school?

9 DT: There were three phases. The first phase was at Ft. Benning and then just  
10 outside Ft. Benning at Camp Darby. This was heavily laced with physical conditioning,  
11 map reading, and patrolling tactics as well as radio procedures and weapons. And so it  
12 was very heavy into that area and it was more advanced than what we had received from  
13 OCS or advanced infantry training. And so then after that was the second phase, which  
14 was up in the mountains in Dahlonega, Georgia. Don't ask me to spell it. And there was  
15 patrolling in the mountain environment and a lot of rappelling, use of ropes, that kind of  
16 thing. And then the third phase was down in Florida, which was again a lot of patrolling,  
17 tactics for in the attack units in the attack, that kind of thing, and more of a flat terrain.  
18 So by that point, I was very good with a map. I never was lost any time in the mountains,  
19 it was so easy. I didn't even need a compass. I could just read the terrain lines and walk  
20 anywhere I wanted to. In the Florida panhandle, you definitely had to use your compass  
21 because there were no terrain lines, it was just all flat. And so it was two different, vastly  
22 different environments to really get you some good training.

23 RV: Was there anything really, really challenging to you about the Ranger  
24 school?

25 DT: Physically, it was very challenging physically and mentally because you did  
26 not get much sleep. You might go out for a three day patrol and get maybe three hours of  
27 sleep a day, and one C-ration, one meal a day. And you're burning off the calories, and  
28 yet you only get one C-ration, and so typically you would have maybe the cookie for  
29 breakfast and then maybe your canned meat for lunch and then whatever the rest was left  
30 would be for dinner. And so you burned that off pretty quick. And so that was the key.  
31 And all during this, when you're out on patrol, you may not be the patrol leader, but you

1 had to pay attention because at any point in time, the tactical officer would tell the patrol  
2 leader, 'You're dead,' and then would turn to someone else and say, 'You're now the  
3 patrol leader.' So you had to pay constant attention to what was going on because you  
4 could be the patrol leader and in Ranger school, you had to successfully pass three  
5 patrols, or you did not get the Ranger tab. And so there was very, very demanding.

6 RV: Ok, Dave. This is your last step before you go to Vietnam. Were you aware  
7 that this was the case?

8 DT: Yes, because my orders – when I received my orders for Airborne and  
9 Ranger, they also included a leave and then orders for Vietnam. I was...and I  
10 volunteered for the glory units, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, or the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. I  
11 wasn't sure what I would get. I was also thinking of going to Special Forces. But  
12 someone had told me that the lieutenants like me, who had seen nothing in the Army but  
13 basic training, AIT, and OCS, would go through Special Forces training and when they  
14 got to Vietnam they were told to take their berets off, that they were going to a regular  
15 unit for six months because they just didn't have the time in the Army to be able to  
16 handle the isolation in some of those A-camps out in the middle of nowhere. So I  
17 decided, 'Well, if they're going to make me do that, I might as well go straight over and  
18 go to a regular unit.'

19 RV: Well tell me, did you get time off before you went?

20 DT: Yes, and it was interesting. I had actually a thirty-day leave, and ran around,  
21 did a lot of drinking, partying, and everything else, and got some girls upset at me. One  
22 was catching me dating the other. And so after a month, my money was running out and  
23 it was time for me to go, but I would never get my port call. And I kept calling down to  
24 Ft. Benning and calling to Ft. Benning. They said, 'Well, be patient, be patient.' Finally  
25 I called the Ranger School and asked the administrator there, 'Are you sure you put the  
26 levy through for my port call?' And she said, 'Let me check my files,' and I heard over  
27 the phone, 'Oh, my God.' Here she had stacked my request for a port call in my file, and  
28 I could've actually waited out the rest of my Army time, never gotten a port call, and then  
29 could've gotten out. That did happen with other people and the courts ruled in their  
30 favor. And so then needless to say, overnight I was given a port call, and off I went.

1           RV: Right. Well, were you eager? Did you still have this gung-ho attitude where  
2   'I want to get in there'?

3           DT: I think the gung-ho had slowed down a bit and was measured by some  
4   maturity. I had met enough people in Ranger School because all of the Ranger School  
5   cadre, training cadre had been to Vietnam. And so they really were very, very serious  
6   about the training they gave, and they were unforgiving if you made mistakes.

7           RV: What did they tell you about Vietnam?

8           DT: They said, 'Keep your head. Your training is good training, and just don't  
9   make mistakes. Follow your training. Don't get lazy.' Particularly they emphasized that  
10   to us junior officers. 'Don't get lazy and don't let your men get lazy.' And so that was  
11   the guidance.

12          RV: Was it accurate?

13          DT: I think so, yes. I thought that in some respects, Ranger School was tougher  
14   physically than in the boonies of Vietnam. Except the heat, which would sap you, but  
15   other than that, I thought Ranger School was tougher physically.

16          RV: Well tell me, Dave, about your trip over to Vietnam. Where did you leave  
17   from in the United States, and what was it like?

18          DT: I went to the Philadelphia airport. My father worked at night, so he slept  
19   during the day, and so he said goodbye to me the night before. He was rather sanguine  
20   about the whole thing.

21          RV: Was he really?

22          DT: Yeah. I mean, both my parents were thinking, 'Oh boy, here he goes to  
23   Vietnam. We've been lucky so far to get two other sons back unhurt.' Well, my twin  
24   brother had received a Purple Heart. But he came back, and I think they felt that, here I  
25   am, I'm going to be an officer, infantry officer, that their luck was running out. But I  
26   mean, they kept it inside. I just hugged my mother. She couldn't go to the airport with  
27   me. And off I went. My twin brother took me to the airport. I remember getting to the  
28   airport. I had a cold, a bad head cold and I asked the stewardess who was there to help  
29   people with their tickets. I said something to the effect, or she asked me something and I  
30   remember replying, 'Well, it all depends if I ever make it back.' And she looked at me,  
31   and she said, 'You'll be back,' she said, 'You'll come back.' So, I flew from there to

1 Chicago to get a connection to go to Ft. Lewis, Washington. And I met in Chicago this  
2 captain who was a reservist, and he was going over to Vietnam. He was a quartermaster  
3 officer. And so we kind of stayed together. And this guy was, the whole time we were  
4 flying over to Ft. Lewis, you know he was telling me how he was married and he had  
5 children and he was worried he was going to get killed and all this other stuff. And I'm  
6 thinking, 'Well, you know, you volunteered for this.' And then we kind of talked on the  
7 way to Vietnam as well, and we got into Cam Ranh Bay for several days to get our  
8 assignments. He got his assignment and he was staying right there in Cam Ranh Bay,  
9 which was probably one of the biggest bases in Vietnam. And he said, at that time he  
10 said, 'I really feel bad I'm not going out with you guys up to the...' I said, 'Why don't  
11 you shut the hell up, you've been telling me for days now. You got what you wanted.  
12 Take the gift and let go of it.'

13 RV: Yeah.

14 DT: And the other memory I remember is at Ft. Lewis, Washington. We waited  
15 for I think two days before our flight. There were a bunch of us junior officers that kept  
16 together, and we decided to go to McChord Air Force Base next door to go to the  
17 Officer's Club for dinner, and they had this Officer's Club as only the Air Force can do  
18 it. It was very nice, very baronial, like an English pub. And so we all sat together and  
19 we're looking at the menus, and one of the officers said, 'Boy, these prices look kind of  
20 high.' And I slammed my menu shut and I looked at him. I said, 'Are you forgetting  
21 where the hell we're going tomorrow?' I said, 'The only thing you should be doing is  
22 drinking beer.' And so we all said, 'Yeah, you're right.' So we proceeded to order steak  
23 and drink nothing but beer and get smashed.

24 RV: Dave, let me go back just a bit. Do you remember that drive to the airport  
25 with your brother? What did he say to you? Did he give you advice? Had he talked to  
26 you about Vietnam?

27 DT: A little bit. We really didn't talk that much. It's just the way we were. And  
28 when I got out, he shook my hand and he said, 'Keep your head down.' And that was  
29 basically it. There was no need to talk. And it was funny, because he and my older  
30 brother were in Vietnam, part of the time they were there together, and my brother with  
31 the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne took a small leave and hopped on helicopters to go all the way up

1 Vietnam to meet my twin brother in Da Nang. And they actually went out on patrol  
2 together.

3 RV: Really?

4 DT: And it made *Army Times*, and the interesting thing was at that time, the  
5 Marines – because this was still early in the war, the Marines still had their regular  
6 fatigue uniforms and M-14s. The 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne got all the newest equipment, so my  
7 older brother had the new jungle fatigues, the M-16 machine gun, the whole thing. So  
8 when he went up there, they looked at him like he was God. And the Marines would say,  
9 ‘Hey, can I touch your weapon, you know, can I touch your rifle?’ And everything. So  
10 yeah, they went out on patrol once.

11 RV: Wow, that’s neat. Well, tell me about the trip over, over to Vietnam.

12 DT: We flew from McChord Air Force Base in one of the large civilian planes.  
13 Of course, it was chartered. We went through Japan, and this is late February of 1969,  
14 and at that time, the antiwar was pretty high, even in Japan. And so when we got to  
15 Japan, we all wanted to get off the aircraft and stretch our legs, and they would not let us  
16 off because there were antiwar demonstrations inside the airport. And so they did not  
17 want a confrontation. So we had to stay on the plane, and then from there we flew down  
18 to Vietnam.

19 RV: They had antiwar demonstrations in the Japanese airport?

20 DT: Right.

21 RV: Wow.

22 DT: I don’t know the extent or how large they were, but there were protesters  
23 there and we were told to avoid any incidents, we had to stay on the plane.

24 RV: And I suppose you all were a bit resentful toward that?

25 DT: Yes, because we wanted to get out and stretch our legs, you know, and so.  
26 And the other thing I remember, there were a lot of enlisted on the plane, and of course I  
27 was an officer with my Airborne wings and my Ranger tab, and I was just trying to walk  
28 up and down, acting confident and trying to give these guys some confidence, and what  
29 did I know? I mean, I was just coming out of training like them.

30 RV: Right.

1 DT: We did get to Cam Ranh Bay, and as I'm sure many people have told you  
2 the first images when those doors open up and the hot blast of air came up to meet us, it  
3 was just something I was not prepared for. It was hot. Very hot. And as soon as we got  
4 off the plane, some other people got on and the plane got out.

5 RV: Really?

6 DT: Yes.

7 RV: Did you see the guys getting on? What did they look like?

8 DT: They were waiting in line. They looked tired, they looked worn. I could tell  
9 they were young, but they looked old. And the other image I have in Cam Ranh Bay is  
10 when the buses came up to pick us up, they had wire mesh over the windows, and that  
11 just hit me that, 'Ok, this is for real.' If they found it necessary to do that in a very big  
12 base like Cam Ranh Bay, this was for real.

13 RV: Right. What was your impression of Cam Ranh, just in general from the air  
14 and once you got there?

15 DT: Huge, very big, and you could look out. Of course, you had the ocean to one  
16 side. On the other side were these mountains. And they were very foreboding. And I  
17 just looked out at those mountains, and I just knew there were people out there that  
18 wanted to kill me. And eventually, I was going to get up into those mountains one way  
19 or the other. And then the other thing was the fact that I think our second day there, we  
20 caught some rockets coming in. And I remember when we were first there, when we  
21 arrived, the briefer said, 'You are here at the most secure base in South Vietnam,' and  
22 then the next day, we get rocketed.

23 RV: Oh, geez. That's like, 'Welcome to Vietnam.'

24 DT: Yeah.

25 RV: Did you know exactly what your assignment was going to be when you got  
26 to Cam Ranh, or did you have to wait?

27 DT: We had to wait a couple days until the staff in Saigon allocated us to a unit.  
28 When I got my unit designation, it said 'Americo Division,' and I thought, 'What the hell  
29 is that?' And I went to the personnel officer there, and I said, 'You don't understand, I'm  
30 an infantry officer. I'm going to an infantry unit.' I thought they were sending me to

1 some logistical base or something like that. And he said, 'Nope, that's infantry.' And of  
2 course, we had not heard of the Americal Division.

3 RV: Right.

4 DT: And then, that same day, a chaplain who was a major was just coming back  
5 from his R&R, and he had an Americal patch on. And I pulled him aside, and I said,  
6 'Chaplain, I'm going to the Americal Division. Tell me all you know about it.' And I  
7 said, 'I'll buy you the beer.' So we went over to the Officer's Club and had some beers  
8 and he gave me a brief overview of the division, how it was formed, what the three  
9 brigades were, where they were, and so forth.

10 RV: Do you remember what he said?

11 DT: Yes, very vividly. He said the three brigades were the 196, they are north of  
12 the division headquarters, and they are facing some very tough North Vietnamese  
13 regulars. He said the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade is far south of the division area of operations, and they  
14 were facing both the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, but very heavily mined area  
15 and every day, they got a lot of helicopters in with arms off and legs off. He said, 'If you  
16 have any way to get out of going to the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, I would suggest you do it,' and he  
17 said, 'What you want to try to do is get the 198<sup>th</sup> Brigade. They're what we call the  
18 palace guard. Their mission is to protect the division base.' And so I thought, 'Hmm,  
19 ok.' And so, I think it was the next day we moved up to Chu Lai by plane, and on the  
20 way we first went down to Saigon, and we had the better part of a day to wait until we  
21 could catch a hop up north. And I'll never forget by the big hangar where we all were,  
22 there were these Air Force cooks that had these big grills, and they were grilling steaks.  
23 And we could go over and eat with them. And they said, 'How do you want your steak?'  
24 And I'm thinking, 'Where did I go wrong here?' And I also remember, as hot as it was in  
25 Cam Ranh Bay, it was very, very hot down there in the delta.

26 RV: There was a distinct difference?

27 DT: Yes. To me, there was. And the other thing I remember is when I got off  
28 the plane from Cam Ranh Bay down at Saigon at Tan Son Nhut Airport, I walked over to  
29 this huge hangar to wait to catch another flight, and there were some of my Officer  
30 Candidate School candidates who had made it to commission, and they were there just  
31 arrived, and they were going out to their units. And they looked at me like they were

1 looking at a ghost. And I said, 'What's the problem?' And they said, 'We thought you  
2 were dead.'

3 RV: Really?

4 DT: 'We had heard that you had been killed.' And I said, 'Well, I'm very much  
5 alive.'

6 RV: Do you know how that rumor started?

7 DT: They had seen in *Army Times*, of course those days every issue of *Army*  
8 *Times*, there was just a very long list of officers, most of them lieutenants, that were  
9 killed. And they had seen a David Taylor, a First Lieutenant David Taylor and assumed  
10 that was me.

11 RV: I bet they were surprised to see you. Dave, tell me about your...how you  
12 were pleased or not pleased with your assignment. Was this what you had in mind for  
13 yourself there, or did you want to go right up into those mountains?

14 DT: I thought, you know I wanted to go with a main unit. In fact, I was so sure I  
15 was going to get the 101<sup>st</sup>, that after I got out of Ranger School I sewed the 101<sup>st</sup> patch on  
16 my green uniform. So I was disappointed, but I thought, 'Well, they say it's an infantry  
17 unit, so that's what I'm here for.' I learned later because the Americal Division had been  
18 formed from three separate brigades, and they had a lot of personnel issues in terms of  
19 people finishing their tour of duty just after the division was formed, and they were  
20 infusing people from all over to try to keep too many people from leaving at the same  
21 time, but they had a leadership vacuum. And so they were drawing on as many  
22 lieutenants like me, who had Airborne and Ranger School training to go up there and try  
23 to beef up the small units.

24 RV: Ok. Let's go back just for a minute to Cam Ranh. You said you were  
25 mortared that second night? What was that like? That was your first taste of combat.

26 DT: Yeah, it was. It was scary. It was at night, and running out, we had a bunker  
27 nearby our billets and so we were told if anything does happen, to run into the bunker.  
28 And I wasn't sure how big the base was, but I found...I felt naked because I didn't have a  
29 weapon with me, and I didn't want to depend on someone else to defend me, and that's  
30 what in fact happened. We had the rear people, the administrators and the clerks, at night

1 they took times guarding the facility. And I did not feel comfortable with that. I rather  
2 would have had a weapon myself. So that made me scared.

3 RV: And did anything happen? Any close calls?

4 DT: No, it was just that one time, and then after a while...I mean, we were all  
5 packed, we had received jungle fatigues and everything else, so we were kind of like,  
6 'Well, let's get on with it.' The attitude was, 'Let's get on with it, we're here, let's get  
7 started.' So, I was happy to get out of there.

8 RV: Yeah. I can imagine. Ok, tell me about catching the flight to Chu Lai. How  
9 long were you there at Saigon? Just for a few hours?

10 DT: Just for probably four hours. We flew up to Chu Lai, again flying in very  
11 hot. There we got picked up by two and a half ton trucks. I remember Chu Lai, the  
12 smell. The smell of burning wood, the smell in some cases of incense, the smell of  
13 rotting fish, that kind of thing. The smells were much more apparent, and so we went  
14 over to a part of the division base which was their combat center for in-country  
15 orientation, and I think I was only there for like, three days, and for me it was interesting  
16 to hear the sergeants talk about Viet Cong tactics, and particularly the mines and booby  
17 traps, which were very bad in that area of Vietnam. Other than that, it was not too  
18 interesting to me. We had plenty of time off. The officers did, and right down on the  
19 beach from where we were, they had the division's long-range patrol company, and so on  
20 my off hours, I would go down and train with them. And I thought, 'Well, that's my  
21 ticket. That's what I want to do.' But they had no openings, and I introduced myself to  
22 the company commander, and I said, 'I'm out of Ranger School, so I can do this kind of  
23 stuff.' And he said, 'Well, I have no openings.' And then I think a day or so later, I  
24 found out that some of the LRRP lieutenants got into a big fight at the Officer's Club at  
25 division base, and I thought maybe one of them would be relieved and there would be an  
26 opening for me. So I went back, and the company commander just laughed. He said,  
27 'No, I take care of my men. No one got relieved.' So in three days, we got our  
28 assignments, and by that time the word was out, exactly what the chaplain had told me  
29 about the difference in the three brigades. And so all the officers stood there, and I can  
30 remember this as clear in my mind's eye today as it was back in 1969. We all waited on  
31 baited breath, and they would say, 'Ok, the following officers are going to the 196<sup>th</sup>

1      Brigade.' And all of us are thinking, 'Oh, NVA, main force NVA.' And they called off  
2      these lieutenants and they picked up their gear and they went over to the truck. And then  
3      they said, 'The following are going to the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade,' and that's the place you didn't  
4      want to go. And the lieutenants were called out, and I remember watching them walking  
5      over to the truck. Their heads were hung low like they were going to the gallows. And  
6      I'm just all smiles inside. 'That only leaves one place for me!' And so I went to the  
7      198<sup>th</sup> Brigade and I was assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> to the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, which was not far  
8      from the division base.

9            RV: So how long was it before you left?

10           DT: We left immediately. Those of us going to the 198<sup>th</sup> Brigade, we went just  
11      basically across Highway 1 from the division base to the 198<sup>th</sup> Brigade Headquarters, LZ  
12      Bayonet, named because the bayonet was very prominent in the brigade patch. And then  
13      we had an office call with the brigade commander who wanted to see all the incoming  
14      lieutenants. And then because I was going to the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 46 at LZ Gator, which was  
15      about five miles down Highway 1, a few of us lieutenants got into a jeep, and we drove  
16      down Highway 1 to my battalion assignment.

17           RV: Ok.

18           DT: And I remember driving down there and looking at the women out in the  
19      fields working in the rice paddies, and a couple of them would just drop their pants and  
20      just squat and defecate in the rice paddies, and I thought to myself, 'Here I am, I'm on the  
21      dark side of the moon. This is a culture that's just totally different than what I ever  
22      expected,' even though I studied so much for Vietnam. It's just, I was taken back by  
23      what I saw.

24           RV: What did they tell you in that orientation there at Chu Lai?

25           DT: Several things. For the enlisted people, they talked about the VD and those  
26      kinds of things and not to fool around with the women. I remember standing in the back  
27      of the class when the sergeant, a black sergeant with an accent was telling all the enlisted  
28      people, 'If you get VD, don't come to me and tell me you caught it on the toilet seat,  
29      because I'm going to know exactly where you got it.' And I was laughing in the back,  
30      that was so funny. The men chuckled, too. And then the other thing was, the real  
31      emphasis on mines and booby traps. They had a defector who was a sapper, and as we

1 sat there on the bleachers, he showed us how they operated, and he actually crawled  
2 through the sand, through some concertina wire and put his charge in and everything, and  
3 it was just eerie. I mean, you could hear a pin drop. Here's this guy with this shock of  
4 black hair and just shorts on, crawling through the sand. And you knew that he had once  
5 probably killed some Americans, and it was a real reality check.

6 RV: What else was told to you?

7 DT: Strong emphasis on taking your malaria pills, that you could be given an  
8 Article 15 if you did not take them and you came down with malaria. I eventually came  
9 down with malaria, but I did not get an Article 15. And then small unit patrolling, as  
10 much as they could do within the confines of that battalion training – or, that division  
11 training center. It was interesting because several months before that, all of the groups  
12 that came through the division's combat center, as part of their training they would  
13 actually take them out, outside the Chu Lai base and take them on an actual patrol. Not  
14 too far out. And apparently, some of those patrols came in to contact, and the enlisted  
15 people because so unnerved, they decided not to do that because they had too many new  
16 people. It was just a patrol of new people. They didn't have any veterans with them, and  
17 so they cut out all of the real patrols outside the division base and they decided to wait  
18 until the men got to their units, where they could be put in with a bunch of experienced  
19 people. Just, too many were losing it.

20 RV: Did you feel prepared, Dave?

21 DT: I felt very prepared.

22 RV: Physically, I understand.

23 DT: Physically, mentally, and tactically.

24 RV: Ok.

25 DT: And I knew how to call in artillery, I was confident, and when I got my unit,  
26 my platoon, we had a sit down and I told them that we were not going to do things stupid.  
27 We were not going to get on line and charge; we were not going to do dumb things.  
28 There was a reason why we had indirect fire support, and I intend to use it. But, I said at  
29 the same time, we are not going to avoid the enemy. At that point in time, you know,  
30 some units would kind of...they're supposed to be out on patrol, and they would say  
31 they're searching and avoiding.

1           RV: Right.

2           DT: I said, 'We're not going to do that; that's not what we're being paid for. But  
3    we're not going to do stupid things just to make contact.' And so...I think they  
4    appreciated that.

5           RV: Dave, why don't we take a break?

6           DT: Ok.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with David Taylor  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
April 8, 2005  
Transcribed by Jessica Harrell

1           Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. David W. Taylor. I am again in Lubbock and Dave, you're in Medina  
3 – excuse me, Medina, Ohio, and today is April 8. It's 1:42 PM Central Standard Time,  
4 and continuing Dave, with what we were doing, you were in Vietnam for the first time,  
5 you had progressed to Chu Lai and LZ Bayonet and then on to Gator. Before we get  
6 there and start talking about events there and what happened with your tour there in  
7 Vietnam, tell me about the overall feeling that you had as an officer going to Vietnam  
8 and where that came from when you first started feeling what you might have been  
9 feeling?

10           David Taylor: Well, as I got my assignment to go to the 5<sup>th</sup> of the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry  
11 Battalion, the 198<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, I was on my way down there and you know,  
12 unconsciously I guess or subconsciously, going down that road, Highway 1, I thought  
13 about, 'Ok, now this is for real.' All of the training I took, and I did the very best to  
14 prepare myself as best as I could. Now, I'm going to see if I could pass the muster, and I  
15 kind of thought back a little bit about all that time I spent in Officer Candidate School  
16 and Ranger School, but particularly Officer Candidate School, where we were all there  
17 together, we were all on a mission. It was a mission with destiny, I think. And we knew  
18 where we were going. There was no doubt in anybody's mind. We were all going to  
19 Vietnam. We were there by choice to go through all this training and all this punishment  
20 and harassment because there was something inside of us that said, 'Do you want to  
21 measure up?' And I think a lot of people had different reasons for going there, but all of

1 this was now coming to a head, and all of my partners in Officer Candidate School and  
2 my Ranger buddies in Ranger School, and in Airborne School, none of them were with  
3 me. I was on my own now, so I was going to do my best to fulfill whatever was given to  
4 me, so that kind of was in the background of my mind as I was finally heading to my  
5 appointment.

6 RV: Wow, that's an interesting way to put it. Your appointment. Your  
7 appointment with destiny?

8 DT: Well, I'm not so sure I thought in those grandiose terms, but it was probably  
9 an appointment with myself to see if in fact I could be an effective infantry officer in war,  
10 and I think that's a high calling. And so I was going to find out, one way or the other.

11 RV: How difficult, Dave, in your opinion...I guess looking at it right now today  
12 in 2005, how hard is it to translate that training into actual, legitimate, and effective  
13 action in the field?

14 DT: I think a lot of it has to do with the psychic that is created by the military, in  
15 my case the Army, and the kind of training they do, the emphasis on knowing the  
16 standards, knowing your job, and working together as a team, and each person working  
17 for each other. And that whole process of teamwork and knowing your craft and being  
18 able to lead and all that I think prepares you. I certainly felt I was prepared. I was  
19 nervous, because I knew I was going into the combat zone, but I also felt prepared. And I  
20 remember one day when I was an officer candidate TAC officer, I'll never forget this.  
21 We were at the Infantry Hall, the infantry school at Ft. Benning, finishing up a class. It  
22 was the end of the day, and my candidates in my platoon were walking out to get in  
23 formation and march back to the battalion. And as we were walking out of this  
24 classroom, there were two old colonels sitting in the back that were monitoring the class.  
25 And I could overhear them talking as we were walking out. And the one colonel looked  
26 to the other and said, 'These young men, when they get to war, if their first contact with  
27 the enemy is something small, like a sniper, they'll be able to do it and they'll be ok and  
28 that's the introduction they need. If some of them, their first introduction is in a major  
29 firefight or an ambush, some of them are not going to be able to handle it. It's just the  
30 way the human mind works.' And I remembered that, and he was concerned and he was  
31 hoping that all of these newly minted officers would have their first taste of combat

1 would be something relatively minor. Just to get their mind in shape. And I remembered  
2 that many years later, because my first contact was with a sniper. And it finally dawned  
3 on me there was someone out there trying to kill me and it just took a sniper to get that  
4 thought across.

5 RV: Well, we'll talk about that incident when we get to it. Let me ask you one  
6 more question overall, just looking back. What do you do with weak links in your  
7 platoon and your company?

8 DT: In my training?

9 RV: Well, not necessarily in the training, but once you're over there. You talked  
10 about putting the stuff into effect and how it's going to affect the human and working as a  
11 team. What do you do with that weak link? If you have it.

12 DT: Ok, when you are in combat as a small unit leader, you cannot afford to lose  
13 people. So whoever you have, you work with the best hand that you've been dealt. You  
14 don't get rid of them. It's not like Officer Candidate School, if they don't seem to be at  
15 the top of their form that you get rid of them. You have that body and you have to make  
16 the best out of them, regardless of how weak they are. So the weak links in my platoon,  
17 and I only had a couple, I made sure they were paired with people who were strong, and I  
18 made sure the squad leader kept an eye on them. I could not afford to lose them. I  
19 needed everybody I could get.

20 RV: Well Dave, let's go back to Vietnam. Tell me, you're going to LZ Gator.  
21 What was that like?

22 DT: Well, as I think I mentioned before, I was driving down in the back of a jeep  
23 down Highway 1 to our base camp, seeing these mamasons out in the fields, tilling the  
24 rice fields and then all of a sudden dropping their drawers and squatting over to defecate.  
25 And I realized, as much as I had prepared for Vietnam, I wasn't fully prepared for the  
26 culture shock. And in a sense, I thought to myself, I'm on the dark side of the moon.  
27 This is more different than I ever thought it would be. And so, with that in mind, we  
28 finally pulled up into Landing Zone Gator, which was just about five hundred meters off  
29 Highway 1, about five miles south of the division base. And I found it rather interesting  
30 on the trip down as well. We went very, very, very fast. And...

31 RV: Driving on the road, you mean?

1 DT: Driving on the road. And I told the driver, 'You might want to slow down or  
2 we're going to go over.' And he said, 'We don't slow down around here, because you  
3 invite sniper fire or even an ambush.' And so I thought, ok. And incidentally, I did not  
4 have a weapon with me.

5 RV: Why not?

6 DT: I was not issued a weapon in Chu Lai; they said, 'You will get your weapon  
7 when you get to your battalion.' So there was a jeep driver and one other person in the  
8 front, who had a weapon, and there were three of us in the back and we had no weapons.

9 RV: I imagine you didn't feel very safe.

10 DT: I felt naked. One of several times in Vietnam. We arrived at the battalion  
11 headquarters at LZ Gator, and as I recall the battalion commander was there, Lieutenant  
12 Colonel Richardson, and we went in to see him and report in. He was very gracious. He  
13 welcomed us, and I don't recall exactly, but it wasn't too long after that. It was certainly  
14 within a few hours, he took us three new lieutenants out to his helicopter and said, 'Come  
15 on, I'll take you for a tour of the area.' And so we got in, and I asked for a weapon. He  
16 said, 'Oh, you won't need a weapon.' So again, we get on this helicopter. And Colonel  
17 Richardson was a hell of a battalion commander. He was a real leader, not afraid to mix  
18 it up with getting in with the squad if he had to, and he loved being in his helicopter and  
19 flying what we called nap of the earth, where you fly real low to the ground. And that's  
20 exactly what he did with us three lieutenants, and again, I had no weapon and he's flying  
21 real low to the ground and I'm wondering if, we're either going to crash the helicopter  
22 and get killed or we're going to come under fire, and I have no weapon at all. Well, we  
23 did a quick tour. I suppose it was about a half hour, and then we came back to Gator, and  
24 I was assigned to Charlie Company.

25 RV: Ok. Dave, your initial impression of the morale. What was that like?

26 DT: When I got to Charlie Company, the morale seemed ok. The men just  
27 seemed very tired, low-key. No one jumping around laughing, but no one walking  
28 around morose, either. Just a kind of low-key, joking with one another, but kind of a  
29 serious note as well. It was like just people that were serious but knew how to banter.  
30 Kind of hard to describe.

1           RV: Did anybody tell you that the Army had begun to experience some discipline  
2 problems here in '69, '70? Was this any part of a conversation you had before you went  
3 there and once you got there by your superiors?

4           DT: No, it was not. And I did not see that until oh, maybe a month after I was  
5 with the battalion. Then I could start to see and feel a little bit of that inside the battalion  
6 firebase on LZ Gator, and it mostly had to do with support soldiers in the battalion at  
7 Headquarters Company who did not go to the field, and they were at Gator. They had  
8 support duties. And you could see some of that building up the antiwar resentment.  
9 They did their jobs, but every chance they got, they would kind of congregate together  
10 and most probably sneak a marijuana here and there and smoke that. That kind of thing.  
11 So I did start to see some of that. As I recall, it was not a major issue in the battalion  
12 when I got there in February of '69.

13           RV: Ok. How were you accepted by the members of Charlie Company? Can  
14 you describe your first meeting and what went on?

15           DT: Yes, I found it very interesting. Our first sergeant, Aldrich Smith, was a  
16 grizzled old veteran from World War II. He had been with Darby's Rangers in World  
17 War II. He had fought in Korea and he had also been in Special Forces up in Laos doing  
18 some special operations work before he came to our battalion as a first sergeant in the  
19 line company.

20           RV: Can you spell his first name?

21           DT: Yeah, I believe it was A-L-D-R-I-C-H.

22           RV: Ok. Smith.

23           DT: Smith, right.

24           RV: And he was going to with you? He was your first sergeant?

25           DT: Yes. And as a point in fact, oh now I guess it's about six months ago from  
26 this date that I am talking to you, I actually had a phone conversation with him. He lives  
27 in a suburb of Chicago and his wife had just passed, and he was very appreciative. I've  
28 had two or three phone conversations with him. I hope he holds on to the next time I'm  
29 out in that area; I'd like to visit with him.

30           RV: Ok. I imagine that someone with this kind of experience was comforting, to  
31 an extent. Was it intimidating?

1 DT: Well, it was funny, because he was a Ranger, and another lieutenant, Al Bei,  
2 his last name is B-E-I, and myself had arrived at pretty much the same time, both of us  
3 from Benning's Airborne and Ranger Schools. Sergeant Smith's attitude was, that meant  
4 nothing to him until you were in the field and you could prove yourself. And what really  
5 impressed him is if you were wounded. And so, we were kind of expected to be received  
6 as some hotshot, highly trained infantry officers that could end the war in a month, and it  
7 didn't play with him.

8 RV: Well tell me about that first meeting with the company?

9 DT: The first meeting was with the company commander, and he assigned me a  
10 mortar platoon, which was 82-inch mortars. And our mortars at that time, we were  
11 responsible for the security of LZ Gator on the bunker line, so the company was back at  
12 Gator and the mortars were set up inside the perimeter. And so I think just to give the  
13 look-over for me and see how I would handle men, he gave me the mortar platoon rather  
14 than a rifle platoon that would be going to the field. The mortars typically stayed behind,  
15 and so I went down to the mortar area and I stayed with them, and I introduced myself. I  
16 gathered them together and told them a little bit about myself and I think we hit it off  
17 fairly well.

18 RV: Ok. What about the individuals, the men in the company?

19 DT: The men in the company were kind of, they look at you with a jaundice eye,  
20 because they want to know, you know, 'What kind of leader are you going to be? Are  
21 you going to do stupid things, are you going to get crazy, are you really competent or  
22 not?' And to them, being Ranger qualified is a plus, but it did not necessarily win them  
23 over. They had to see you perform.

24 RV: Did you think that...or, was it legitimate? Was this a true...should they not  
25 respect you for who you are or your position, or was that a legitimate thing? They  
26 needed to see you in action and see how you perform and see how you lead?

27 DT: Well, I was respected as an officer. And the sergeants and the men knew  
28 that I was in charge. But they just kind of watch you and see what you have to say and  
29 try to assess you. With my mortar patrol, I was blessed because there was actually a buck  
30 sergeant, a sergeant E-5 who was in charge of the platoon before I got there. They had no  
31 lieutenant because the lieutenants were few and far between, and they were used for the

1 rifle platoons. And so this sergeant really knew his craft. He was very good on the  
2 mortarboards. He had in my mind's eye, I can still see him. He had horn-rimmed  
3 glasses, very smart, kind of a maverick. But he knew what he was doing, and so I made  
4 sure that he kind of ran things because he was pretty good. And I do remember that with  
5 the mortar platoon, I went out there to help them out doing some mortar drills, and of  
6 course we all had our shirts off working in the mortar pits and that kind of thing. I  
7 wanted to mix it up with the men. And a few days later, I came down with sun poison on  
8 my back. Blisters all over because I didn't put any lotion on. And I remember my medic  
9 was patching me up, and of course the blisters kind of looked like it could be a lot of  
10 things, and one of the platoon sergeants walked by, a tall lanky fellow who kind of liked  
11 me, but he looked at me and he said, 'Sir, what stage of syphilis is that?' And I looked at  
12 him and I said, 'You smartass, I'll take care of you later.' So we kind of build up a  
13 rapport.

14 RV: Ok. Well what were the first few days like there? You're spent digging,  
15 mixing up with the men? What did you do?

16 DT: Mainly, I just tried to learn from the men. I tried to get to know them, tried  
17 to talk to the other platoon leaders and learn more about the area. It was just a few days  
18 before my mortar platoon and one of the rifle platoons was actually moved out of Gator  
19 to LZ Dottie, D-O-T-T-I-E, which was south of us, very close to Binh Son, a district town  
20 south on Highway 1. Incidentally, this LZ Dottie was the same LZ where Lieutenant  
21 Calley's men took off before the thing from My Lai.

22 RV: Yes.

23 DT: At the time, I went down there, and this was just a few days after I arrived  
24 on Gator. There was only the artillery battery down there, some support troops, and then  
25 Lieutenant Bei's soldiers and my soldiers were responsible for securing the entire  
26 perimeter. And so we didn't have a lot of soldiers down there. A couple years later,  
27 when Lieutenant Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf took over command of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup>  
28 Battalion of our brigade, he chose LZ Dottie as his battalion base camp, and so he was  
29 defending it with an entire battalion and we only had like, three platoons in total.

30 RV: Wow.

1 DT: I do remember on Dottie, I was kind of anxious to get out and do some local  
2 patrolling and that kind of thing, even though I only had mortar platoon. And Lieutenant  
3 Bei, who had a little time in country more than me, was very wise and very savvy, and he  
4 said, 'Just be patient. Just be patient.' LZ Dottie was not an area you particularly wanted  
5 to patrol around because it was on the Batangan Peninsula, and that's B-A-T-A-N-G-A-  
6 N. And that was probably the one area in South Vietnam was the most heavily mined  
7 and booby-trapped area.

8 RV: Yes.

9 DT: And so he said, 'Let's not get too pushy. You get plenty of field time  
10 coming up.' So I was happy for that steady voice when I was there.

11 RV: Was Dottie going to be your main base of operations where you were going  
12 to be coming out of every day?

13 DT: Just for temporary, to help build up the defenses of Dottie until some other  
14 soldiers could be put on there. People were moved around quite a bit, so we never stayed  
15 one place too long. And we were only there for I don't think more than a couple weeks,  
16 and then we moved back to LZ Gator because the company was going to finish their  
17 perimeter duty and move out into the field, and so we were all consolidating.

18 RV: Ok. Ok.

19 DT: And at that point, since we were going to the field and we were short of rifle  
20 platoon leaders, I was giving a rifle platoon. The mortar platoon was very well handled  
21 and led by that buck sergeant, and there was no sense in me being there. And to go to  
22 your earlier question, here are the rifle platoon who did spend a lot of time in the field, I  
23 gathered them up on LZ Gator inside our platoon tent and introduced myself, talked to  
24 them. I had a couple buck sergeants who had actually been there when the battalion first  
25 arrived in Vietnam at the end of March of '68, so these were grizzled veterans. They had  
26 earned, all earned, or both of them had earned their stripes in the field. And I explained  
27 my philosophy, that we were there to get a job done, but that we would not do anything  
28 stupid. We are not going to get on line and charge, we are not going to walk on trails,  
29 and we will use indirect fire support, artillery and mortars, and helicopter gunships to the  
30 maximum amount. So I said, I told them we are not going to do anything stupid, but at  
31 the same time, we are not going to go out and avoid contact. And I think that the two

1 veteran sergeants shook their head and said, 'Ok, we can work with this guy.' That's  
2 what was in their mind. And shortly after that, we went out into the field.

3 RV: Ok. Let me ask you a question. I'm trying to imagine you addressing them.  
4 How long had these boys been there? Do you know?

5 DT: Most of my men had been there as far as I could tell at least four to six  
6 months.

7 RV: Ok. I used the word boys on purpose because I want to talk about their age  
8 and then your age in relation to them, and how that dynamic works. They are what, three  
9 years, four years younger than you in general?

10 DT: I was...now I have to think about this. I was born in '46, so '69...

11 RV: You're thirty-three.

12 DT: No. Twenty-three.

13 RV: Twenty-three! Twenty-three years old.

14 DT: So, yeah. And surprisingly, most of my men were twenty, twenty-one.  
15 They were a little older in age than normally you would think of, and I don't know why  
16 that is. Whether the draft at that point had changed and we were drafting people out of  
17 college versus right out of high school. But you know, I think they were appreciative of  
18 the fact that I had an attitude that we weren't going to do anything crazy, that I was going  
19 to be cautious but I was not going to be timid, and I told the men in front of the two  
20 experienced sergeants that even though I had gone through Ranger school, that was not  
21 Vietnam and that I was going to rely on them for advice until I got my feet wet in the  
22 field. And I think they collectively liked me telling them that.

23 RV: Ok. Was there any discussion of, or did you hear about any discussion of,  
24 'Let's hope that Lieutenant Taylor doesn't want to earn medals or get promoted,' things  
25 like that?

26 DT: No, I never heard that, and it was that whole thing about medals is  
27 interesting, because I don't know of any officer, a junior officer that I came in contact  
28 with over there that ever thought about medals. It was never in my mind at all. What  
29 was in our mind was getting the job done for the company commander so that we looked  
30 competent and doing it without drawing casualties. That was the entire focus.

1           RV: Ok. Could you give us a basic description of Gator and what your barracks  
2    were like and the daily life there?

3           DT: Yeah, Gator as I said was about, oh maybe three hundred yards off of  
4    Highway 1. It was a dirt road that led up to it. It was a hill but that had been carved out.  
5    A low-lying hill that had been carved out inside, so it was like a bowl. An elongated  
6    bowl, and that bowl was probably a thousand yards, if not more from end to end. It was  
7    fairly big. And inside the bowl were interior dirt roads and then all over the bowl were  
8    little groupings of tents where the rifle companies had their headquarters, as well as  
9    support elements. To the east of the...the eastern edge of the bowl, which overlooked  
10   Highway 1 was an artillery battery, and on the western side of the bowl, which  
11   overlooked the valley beyond and then beyond that to the mountains, that is where the  
12   battalion tactical operation center was. The battalion commander's bunker, the mess hall,  
13   all of those other things.

14          RV: Ok. Tell me about your individual barracks. Where did you live? When  
15    you were not in the field.

16          DT: We were in tents.

17          RV: Yeah, when you weren't in the field.

18          DT: Yeah, everybody had tents except for those who were more permanent on  
19    Gator. A few of those had wood buildings with large screen windows and around that  
20    were sandbags of walls. The grunts, the troops that were in and out all the time, we  
21    basically just had tents with openings on the side so the air could get through. No  
22    mosquito netting, per se. You could put some over your individual bunk. And these  
23    were just cots, that's all they were, and they were on a wood platform so that when it  
24    rained, you wouldn't get wet. The water would go underneath you. So it was fairly  
25    sparse. Outside each tent was a bunker of sandbags so that if we received rocket attacks  
26    or stuff like that, we could run out real quick to get inside the bunker to be protected.

27          RV: How often would that have happened, any mortar or rocket attack?

28          DT: Not very often. I don't think it happened once while I was on LZ Gator. Of  
29    course, most of the time, I was in the field. But it would happen from time to time.

30          RV: Ok.

1 DT: And the other thing we had by the bunker were sandbagged fighting  
2 positions that...you always had your weapon with you, and so that if there was a rocket  
3 attack, you would run into the bunker, but some people would also take up position  
4 outside the bunker because very often when you received rockets, it meant that possibly  
5 sappers were coming through the wire, and they would be running around inside the  
6 firebase, LZ Gator. We always, the battalion SOP at night was always, you had to wear  
7 your helmet. Your steel pot. And your weapon with ammunition. You wore the steel  
8 pot because if you were walking around at night and sappers attacked and got inside the  
9 perimeter, they could...you could be seen in the dim light, and with a steel pot on you  
10 would not be mistaken for an enemy. So you did not want to wear a soft cap, you wore  
11 your steel pot.

12 RV: Was that uncomfortable to wear all the time?

13 DT: It was. But like everything else in life, you get used to it.

14 RV: Were you the one who had to enforce such rules with your platoon?

15 DT: No, everybody wore it. It just made common sense at night. So if you were  
16 walking around, you definitely wore your steel pot and you had a weapon with  
17 ammunition.

18 RV: Ok. Anything else you want to talk about regarding Gator and your daily  
19 life there? How about food and things like that?

20 DT: Well, the mess hall was pretty good. And they did the best they could to  
21 provide us food. When we had the bunker line, when I had a rifle platoon on the bunker  
22 line, we had a certain proportion of the bunker line, and I would check it out every night,  
23 check my men out, make sure that the wire below the bunkers were secure. I do want to  
24 go back for a moment with the mortar platoon, something I forgot.

25 RV: Sure.

26 DT: One of the things, I was so impressed with my mortar platoon at night when  
27 we were on Gator as a new lieutenant, I would go up on the bunker line, and we had a  
28 radar unit there. And the radar would look out across the valley, and at night could detect  
29 any enemy movement. And of course during the war, in the war zone, no civilians were  
30 allowed to travel at night. You stayed in the hamlet because if you were out, you could  
31 be mistaken as enemy. And so, no one...unless you were enemy, you didn't walk at

1 night. So what I did to get some practice calling in fire missions, I went up where the  
2 radar unit was and befriended them and then told them that if they saw anything, just let  
3 me know and I would call in my mortars. And that's what I did. I had a mission one  
4 time and called in the mortars, and we called in some marking rounds, some flare rounds,  
5 and then I called in some high explosive rounds, and according to the radar guys, there  
6 was a small group that was moving, and once the rounds started, they started scattering.

7 RV: Ok. So you were able to practice a bit?

8 DT: I was able to practice, and one night when we did that, firing at movement  
9 out in the valley, the next morning when I went to breakfast at the mess hall, the battalion  
10 S-5, which is a new staff position created in the Vietnam War for civil affairs. The  
11 lieutenant came in and sat down to eat next to me, and he looked at me and he said,  
12 'Taylor, were you the one that was calling in that mortar fire out into the valley?' And I  
13 said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Well, there was a villager that claimed that the marking round  
14 with the flare had landed on his hooch and burned it down.' And I said, 'That's baloney.'  
15 Actually, I said, 'That's bullshit.' Because I knew exactly where that...my rounds  
16 weren't even anywhere close to those hooches. They were far away. And he said, 'I  
17 know that, and you know that. Obviously, he got the canister and dragged it over to his  
18 hooch and set his hooch on fire so he could get paid.' And he said, 'I have to go out and  
19 pay him anyway.'

20 RV: Wow.

21 DT: So. Oh, what a way to fight a war.

22 RV: Right. How common was something like that?

23 DT: As I understand, it was fairly common. But it's tough to...it's tough to  
24 generalize because in other occasions, there were some genuine grievances. So I  
25 wouldn't want to generalize that it was one way or the other.

26 RV: Ok. That makes total sense.

27 DT: Yeah.

28 RV: Because you do hear that there was corruption and there were lies here and  
29 there, and the South Vietnamese civilians were doing this and the...

30 DT: Right.

1           RV: What about any other specific examples that you had personally with such  
2 things? With seeing this kind of...this war fought that way?

3           DT: I've never, to be honest, I've never other than that one incident; the  
4 interrelationship with civilians in the villages was typical of that kind of war. You never  
5 knew who you were looking at. The very people that were innocent civilians, you knew  
6 some of those folks might at night be laying out mines and booby traps for you. And so it  
7 was just a very tough kind of thing to manage in your own mind as well as manage with  
8 your men.

9           RV: Can you go ahead and make some comments on the Vietnamese civilians?  
10 Just in general, what were your impressions then for your tour?

11          DT: I always found them very friendly. Now you had to take that with some  
12 caution. Out in the field, I was more comfortable with civilians than being on vehicles  
13 driving down Highway 1 and going through small towns or hamlets. It was then that they  
14 would be prone to throw a grenade at you or something like that, and maybe one civilian  
15 would do that because he was a Viet Cong, but the other civilians in that village were not.  
16 They were pro-government, and this individual had infiltrated. So it was tough. But out  
17 in the field, whenever you were walking to a hamlet or a subhamlet, I was comfortable  
18 with the people. Most times, they had smiles. At a minimum, they would just stare at  
19 you, which gave you an indication that they were not less than friendly. But I was  
20 comfortable dealing with that in the field. I was not comfortable dealing with it in major  
21 towns.

22          RV: Ok.

23          DT: And the first mission with my rifle platoon was actually, we went northwest  
24 of LZ Gator into what we called the Rocket Pocket or Rocket Valley. This was a long  
25 stretch of valley that was always a thorn in the side of the Americal Division because it  
26 was in this valley that the Viet Cong would bring these 122-millimeter rockets and set  
27 those up, pointing them towards the Chu Lai Division base and just fire them and leave  
28 them. And they were very simple to operate; it was just a point and shoot rocket. You'd  
29 just put basically a little mound together and put two cross bamboo poles and then put the  
30 rocket in the vertex of the bamboo poles and point it towards Chu Lai, and you were  
31 ready to go. So our mission as a company was to go through the Rocket Valley, and that

1 was a good mission for me for my first time in the field with my rifle platoon, because we  
2 worked together as a company.

3 RV: Now how soon Dave was this first mission when you got back to Gator the  
4 second time?

5 DT: I think it was just a few days after we got back to Gator. And I was blessed  
6 to be able to, my first time in the field to be able to work as a company.

7 RV: Why do you say that?

8 DT: Well, because number 1, I could get my bearings and I had other platoons  
9 with me, and so it was just a more comfortable feeling. However, I was surprised at  
10 myself after we were there just a few days, I kind of wanted to be by myself with my  
11 platoon. Working as a company became cumbersome, and so after a few days, that's  
12 exactly what happened. The company commander split us up and we went to all different  
13 sections of that valley on our own.

14 RV: Ok. Can you describe the first...what was it like those first days going out?  
15 It was your very first patrol in Vietnam.

16 DT: Well the first patrol, we were in the file. My platoon was somewhere in the  
17 company file. We weren't up front. And I could hear some shooting going on ahead.  
18 Someone was being sniper fired from an AK-47. My men immediately went to ground,  
19 and I stood up. Me, the Airborne Ranger with all the training, and I looked at my radio  
20 operator who was down on the ground. I said, 'What was that?' He looked at me and he  
21 said, 'Uh, sir, they're shooting at us.' And so just like the colonel said at Ft. Benning, I  
22 was blessed with an early adoption of just small sniper fire, and it was just that one little  
23 incident that got my head on straight, and from that point on, I was in the war.

24 RV: So how many shots were fired? Where they fired directly at you?

25 DT: No, they were fired at a platoon that was in front of me.

26 RV: Ok.

27 DT: So they weren't even fired at us, but of course we could hear the sound. So  
28 my men instinctively went to the ground.

29 RV: Ok. Go ahead and continue. What else happened on the first patrol?

30 DT: Well, we were basically, after a couple days the company split up and I had  
31 my platoon by myself and we had a portion of the Rocket Pocket to search. And we did

1 that using good patrolling procedures. Going along, men staying at least ten feet from  
2 each other in case one hit a mine. We stayed off of trails, and there were some trails in  
3 that area. And then in the evening, we would gather up and look around and decide  
4 where to put in for the night, and at this point I would bring my two experienced  
5 sergeants together and tell them what I thought. I didn't want to ask them what to do. I  
6 told them what I thought, and they would say, 'Ok, that makes sense,' or, 'Maybe we  
7 should be actually a little over into this direction instead of here, and I would say, 'Well,  
8 why is that?' And then they would point out how they look at the terrain and so we  
9 would do that for the first couple nights and then after that, I think we were all of one  
10 mind and I basically took over the platoon and didn't have to interface with opinions.

11           RV: Ok. Let me ask you some specifics. Just I guess basics. I think this is very  
12 important for people to know about. Tell me Dave what your uniform was like. What  
13 did you have with you?

14           DT: We had the standard Army jungle fatigues. However, it was so hot out there  
15 that the fatigue shirt, normally most of my men and myself included, if we were not  
16 operating as a company, we were just by ourselves, I would take the fatigue shirt off and  
17 roll it up and put it in my rucksack. And I would just put a towel around my neck and  
18 have my t-shirt on, and then I would put the rucksack straps over the towel so it didn't  
19 rub into my shoulders. And that made me much more comfortable. The SOP was that  
20 we were supposed to wear our fatigue jackets, but unless someone was coming in on a  
21 helicopter – I would get it on for that. Other than that, I kept it off. It was just so hot.  
22 We carried about fifty pounds in our rucksacks. Mostly ammunition. Not too much  
23 food. It was so hot, we didn't eat that much. And we were also fortunate, every other  
24 day we would get a meal brought in at noon. And so we would stop, put in a perimeter,  
25 and have a good meal from the mess hall. So we were fortunate.

26           RV: Yes.

27           DT: But it was mostly ammunition and water. Those were the two most valuable  
28 things we carried.

29           RV: Tell me about getting good water. How would you go about that? I mean,  
30 you did get resupplied. Was that consistent?

1 DT: Yes. We were, at least in the Rocket Pocket because we were close to LZ  
2 Gator. It did not take much time for a helicopter to come over, and they would bring  
3 these plastic jugs, actually, and in some cases mermite cans. But they would bring in  
4 fresh water. We would fill up and we did have purification tablets, in case we were  
5 getting low on water, we could go and get it out of a stream and put our purification  
6 tablets in. But we were very fortunate at that time to get supplied very well, so we were  
7 not hurting for water.

8 RV: Did you ever have a problem with getting supplies in the field?

9 DT: No. No, never. The only time is several months later, when we were south  
10 as a company in an area of low-lying hills. There was very little water and if we ran out  
11 of water, we would have to use rice paddy water. Other than that, we were well supplied.  
12 It was my experience, I was fortunate enough not to have that problem.

13 RV: Ok. Tell me about your weapons, Dave. What were they like? What did  
14 you carry personally and how were you outfitted as far as the platoon's concerned?

15 DT: I carried an M-16. I did not have rank on my jacket or anything. Everyone  
16 knew who I was.

17 RV: Was that for safety?

18 DT: Also for safety, so I wouldn't be identified. Although I was close to the  
19 radio operator, so the average Vietnamese could figure it out. But M-16, lots of  
20 ammunition. I carried two grenades. I was nervous about carrying them.

21 RV: Right, because I remember what you said about your experience with the  
22 grenades. You didn't feel confident. As confident with grenades.

23 DT: Right, and I didn't...I didn't like to use them, but I did have them. I made  
24 sure that the grenades I had were new, that the pins were not rusted, because I did not  
25 want them falling off and exploding on me. And that brings up something that I want to  
26 go back with a little bit. With the first couple of days, we were in the Rocket Valley as a  
27 company. We were on the top of a hill and taking a break in the middle of the day, and  
28 we saw down across the rice paddies, coming from an area where we were the day prior,  
29 we saw two Viet Cong. One had an AK-47, boldly walking along on a trail right by a  
30 wood line. I don't think they understood where we were. And I had just prior to that, I  
31 had told the company commander I wanted to take my platoon down at the base of the

1 hill and just patrol the area, and he said, 'Ok.' So I went down at the base of the hill, and  
2 that's when we saw these two Viet Cong. And so I called back to the company  
3 commander and told him where they were, and a company forward observer, an artillery  
4 officer called in some fire from the battery at LZ Gator. Well, the battery had made a 10-  
5 mil error on the guns, and I remember my men were crouching low so the Viet Cong  
6 wouldn't see them on the other side of the rice paddy, and one of my men had elected  
7 that this was a good time to go and take a crap, and he went off to the side and dropped  
8 his drawers and he's crapping. Just then, the artillery goes out from LZ Gator, except  
9 instead of landing on the Viet Cong, it landed in the rice paddy right in front of us. And  
10 fortunately, the rice paddy was wet and it muffled the explosions. Well, one of these  
11 rounds landed not too far from the soldier that was taking the crap, and so the next thing I  
12 know, he came over to me after the rounds exploded with his pants down and mud just all  
13 over him from head to toe. And I thought, 'Well, there's one way to get the crap out.' I  
14 was very angry. I called immediately to the company commander and I told him that  
15 when I got up at the top of the hill, he better have that FO out of my sight, and the  
16 company commander came back and said, 'Take it easy, it was not his fault.' They  
17 realized what had happened, and the battery at LZ Gator said it was their mistake.

18 RV: Ok.

19 DT: He told me to take my platoon across the rice paddy to check on the two VC  
20 and see if we got any of them, because one we saw had been wounded, and he crawled  
21 away. I used an interesting formation that was just being introduced at that time in  
22 Vietnam for small units. We used a wedge. Rather than walking across in a single line,  
23 whenever you go out into a big rice paddy, I found the better formation was a wedge with  
24 the point being towards the direction you were going, and then you had two flanks  
25 coming out, and the my headquarters element was right in the middle. This meant that if  
26 we were fired upon out in the open, I had more control over my men and I could  
27 maneuver them rather than having a long, single line going out across the paddy. We got  
28 to the other side. We found some blood, but we could not find any of the VC, but we did  
29 find a spider hole. A small little hole. It could have been the entrance to a tunnel. It  
30 didn't look like it was that big, but that's when I decided to use the grenades and I put  
31 some grenades down there. And the company commander told us to come on back.

1 Another image I have of operating in that valley is that there were mines and booby traps,  
2 not as bad as out on the Batangan Peninsula, but there were some. And of course the  
3 villagers pretty much knew where they were. And they had to straddle both sides of the  
4 fence to deal with the Viet Cong that might come through now and then and certainly  
5 deal with the South Vietnamese Army and the American forces. But they knew where  
6 the mines were. And so I picked up something that my sergeants told me about. When  
7 we were walking through an area, if we would see a villager out in the field, we would  
8 have him walk in front of us. Particularly if we had to walk on a trail to get someplace.  
9 And so we did make the villager walk in front of us. The two times I did that, they did  
10 not resist. And then they would walk in front of us for a while until we started getting out  
11 of the immediate area, and then we would let them go because in Asia, most villagers did  
12 not know too much beyond their immediate area. And so we did do that. And I  
13 remember one time in the valley, I think the was our third or forth day there, my men  
14 were setting up at lunch for some chow in my platoon, and the battalion called and said  
15 that we have a reporter that was coming out and wants to spend a couple days with you,  
16 just walking around. Well, I did not want a reporter around with me. I was not doing  
17 anything wrong, but I did not want a reporter making value judgments on my tactics, and  
18 particularly when I was using villagers walking in front of us. And so I had the  
19 quandary, 'What am I going to do?' And then the radio snapped that, 'The bird is  
20 inbound,' the helicopter, 'Mark smoke, I got your package,' which was this reporter.  
21 And I'm thinking, 'What am I going to do, what am I going to do?' So then I got on the  
22 radio while my men was just sitting around eating. And I said, 'I recommend you do not  
23 come in, I am under small arms sniper fire.' And I watched the helicopter make a left  
24 turn at a right angle and move out. My men were looking at me, thinking, 'What are you  
25 saying?' But I got rid of the reporter.

26 RV: Why would you not want that reporter to see your tactics?

27 DT: I didn't want a reporter with me because I was pretty much against the way  
28 we were being treated in Vietnam by the media. By that time, I had seen it at Ft.  
29 Benning. I had heard stories from officers that had been in Vietnam, that the reporters  
30 and journalists would unfairly report things that they were seeing in the field, and I just  
31 decided fairly or unfairly, that I didn't want to be a part of that.

1           RV: Ok. Can you make any comments about how you came about that opinion?

2   What was it there in Vietnam that got you there?

3           DT: Just from what people were saying, that they felt they were under a  
4   microscope whenever reporters were in the field, that the antiwar sentiment was growing  
5   and they just didn't want to be a part of it, particularly officers who had careers to think  
6   about. They wanted to be judged on their performance and not on some reporter who  
7   might misconstrue what they were doing. And so as a junior officer, I didn't want to  
8   have anything to do with that.

9           RV: Right. Dave, tell me about this wedge formation again. This was something  
10   that was new in Vietnam at the time, you were saying?

11           DT: As far as I understood. I had not heard about it at Ft. Benning, but the  
12   company commander had told us before going out to the rocket pockets that if we were  
13   going out across any major wide open rice paddy, that it had come down from Saigon,  
14   from MACV headquarters, that they wanted small units to start using that formation.

15           RV: Ok. How far apart were the men in the wedge?

16           DT: Probably no more than five meters. Oh, maybe four or five feet from each  
17   other.

18           RV: You found it effective?

19           DT: I thought it was effective. I was surprised at how effective it was rather than  
20   having your unit strung out over a long distance. I could see everybody. If I needed to  
21   get them online to go fast, straight ahead, or to go at a right angle left or right, I could  
22   easily do that. You couldn't do that with a line.

23           RV: Right.

24           DT: I do remember the first time I tried it, the company commander was back up  
25   on the hill behind us with the rest of the company, and I asked him facetiously to take a  
26   picture, because I thought it looked pretty, going across the field.

27           RV: Did he get one?

28           DT: No. Never did.

29           RV: Ok. Well while we're on this subject; tell me about the typical tactics you  
30   would use in the field. I know it varies with terrain, but can you kind of go through in  
31   your mind and talk about the different ones that you used personally?

1 DT: Most times, it was the single file patrol, and a typical day in the valley, we  
2 would patrol during the day, stop at noon, put in a perimeter and have our lunch, whether  
3 it was brought in or we just ate our C-rat...that was our main meal of the day. Patrol  
4 some more at night [in the afternoon], and just at dusk we would put in a perimeter like  
5 we were staying there for the night, because from time to time, there might be someone  
6 walking on the trail nearby that would see us. But while we were putting in this  
7 perimeter for the evening, I was actually devising two ambushes for the night, and I  
8 divided my platoon into half. I normally never had more than twenty-six men in the  
9 field, and that's not a lot. That's a little over half of the normal platoon. And so I  
10 basically divided the platoon into half. My platoon sergeant took one half and I took the  
11 other half at night, and we would go into two ambush positions. Once it got dark, we  
12 would move out from our perimeter that we were supposed to be at into two ambush  
13 positions no more than a couple hundred meters from each other, and then we would stay  
14 there for the night and then the next day in the morning, we would meet up at another  
15 location. And so we constantly moved and tried to keep the Viet Cong off balance as far  
16 as fixing our location so they couldn't hit us.

17 RV: Was it effective?

18 DT: It was effective. I remember one night, we decided that we were going to be  
19 all together in a position, and I don't remember why we did that. Maybe we were told to  
20 stay together because we were going to get picked up the next day, I just don't remember.  
21 But we were in a position where it was on the valley floor, and you couldn't dig in. I  
22 wanted to at least get some prone foxhole positions. That is to say you know, maybe five  
23 or six, seven inches below the ground, just something so you get a little bit into the  
24 ground. But digging was a no-no, the ground was so hard. At night, we could hear some  
25 movement out in front. My men would come over and say they could hear some  
26 movement. We did not know whether those were small animals or just what. As the  
27 night progressed, I got a radio call from the battalion intelligence officer saying that they  
28 had some intelligence that a sapper platoon was somewhere in the valley near our  
29 location. And I radioed, I answered and I got that information, and I said, 'Well thanks a  
30 lot.' And he responded by saying, 'Well, have a good night.' And some things just stay  
31 with you. Well later is when my men started hearing these noises. And I was thinking

1 we were in not a good position, so I told my men to start throwing grenades, which they  
2 threw a couple grenades. And later on, the noises continued. I was not comfortable  
3 because throwing grenades during the day is a tough ordeal, let alone throwing them at  
4 night. I was afraid that if someone made a mistake, it might blow up some of my men.  
5 So I knew that south of my position, about four hundred meters was a hill, and it went up  
6 fairly high. And so I drew my compass towards that hill, and I told everybody to get their  
7 rucksacks on. I would not allow anybody at night to have anything out of their rucksack.  
8 I wanted to be able to get up and go at any time. So at that point, we closed up where one  
9 man could hold the back of the rucksack of the guy in front of him, because it was pitch  
10 dark. I walked to the front of the formation and told them to just follow me, so we were  
11 in close order. I led the platoon and we moved at night in the dark and I took them up  
12 that hill. And we went up to the top of the hill, and the hill itself had a lot of scrub brush  
13 and briars and brush and everything, so we got through that. At the top of the hill, it was  
14 kind of bald a little bit, and as I got to the top, as my men came up, I placed them around  
15 the top of the hill facing down in a circle, and then I told them when they all got up there,  
16 I told them to just take five steps forward down the hill and then just get down. That's  
17 where we spent the night.

18 RV: Dave, let me ask you a quick question. Did you communicate all this ahead  
19 of time? Or did you do it by hand signals as you were going? I know you couldn't see  
20 anything.

21 DT: I got my squad leaders together. In the dark, I walked to each of the squad  
22 leaders, told them what we were going to do, told them to stay tight, if any man is lost,  
23 they're going to be spending the night by themselves. And we whispered that to every  
24 person. We only had about twenty-six, and so I think they all got the message. No one  
25 wanted to be left behind. And so then we went out. Later that evening once we got  
26 settled, I heard some explosions down there where we were, where we had left. So I was  
27 kind of glad we made the move.

28 RV: Sounds like it. Did you run into anything up on the hill or anywhere else?

29 DT: No, nothing. See, in Vietnam, sometimes all you have to do is make the  
30 slightest change, and that threw off the enemy. The grunts in the field that kept the set  
31 patterns all the time invited trouble. So you always had to weave and dodge and bob and

1 just keep moving and don't set any patterns, and that was the best way to keep from  
2 getting attacked.

3 RV: Ok. What was your favorite weapon?

4 DT: My favorite weapon was the M-16. I liked it as a weapon. I regretted that it  
5 had to be cleaned all the time because I was used to the M-14. But next to that, my  
6 favorite weapon was the M-60 machine gun. That was the equalizer. And I always made  
7 sure we had at least two M-60 machine guns with us, even if we were just down to  
8 twenty men or twenty-one men, I always made sure we had at least two machine guns.

9 RV: I know for obvious reasons, but can you explain why?

10 DT: Well, because it had the extra firepower and it was heavy, but not that heavy.  
11 It wasn't an encumbrance on the men, so it was a lot of extra firepower and each one of  
12 my men always carried some M-60 machine gun ammunition.

13 RV: Ok. How often did you use your .45?

14 DT: I did not carry a .45.

15 RV: All right. I was going to ask. You didn't mention that, but...

16 DT: No, I thought that was a waste of...a wasteful weapon. I was never  
17 impressed with it, and it was just something that was more weight that would be useless.  
18 I never carried a .45.

19 RV: Ok. What was your favorite C-rat? Or your least favorite C-rat?

20 DT: Boy, I don't know. I guess, I liked the C-rations, actually. I guess that  
21 makes me kind of crazy, but I had none that I did not like. Most people did not like ham  
22 and limas. I enjoyed that. I did have a Mexican-American soldier in my platoon. I had a  
23 couple, for that matter, but one in particular, his mother who lived in New Mexico would  
24 send him a homemade hot sauce, and so I would always be a buddy to him and he would  
25 give me some of his hot sauce, and that made things good. And we also received with a  
26 resupply of C-rations, what they called an SP packet. And those were extra sanitary  
27 supplies, chewing gum, odd and end things. But in that SP packet was a little carton of  
28 cigars. And those always went to me. Rank does have its privilege. And so...and  
29 fortunately most men did not want to smoke cigars, so I always used to get the cigars.

1           RV: Ok. Well, I'd like to ask you couple of other general questions. Just, you  
2 know for these basics, I think it's very important that we talk about this. Was there any  
3 weapon that you did not have that you would like to have had there in the field?

4           DT: Not that I could think of. We had the M-79 grenade launchers, the M-16s,  
5 grenades, the M-60 machine guns, and we also carried the light antitank weapon, the  
6 LAW, which was good for bunkers, that kind of thing if we needed to use it. So I think  
7 we had everything that we needed in the field as far as hand-carried weapons. I carried a  
8 knife, and some of the other men had knives. But beyond that, I think we were well  
9 supplied. I think what was most important is having enough ammunition. It was not the  
10 kinds of weapons that you had, but making sure you had enough ammunition for the  
11 weapons that you did have, and that was a constant concern of mine that I impressed on  
12 the squad leaders and my platoon sergeant, is always check the men. Make sure they  
13 carry enough ammunition. Because sometimes, you would find a lazy grunt who would  
14 not carry enough ammunition just to make his load lighter, and that was a no-no.

15           RV: Tell me about the enemy weapons. Which ones did you encounter the most?  
16 Which ones were most feared?

17           DT: Truthfully, I rarely encountered the enemy. When I did, they were up close  
18 and personal. But the AK-47 and mortars. They would mortar us and the AK-47, and  
19 then the weapon of the enemy that we feared the most that we had the most contact with  
20 were the mines and booby traps.

21           RV: Do you want to talk about those? What did you see? What'd you run into?  
22 How did you defeat them?

23           DT: Well, the mines and booby traps were mostly used out on the Batangan  
24 Peninsula, which after our time in the Rocket Valley, we went to the Batangan Peninsula  
25 out on LZ Minuteman, which was north of the Pinkville area along the coast. This is a  
26 firebase that was built early in 1969 during Operation RUSSELL BEACH, and the  
27 civilians were relocated just outside of LZ Minuteman in a refugee village. And so the  
28 mission on LZ Minuteman was to protect the refugees. And so we spent a considerable  
29 amount of time out there in the spring of 1969, patrolling the area out there on the  
30 Batangan Peninsula. It was very heavily laced with mines and booby traps. Even inside  
31 of LZ Minuteman, there were some mines and booby traps on a few occasions when the

1      firebase would not be occupied, the Viet Cong snuck up and they put mines and booby  
2      traps inside the perimeter.

3            RV: Ok.

4            DT: And we did lose some men because of that. Not on my watch, but there  
5      were some men that actually stepped on mines inside the perimeter and died.

6            RV: Ok, besides mines, what else would you see?

7            DT: Mostly mines, booby traps, and then you would get mortared. Like I said,  
8      periodically we would get some mortar rounds coming in on LZ Minuteman. At that  
9      point in time in our part of Vietnam, and I think in Vietnam, South Vietnam in general,  
10     the enemy still was recovering from the Tet Offensive of '68. And so here we are early  
11     '69, they had another minor Tet Offensive in January and February, and they were not in  
12     good shape. In our part of Vietnam in southern Quang Ngai province, our main enemy  
13     was the 48<sup>th</sup> Viet Cong Battalion, and they had been heavily hit in Tet of '68, and so the  
14     way they made up for that was just saturating the area with mines and booby traps.

15            RV: Ok. Did you see a marked difference in the post-Tet era? I mean, you  
16      weren't there before, but can you draw any comparisons as to what it was before the Tet  
17      and then you patrolling in this area after Tet?

18            DT: Yes, only from the experience my men relate to me. They were very, very  
19      frustrated because prior, during Tet and before Tet, when you would encounter the Viet  
20      Cong, you would encounter them in some group of some size where you could bring your  
21      fire power to bear. You could not do that anymore. Not in our area of South Vietnam.  
22      So the vets were very chagrined that we couldn't see the enemy, yet we were losing  
23      people, we were losing arms, legs, in some cases lives from mines and booby traps, and  
24      there was no way to get back at the enemy.

25            RV: How did that affect you, Dave?

26            DT: It made me very nervous and it made me more determined on managing my  
27      men. When we did patrolling on the Batangan Peninsula, we had to be very, very careful.  
28      Absolutely you did not go on any trails and the men did not need to be told that. But, the  
29      problem was if you were walking along and you saw a hedgerow of bushes in front of  
30      you, the men would naturally want to go through the natural opening in the hedgerow  
31      because it was so heavy and it was so hot. They had heavy loads. And it was up to me to

1 make sure that the point man would not do that, that we would cut our own way through  
2 the hedgerow. And men would get upset because it meant getting scratched and bruised  
3 and everything else, but it was the safe way to go. And as much as I tried to be careful,  
4 even I had a lapse in judgment one time.

5 RV: What happened?

6 DT: And it just stands out in my mind, we had left...we had left the LZ  
7 Minuteman to walk quite a distance to go to visit one of the Marine CAP teams that were  
8 in the area. These were combined action platoons.

9 RV: Yes.

10 DT: And my company commander wanted me to coordinate with the CAP team  
11 and let them know that we were in the area. We had some armored personnel carriers on  
12 LZ Minuteman that would take us half of the way to the CAP team, so I was happy about  
13 that. We got a late start in the afternoon and they would take us halfway there until the  
14 terrain got too rough for them and then they went into a circle, a wagon wheel, and we  
15 walked the rest of the way. And the leader in charge of the armored personnel carriers  
16 told me to get back to him before it got dark because he did not want to stay out there for  
17 the night. He did not have many people on his personnel carriers. He just couldn't  
18 defend it. And so I told him, 'Ok, fine.' We took off from there, and in order to make up  
19 for some time, we had to start walking on some trails. We went through an abandoned  
20 sub-hamlet. No one was there. Most of the hooches were knocked down. And so I  
21 increased the distance between my men by about twenty feet, just to play it safe. I was  
22 about the third man from the front so I could keep an eye on the point man and make sure  
23 he went in the right direction. We went through this abandoned village and we finally  
24 got to the CAP team, which was north of LZ Minuteman, also on a little hill overlooking  
25 a refugee camp. We got up to the CAP team on this little hill, and I made coordination  
26 with the sergeant that was in charge. He basically had a platoon of Marines and a platoon  
27 of South Vietnamese local forces. And down below on the beach was this refugee village  
28 they were to protect. I looked at the top of the hill and I noticed that he had four caliber  
29 50 machine guns, one on each side of the hill looking down. One of the caliber 50  
30 machine guns was pointed down on the refugee village. And I said, 'I thought you were  
31 here to protect them. Why are you wasting a gun looking in this direction?' And he told

1 me that the previous week, the equivalent of the South Vietnamese CIA had gone into  
2 that village, that refugee village, and had taken out two or three hardcore Viet Cong  
3 soldiers who were members of the leadership, which the villagers were protecting in the  
4 refugee village. And the Marine looked at me and he said, 'When I saw...' and the  
5 villagers were actually fighting with the South Vietnamese CIA agents to keep them from  
6 taking these Viet Cong people, well this Marine saw that and he looked at me and he  
7 said, 'From that point on, it was me against the world.' And he said, 'I put a 50-caliber  
8 down on the village and I have one on all the other sides,' and he said, 'I'm just trying to  
9 survive.' So he didn't trust anybody. We made some communications with them, and  
10 then I realized the day was getting on and it was starting to get dark, so we started off the  
11 hill to get back to the armored personnel carriers, and to make up for time because it was  
12 getting dark, I went back the same way I came, which is a no-no. So again, I threw  
13 caution to the wind. As we were walking through the abandoned village, this time I was  
14 the second person from the front because I wanted to make sure that we didn't stall, that  
15 we moved quickly. As we were going through the village on this path, I noticed there  
16 was a bamboo pole going across the path that had not been there when we came through  
17 it earlier in the afternoon, and it looked pretty big. And I just froze and I told the point  
18 man in front of me, he was about twenty feet in front of me to stop. I didn't yell at him.  
19 And he stopped and he looked at me, and I said, 'Just come back to me like you're going  
20 to talk to me.'

21 RV: You told him this?

22 DT: Yeah. In a very calm voice. So whoever was watching us, I did not want  
23 them to think that I suspected there was a booby trap. He came back to me, and then I  
24 pulled him. I said, 'Let's go,' and we went back the way we had come. To this day, I  
25 think that was a mine, a command-detonated mine, explosives inside that bamboo pole  
26 because it had not been there prior. And possibly whoever was watching in wait was  
27 waiting for us to get enough soldiers on either side of that pole before he blew it. Well,  
28 we went around the village instead of going through it, and I did get back to the armored  
29 personnel carriers. In fact, they were starting their engines just as we came into view. He  
30 was getting ready to pull out. So we went back to LZ Minuteman, and I cussed myself

1 inside for making such a terrible mistake. I never told my men what my suspicions were.  
2 But I told myself I would never do that again, and I did not.

3 RV: Why didn't you tell them what you thought?

4 DT: I didn't want them to lose confidence in me making such a dumb mistake.

5 RV: Right. Do you think they realized what was happening? That you were  
6 making a mistake?

7 DT: I don't remember. I really don't remember.

8 RV: Dave, would you be interested in taking a break right now?

9 DT: Yeah. That's fine.