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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with David Taylor  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
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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 continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Dave Taylor. Today is April 15, 2005 and I am again in Lubbock and  
3 Dave, you're in Medina, Ohio. And let's pick up where we left off. You were talking  
4 about some operations and kind of movement in the field. I'd like to get your comments  
5 on just what your impressions were of the enemy. Kind of general impressions, and then  
6 some specifics such as strengths and weaknesses.

7 DT: The enemy we mostly faced in our area were Viet Cong, not NVA, and the  
8 intelligence, it was fairly certain they were part of the 48<sup>th</sup> Viet Cong Battalion. And I  
9 think they had been beaten back pretty bad by TET of '68, because we seldom saw them.  
10 When we did, they were just usually in small groups of maybe two or three. So I think  
11 they were beaten back pretty well. And what they did to make up for that was just to  
12 saturate the area with mines. But as I said, we seldom saw the enemy other than coming  
13 in contact with them through the placement of mines or booby traps.

14 RV: Ok. What did you tell your men about the enemy? How were you  
15 informed? Did you say, 'Here's kind of what we're going to be looking for,' or, 'We'll  
16 figure it out when we get there'?

17 DT: No, I think it was pretty much ingrained in my men before I even got there  
18 that the enemy was a wily foe, not often seen, and the key thing was not to get sloppy or  
19 lazy in the field where you may walk into an ambush and see them up close and personal.

1 But I don't think they had the strength to do much in the way of ambushes either, because  
2 they had just been pretty much decimated. So it was mainly to encounter them in groups  
3 of two or three and several times when we did see them, they would be fairly far away  
4 and the problem there was by the time you called in artillery fire, they were long gone.  
5 Or you would have to be very, very lucky to get the first round to land right where they  
6 were at. If it did not, usually by the time it took you to adjust artillery fire, they were  
7 long gone.

8 RV: Was that frustrating for you all?

9 DT: Very frustrating on the one hand. On the other hand, I think my men felt  
10 good that they didn't see the enemy. They had no contact. For me as a platoon leader, it  
11 was frustrating because I knew that eventually if we didn't start getting some of these  
12 guys, we were going to see them when we didn't want to see them.

13 RV: What did you think were your men's impressions of the enemy? Did you  
14 hear scuttlebutt, or could you observe closely what they thought of who was out there?  
15 Their foe?

16 DT: That's a good question and honestly, I don't recall the men ever talking  
17 much about the enemy other than having a grudging respect for them and that they were  
18 afraid if they got too sloppy or lazy, then they may get hit hard by the enemy. So they  
19 were constantly on alert. They did get lazy once in a while, but by and large they were  
20 constantly on the alert so they would not fall into an ambush or hit some mines or booby  
21 traps.

22 RV: Right. What kind of tactics...I mean, you said they would kind of hit and  
23 run, but were there any definite tactics you all could count on to face when you had  
24 contact?

25 DT: The only tactics really that were worrisome from the Viet Cong was sitting  
26 on a main fire base or sitting in a position for a long time, when they could get a fix on  
27 you. And there, the biggest problem was if you were assigned bunker duty on LZ Gator,  
28 because our battalion base camp was attacked several times when I was there, either by  
29 mortars or by sappers because it was a fixed target, it did not move, the Viet Cong knew  
30 everything on the base, and so that was a real danger, is being in a fixed area for so long

1 of a time, and for that reason I always preferred to be in the field because we could move  
2 around and the enemy could never get a fix on us.

3 RV: What would you say was the enemy's greatest weaknesses?

4 DT: Lack of firepower, lack of manpower. They could never really get too much  
5 together in terms of hitting us in any way, shape, or form. The best they could muster  
6 would be maybe to send ten or fifteen sappers through LZ Gator once in a while. And  
7 they did that very effectively, but as far as encountering any main force out in the woods,  
8 that didn't occur. They couldn't do it.

9 RV: Did you...you mentioned, this is post-TET, obviously. 1969. So you talked  
10 about how they were sparse in number versus before TET 1968. Are you in any kind of  
11 position today to kind of reflect upon what you've read and studied and learned and  
12 talked about with people the people who were there before you got there and the  
13 differences between what the Viet Cong were doing and then post TET what the Viet  
14 Cong were doing?

15 DT: Yes, I still had people in my platoon that were there finishing up their tours,  
16 and even in TET of '69, which occurred just before I got there, there was a little action.  
17 But by and large, I mean, the Viet Cong in TET '68 hit the Chu Lai area, they hit a bridge  
18 on Highway 1 just north of LZ Gator on the way up to Chu Lai. They hit the Binh Son,  
19 and that's B-I-N...or, B-I-H-N S-O-N. Provincial town south of us on Highway 1, and  
20 then even further south the provincial capital of Quang Ngai. They hit all of those  
21 simultaneously. And they paid a terrible price for that, not only from U.S. forces but also  
22 I was told the South Vietnamese acquitted themselves well down near the Quang Ngai  
23 area.

24 RV: Well, while you just touched on that, let me ask you about the South  
25 Vietnamese military forces. What was your general impression and how often did you  
26 work with them?

27 DT: I only operated with them once, and that was after we came out of the  
28 Rocket Valley, we ended up on the Batangan Peninsula on LZ Minuteman, which was  
29 northeast of Pinkville and the My Lai's and that area. And our mission was to protect the  
30 refugee camp there as well as patrol through the area because the enemy did have a  
31 strong base in the area known as Pinkville, which was a very heavily concentrated village

1 of a lot of people. And it was a bad area. So on LZ Minuteman was a Vietnamese  
2 company of soldiers that helped to man the perimeter with our company, Charlie  
3 Company. And I just, from the casual faces I got to know the company commander there  
4 and that kind of thing. But we never went on patrol together.

5 RV: Ok. Can you talk about what everybody else, what you heard what  
6 everybody else thought about ARVN and Vietnamese Marines, etc?

7 DT: Yes. The others that had worked with them and my general impression too,  
8 just seeing them on LZ Minuteman is, they realize that they were there for the long haul.  
9 They knew Americans would come for one year and then leave, and yet those soldiers  
10 were there for the duration, whatever that would be, and so they tended to be much more  
11 cautious, more laid-back, not too willing to get too aggressive unless they had to because  
12 again, I think they knew that their tour of duty was going to be a lot longer than ours.

13 RV: Ok. Dave, talk to me a little about some more of your basic day-to-day  
14 operations. You touched on some in our last session, but if you could describe one thing  
15 in particular, what was the difference...and you've also touched on this. What was the  
16 difference between daytime and nighttime in Vietnam? You hear a lot of things about  
17 that that may be myth or stereotype. What can you say about that?

18 DT: Well, daytime by and large was used for patrolling. We would stop at noon  
19 for our main meal, whether we used our C-rations or once in a while, a helicopter would  
20 come in and drop off some food for us to eat for our main meal, and then at night  
21 basically you opened a can of fruit or something like that. You didn't sit around for a  
22 main meal. At night, we always went into an ambush, either together as a platoon or I  
23 would split the platoon up in half and make two ambushes. And that was constant.  
24 Patrol during the day, get your main meal at noon, at night pretend like you're going to  
25 put in a position and then at dark you move out into your ambush positions. You did not  
26 want them to watch you where you were putting in at night and fixing you at that  
27 location. That's why we always moved after dark. Not too far, but someplace else just to  
28 throw off the enemy in case they wanted to hit us. The difference was between that kind  
29 of maneuver was when we went out on the Batangan Peninsula. And there, the patrolling  
30 was less aggressive because of so many mines and booby traps on that peninsula. And I  
31 think I mentioned before, the South Korean Marine Dragon Brigade had been there

1 before our battalion had got there, and they had left a lot of mines in place around their  
2 firebases, so the Viet Cong used this very effectively, particularly on the Batangan  
3 Peninsula. So we had to be very, very cautious during daytime patrols. And night  
4 ambushes. We didn't move around as much as let's say, west of Highway 1 out close to  
5 the mountains.

6 RV: Was there any truth to enemy ruling the night?

7 DT: I think they did in many respects because of the lack of aggressive patrolling  
8 in the evening as well as the fact that that was their land. They knew the trails better than  
9 us and yeah, they used the nighttime to move back and forth. In fact, just north of LZ  
10 Gator was a village almost set in the shadow of the hill we were on and it was a pro-  
11 Communist village, and the intelligence reports constantly said that the Viet Cong would  
12 more out of the mountains in the west, go through that village at night just on the north  
13 side of LZ Gator and cross Highway 1 out to the Batangan Peninsula, which led out to the  
14 South China Sea and supposedly, they had a small rest and recuperation camp out there.  
15 And they would pass by there constantly, and as much as we tried to put ambushes out in  
16 the area around there, it was very difficult to catch them.

17 RV: Ok. Dave, could you comment a little bit on the relationships there within  
18 your unit? Particularly those who were career military, the ones who were in it for life,  
19 the lifers versus those drafted or enlisted on their own. What was that kind of  
20 relationship like? Did you sense any tension or was there good cooperation?

21 DT: I did not sense any tension. At that point in time, I was planning to be a lifer  
22 on active duty. I did not wear that on my sleeve, but I did not sense any tension and in  
23 fact, the only real lifer that we had in my platoon was my platoon sergeant. He had come  
24 out of being a drill sergeant basic training for a number of years. He was a staff sergeant  
25 and this was his first tour in Vietnam, but even as a lifer he was very cautious. It was an  
26 interesting relationship I had with him because even though he had been in the Army  
27 longer, I was better trained and he made a point of telling me once at night when we were  
28 setting up night ambushes and I was calling in defensive artillery fires, dry firing as we  
29 say. He said, 'You know, I don't know how to do this. You need to be teaching me this.'  
30 So I taught him how to do that and I taught him everything I knew from Ranger School  
31 and so, no to answer your question, I don't think there was any tension at all that I could

1 see in my company. Most of the people were not career soldiers. The first sergeant was,  
2 the company commander at that point in time had been. It was his second tour of duty.  
3 But there was no tension that I could see.

4 RV: Ok. Did you ever hear about any incidents of fragging or hear rumors of  
5 this?

6 DT: Not when I was there, I heard from other people that were in the battalion  
7 after I left that there may have been an incident that occurred. I think the bigger problem  
8 with us were the race, the blacks' thing with racism and that kind of thing. The black  
9 power movement, I should say, and that was mostly for black soldiers who were in rear  
10 supply units, that kind of thing at LZ Gator that did not go to the field. They had a  
11 tendency to congregate together and develop a kind of an anti-military, anti-U.S.  
12 government feeling, and so the battalion leadership had to watch that.

13 RV: Can you talk about that racism? I mean, what did you see, witness, and  
14 hear?

15 DT: All I saw when we were back at LZ Gator was just that some blacks, not all,  
16 would congregate in their bunkers inside Gator and would play a lot of black music,  
17 whatever that could be. We didn't have rap back then, but it was something similar to  
18 that. And basically when they were doing that they were probably smoking some  
19 marijuana as well, that you know, you basically stayed away from the bunker. That was  
20 kind of off-limits.

21 RV: Was that something stated, or everybody just kind of knew it?

22 DT: It was kind of everyone knew it. And the battalion leadership understood  
23 that they couldn't let that set, and so they tried to break that up. In fact, the most  
24 effective battalion commander we had was the second one we had, who was a black  
25 battalion commander, and he made a lot of efforts to make sure that that did not get out of  
26 hand, even to the point where we had some military police come down from the brigade  
27 and stay at LZ Gator to do some periodic checks for marijuana and that kind of thing.

28 RV: Talk to me about the drug use. What did you see?

29 DT: All I ever saw...or smelled, actually. I never saw it, but I could smell  
30 marijuana from time to time back at Gator. Never in the field. And when my company  
31 manned the bunker line, there were certain soldiers, not all, who I suspect that were

1 smoking marijuana in their bunkers. I would walk along the bunker line checking, and  
2 they would hide it and put it out, but you could smell that it had been there. And I think  
3 it was more recreational than anything for them. Kind of to relieve the tension I guess  
4 they felt. But it was not used a lot. It was used by a few, is the best way I could  
5 characterize it. And I would also say that even with the black thing, I had a number of  
6 black soldiers in my platoon, and when they would come back from the field, some of  
7 them would be invited to come down to these bunkers where these blacks who were  
8 always on Gator would be, and most of my men would not do that. They wanted to stay  
9 with the rest of their buddies, white guys who they depended on in the field, and they  
10 kind of stayed away from that. As I said, most of that kind of activity where it did exist  
11 existed with people who did not go to the field.

12 RV: Why was it not tolerated out in the field?

13 DT: First of all, if you smoke marijuana, your position could be given away.  
14 Because that smell pervaded pretty far, even to the extent that when we went out on  
15 ambush, I would not even allow my men to put on mosquito repellant because of the  
16 smell. And that cost us dearly in getting bitten a lot, but...so you were very, very  
17 attentive to that, and I daresay if someone would have tried smoking weed in the field,  
18 they probably would have gotten their shit kicked or something else. That would not be  
19 tolerated, because there you're putting someone's life at risk.

20 RV: Tell me about the smells, Dave. I've heard this before that you could smell  
21 the enemy or they could smell you. Is this true?

22 DT: I suppose, if you had a concentration of those. I know when we would be  
23 working in with Vietnamese in the hamlets; they had a certain smell to them. But the  
24 biggest smell that I recall is the smell of burning wood, and it was like wet burning wood,  
25 so it gave off kind of a rotten odor. And that was a constant smell we had. And the other  
26 one was the smell of incense when you're in the hamlets. And that smell, particularly the  
27 smell of burning wood, rotting wood just pervaded the whole area.

28 RV: Ok. I'm curious about a couple of things. What about tension between you  
29 all who were line soldiers, back out in the field, back to the base versus those who were  
30 stationed permanently in the rear. How about any tension or...what was that like?

1 DT: My sense is that I did not see most...there were a few, but most of the men  
2 who went to the field did not congregate with those who were permanently on LZ Gator  
3 in our rear. They stayed with their own kind, and it was almost like two different  
4 societies, and they did not...there were a few, but that would get together with friends  
5 they had in the rear. But for the most part, they would just congregate with themselves in  
6 the company area. Or they would visit with people who had rear jobs who had been in  
7 the field and were soon getting ready to rotate to the States or maybe had been wounded  
8 and could not do field duty and were given jobs in the rear. They would certainly  
9 congregate with those folks because they were their buddies.

10 RV: Ok. How about friendly fire incidents? Did you experience any of those?

11 DT: Yes. Well, the first friendly fire incident was what I related earlier when the  
12 artillery dropped in front of us when we were in the Rocket Pocket. That was the only  
13 friendly fire incident that occurred to me. I know there were others that occurred in the  
14 battalion, and the most usual friendly fire incident was when artillery was called in, if the  
15 platoon leader or company commander did not know their location, they might have  
16 called artillery fire close to their position. That was not a problem with me, I was  
17 fortunate, I knew how to read maps and I never had a problem with getting lost. The  
18 other friendly fire would be helicopter gunships coming in to support and I heard a  
19 couple incidents of that, where the position was not properly marked by smoke, and the  
20 gunships got a little confused and may have fired on it. And there was one other friendly  
21 fire incident that is worth telling. And this just comes in my mind, which I think is rather  
22 interesting. We had gone back to the Rocket Valley, my platoon, for several days to look  
23 for Viet Cong that were firing rockets in the Chu Lai. And after a couple days, I was told  
24 that I would be replaced by a platoon of armored personnel carriers. This was H Troop,  
25 17<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. And I thought to myself, 'What a dumb idea,' putting armored personnel  
26 carriers in that valley really restricted their movement. There were only certain areas  
27 they could go, and this was just going to make it too easy for the Viet Cong to set up  
28 mines for these tracks. In any event, they came about midday into the area. We got on  
29 the tracks and we moved around. I showed them where I wanted to go, and that night,  
30 which would have been the first and only night we would be together; the next morning  
31 my platoon would be picked up and they would be on their own. They went into their



1 wagon wheel, circular position and we, my platoon was inside the wagon wheel laying on  
2 air mattresses for the evening, and they usually slept inside their tracks. That night, I  
3 looked south of my position and I could see Puff the Magic Dragon, the AC-130 gunships  
4 firing up the area. And they would drop flares and they would fire into areas that there  
5 were no friendlies, and I was just amazed at the show. I could see these miniguns coming  
6 out of the plane and thinking, 'My god, whoever's below the ground is not going to be  
7 around.' It was an awesome sight and I was enjoying the show, and then it moved a little  
8 further north towards our position, dropped some flares, fired up again, and I thought,  
9 'Well, I hope they're not going to come any further north, because I called in my  
10 position. Otherwise, they're going to get too close.' And then they came further north  
11 again, dropped flares, and were firing just south of my position. And I rolled off my air  
12 mattress and grabbed a flare and shot it in the air, because if he would have come any  
13 closer, we would have all been annihilated. And as I rolled off the air mattress, one of  
14 the...our position was at the tail end of the spray of the miniguns from the aircraft, and  
15 one of the rounds came right across and hit my air mattress.

16 RV: Geez.

17 DT: Fortunately, and I remember when I popped the flare, I thought, 'If this pilot  
18 thinks that this is a Viet Cong shooting a flare, we're toast.' But I shot the flare and he  
19 pulled away. He did not fire anymore. It just so happened that one of the rounds that we  
20 did catch across our perimeter went in the top of one of the armored personnel carriers  
21 and ricocheted around inside the carrier, hitting one of the men that was inside. And so  
22 we did have one casualty, and I called in a medevac. My first one in Vietnam, and it was  
23 at night, and I went out there with strobe lights and we brought the medevac in and took  
24 the casualty out. So that was a friendly fire incident. The next day, we had moved...my  
25 platoon had moved to another area for a pickup point while the tracks were going around  
26 in the valley, and the brigade called me and said, 'We're sending in an investigation team  
27 on that friendly fire incident, and we want you to take the team back to the night position  
28 where you were.' And so we popped smoke and in came a helicopter with two  
29 lieutenants from the brigade, and I got four of my men get on the helicopter with me for  
30 security and we went back to the spot where we were the previous night. And these  
31 lieutenants had never been to the field; I don't think they could read a map. So I showed

1    them where we were on the map and we triangulated to hilltops and that kind of thing to  
2    make sure they agreed, and they said yes. And then I showed them the coordinates, and  
3    they were exactly the coordinates that I had called in prior to us putting in for the night,  
4    and so I was cleared. The supposition was that I called in the wrong coordinates, and  
5    that's why I got hit. So somebody did not pass those coordinates up the chain of  
6    command to where it got to the aircraft crew.

7           RV: Right.

8           DT: Several days later, my company went for a stand down in Chu Lai on the  
9    beach, and the brigade commander always wanted to come in and just sit with the troops  
10   for a little bit, and so my company commander and the platoon leaders were sitting with  
11   the brigade commander, just having a talk about operations. And the brigade commander  
12   said, 'Oh by the way, is this the company that got hit by that AC-130 gunship?' And my  
13   company commander said, 'Yes, that was Lieutenant Taylor's platoon.' And he looked  
14   at me and he said, 'Oh. Well, I'm sorry about that incident. Fortunes of war.' And I  
15   thought to myself, 'Yes, you bastard.' Had I called in the wrong coordinates, it would  
16   have been end of career for me. But since the chain of command screwed up and did not  
17   get the coordinates to the pilot, now it becomes a fortune of war issue. So that rubbed me  
18   wrong.

19          RV: Yeah. I can imagine. Are you over that today?

20          DT: Oh yes. It was not a big deal. It really wasn't a big deal; I just, I laugh more  
21   at it than anything because the two lieutenants didn't even know what they were looking  
22   at. I had to tell them. And then I looked at the lieutenants when they agreed I had called  
23   in the right position, and I said, 'Listen to me. Airborne Rangers don't get lost.'

24          RV: (Laughing). Dave, this brings up a good point about communication in the  
25   field and within your unit and then back to your headquarters. What was communication  
26   like in Vietnam? How would you describe it?

27          DT: Our communication was excellent. I usually would call the tactical  
28   operations center if I needed to get fire support or gunship support and the company –  
29   and this was when I had my platoon by ourselves in the field. The company would  
30   always monitor the frequency so they were kept informed. So support was very quick,  
31   particularly artillery support. Gunship support took a little longer, unless the aircraft

1 happened to be in the area. But by and large, I thought the communications were very  
2 good.

3 RV: Ok. What about intelligence? How would you rate the intelligence in the  
4 war for you? For your experience?

5 DT: For me as a platoon leader, I thought the intelligence was pretty good. They  
6 would give us as much as they could find out on a daily basis if new information came to  
7 the battalion intelligence officer and it was concerning an area that I was operating in,  
8 that they would call us and let us know. So they passed on the intelligence as well as  
9 anything. That was not the case later on, on June the 3<sup>rd</sup> when I got shot up, which we'll  
10 cover later. But that was the only time that I think intelligence failed us.

11 RV: Ok. Did you ever work with any K-9 units?

12 DT: No. Our battalion did. Other platoons did. I did not have the opportunity to  
13 have them with me. I never requested them. My understanding from other platoons that  
14 used them that they were ok. They were not great and they were not poor. They had  
15 some value, but the dogs would play out pretty quickly in the heat, and so they couldn't  
16 stay out there too long.

17 RV: Did you ever work with troops from Australia, New Zealand, the ROK  
18 troops?

19 DT: No.

20 RV: How about snipers? Did you operate with snipers from time to time?

21 DT: We had snipers, trained snipers in our platoon. The Americal Division had a  
22 sniper training program, and those who had shot expert in their advanced individual  
23 training or basic training may be pulled out to get sniper training. I believe I had one  
24 who had been trained before I got there, but we did not have the rifle and never really had  
25 an opportunity to utilize him. I did have a squad leader, a sergeant E-5. Sergeant Arias,  
26 A-R-I-A-S, a Mexican-American who carried an M-14 with a scope, and he was pretty  
27 good with that. It was not a sniper rifle, but he had longer range than our M-16s and if  
28 we saw someone out far out, a VC who had stopped to smoke or do something, I would  
29 always call Sergeant Arias to try to pick him off.

30 RV: How successful was he?

1 DT: He hit one once and maybe twice, but as usual, they would crawl away by  
2 the time we would get over to them, and they would be gone. We couldn't find them.

3 RV: How adept was the enemy at removing casualties from the battlefield? Or  
4 from the jungle, from the bush? Not necessarily the battlefield.

5 DT: Yeah, I thought they were very good. I don't know whether...certainly their  
6 chances of survival would have been better had they allowed us to capture them and then  
7 be treated, rather than crawl away in the jungle. So I don't know if they were just afraid  
8 of being tortured by the South Vietnamese Army or whatever, but if they could...my  
9 experience was, if they could move at all, even though they were badly wounded, they  
10 would not allow themselves to be captured.

11 RV: How would you treat captured enemy?

12 DT: We would take them in to get them fixed up, bandaged up, and then use  
13 them for intelligence. We had in our company, as all companies did, Kit Carson Scouts,  
14 former Viet Cong, and we had some South Vietnamese who spoke reasonable English.  
15 And so we always had those folks available. In my platoon, I did not have one, but if I  
16 needed one to question someone in Vietnamese, I would just call the company  
17 headquarters and they would have their Kit Carson Scout get on the radio and question  
18 the individual over the radio.

19 RV: Ok. Tell me about working with the Kit Carson Scouts.

20 DT: My impression is they were pretty good. Again, we did not have any with  
21 my platoon. We did have a boy whose parents were killed by the Viet Cong. We  
22 nicknamed him Sammy, and I would suspect he was probably about twelve or thirteen,  
23 and he went to the field with us sometimes, and he learned English very quick. It was  
24 broken English, kind of like American-Indian English. 'I go, you come' kind of talk.  
25 But even he proved useful in interrogating suspects, and he would tell us in broken  
26 English what they were saying. We did not take him to the field very often. We realized  
27 that this was not a good thing to be doing, even though he wanted to go to the field badly.

28 RV: Why do you say that it wasn't a good thing?

29 DT: It was just, to have a child like that in the field with all the danger just didn't  
30 make sense. It was not the moral thing to do. He wanted badly to go to the field with us.

1 We were his family. This is all he knew, but we tried to keep him in the rear as much as  
2 possible.

3 RV: Your unit was his family?

4 DT: Yes. We kind of adopted him as, every once in a while he would go down in  
5 the village by Highway 1 where our road led to from the base and would you know, get  
6 food and see some relatives. But my understanding was, his mother and father had been  
7 killed. I often wondered about Sammy, what happened to him after the war, and a soldier  
8 had told me who was in our company after I left, that some time in 1970, one of our  
9 soldiers grew close with Sammy and was able to adopt him and take him home with him  
10 to the United States.

11 RV: Really?

12 DT: Yeah.

13 RV: Wow. So you don't know where this young man is?

14 DT: No I do not. But I'm happy that he did, because if the Viet Cong would  
15 have ever gotten to him, they would have killed him.

16 RV: Could you trust Sammy and the Kit Carson Scouts?

17 DT: I trusted them. I did not fully trust the Popular Force or our Regional Force,  
18 the PFs, RFs that were in some of the villages nearby. Just north of us, of LZ Gator, were  
19 two subhamlets called Tri Binh I and III. The I just north of LZ Gator, in the shadow of  
20 Gator, had Communist leanings. The one further north of that was ninety-five percent  
21 pro-government, and I spent a weekend there with my platoon as a show of force,  
22 because the Viet Cong were supposed...had said they would attack it. And there were  
23 some PF soldiers in there, and whenever I would be going over things with my men with  
24 the map, sometimes they would come over and look, and I would just kind of fold the  
25 map up. I did not trust them.

26 RV: Was that common, do you think? Or was that unique to your experience?

27 DT: I guess I can't say. I don't know.

28 RV: What about the Ruff-Puffs? Can you talk a little bit about them? What you  
29 witnessed?

1 DT: They were not...I mean, one had a Thompson submachine gun from World  
2 War II. They were lightly armed. Other than maybe being policemen in their village, I  
3 don't see where they were very effective.

4 RV: Can you talk a little bit about the medevac? The dust-off pilots, helicopters,  
5 missions. What can you say about what you witnessed and the faith you had in them?

6 DT: In most cases, our dust-off or medevac was actually just a resupply  
7 helicopter or the battalion commander's helicopter, his command and control helicopter  
8 that did all of the medevacs. A standard medevac helicopter I did not see very often. It  
9 was usually someone on a resupply mission that heard that someone was injured, and  
10 they would immediately go and pick up the injured person and get them back. So in a  
11 sense, every helicopter in Vietnam became a medevac.

12 RV: Ok. Dave personally, did your spirituality fluctuate, change during your war  
13 experience?

14 DT: No. I was raised as a Lutheran. We went to church every Sunday. I had a  
15 strong background in religious upbringing. But in Vietnam, it really...I guess I kind of  
16 lost it. I think where it helped was the Christian-Judeo ethic of morality helped me in  
17 terms of avoiding any possible war crime. And the opportunity for that was always  
18 present. And that's what religion did for me. It gave me a strong sense of right and  
19 wrong that I could make good decisions. I did not participate in religious services or pray  
20 on a daily basis or read the bible or anything like that at that point in time. That took  
21 place later on after I got back from Vietnam. Then I had a religious conversion of sorts.  
22 So.

23 RV: When you say atrocities and had the opportunity to commit them, what do  
24 you mean by that?

25 DT: Well, I remember one time, we were south of LZ Gator, operating as a  
26 platoon in one of these so-called free fire zones. And I think free fire zones are  
27 misunderstood by many people in America. These free fire zones were set up by the  
28 South Vietnamese government that said, 'Look, all the villagers in an area have been  
29 removed to refugee camps, so there are no friendly villagers. If you see anyone that fires  
30 at you, then you can fire back without calling for permission.' And some people may  
31 think this is crazy, but that in fact is what it was. It was just a method to help clear

1 calling for fires, artillery support, or allowing you to fire yourself. It was just a means  
2 that gives you some confidence that there are no friendly forces in the area. Now having  
3 said that, in war, there are screw-ups like anything else in life. We were walking through  
4 an area that was a free fire zone, and up ahead of us my point man said there was a  
5 village, a hamlet with people, women, children, and so forth. And I said, 'Well, we're  
6 not going to go near it. We're going to go around it, and if we get fired on from inside  
7 that hamlet, I did not want to be calling in artillery or gunships, knowing there were  
8 women and children there. So we just avoided it.

9 RV: So you just could walk around it, basically?

10 DT: We walked around it, and that was a screw-up in coordination, because there  
11 was a village there. That area never should have been called a free fire zone.

12 RV: Why do you think it was?

13 DT: Oh, I think it was just probably a lack of coordination. But when you get  
14 that, and you get that in war. In all wars. That's why it's incumbent on the junior  
15 leadership to use their brains and make good judgment.

16 RV: Right. Dave, do you want to talk a little bit about My Lai? Your  
17 impressions?

18 DT: I never operated in My Lai. Our company did not go down there. We were  
19 north of that on LZ Minuteman. Usually, Alpha Company would go into My Lai because  
20 they were used to it and the battalion commander wanted to...rather than send in a unit  
21 that had not been in that area, he kept sending in A Company. They had a strong  
22 company commander and they knew the area well, so it was better that they go in,  
23 unfortunately for them. It was a very tough area, and as a matter of fact, and the time I  
24 was in Vietnam the first half in 1969, one of the soldiers in Alpha Company that would  
25 go to My Lai was Tim O'Brien, the famous author. So he was with us.

26 RV: He was actually...

27 DT: He was in Alpha Company during the time I was there with the battalion,  
28 and he writes of his experiences in that area in the book, *When I Die in a Combat Zone*.

29 RV: Yes. How closely did you know him?

1 DT: I did not know him at all. Since then in writing my book about the  
2 Batangan's history in the war, I have talked to people that knew him from Alpha  
3 Company.

4 RV: Ok. What have they said?

5 DT: They said he was highly intelligent, somewhat reserved, a deep thinker. He  
6 was the company commander's radio operator and kind of kept to himself a lot, but was  
7 not a recluse. But I guess the general feeling was he was just kind of a deep-thinking  
8 kind of a guy. But he had a lot of talent, and that's why they used him as the company  
9 commander's radio operator.

10 RV: Why do you think he's written so much about his experiences? I mean,  
11 obviously he has success and it's his income, his trade. But he's quite prolific and his  
12 stuff is read quite widely by different age groups in the United States. Why do you think  
13 he's writing so much, and why the success?

14 DT: I would suspect it's a catharsis for him, first and foremost. And his love of  
15 writing, and it's something that he...it formed a basis so early in his life that he kind of  
16 gravitates towards the Vietnam experience whether it be fiction or nonfiction, and he's  
17 written both. He takes it out of the Vietnam experience and the experience of the '60s.

18 RV: Yes. Dave, some general questions about life in the field and life in  
19 Vietnam. How much contact did you have with home and the United States and your  
20 family?

21 DT: As I recall, I may get a letter every two or three weeks, and then I would  
22 send a very short letter. Sometimes I would get some foodstuffs and that kind of thing.  
23 My letters were always very short. I would try to write the letter before nine in the  
24 morning because it got so hot, the sweat would actually drip onto the ink and smear up  
25 the ink, it was so hot. So I'd try to write my letters early in the morning. And there  
26 wasn't much I could say, other than, 'It's hot, I'm ok, I'm well,' and you know, talk  
27 about the weather.

28 RV: Right.

29 DT: And you know, that was it.

30 RV: Did you try to protect those you loved back in the United States by kind of  
31 not telling them the dangers you were in?



1 DT: Yes, I did. And particularly my mother and father, because they had already  
2 had three other sons...or, two sons go over to Vietnam. My brothers of course knew that  
3 as an infantry officer, I was probably seeing a lot more than I was mentioning in my  
4 letters, but they did not say anything to the parents.

5 RV: Have you...or did you since after you got back, talk to your parents about  
6 what you did?

7 DT: Yes, my mother's first words when she met me at Ft. Dix hospital, when I  
8 was shot up and medevaced to Ft. Dix, she said, 'I never knew you were exposed to this.  
9 I always thought you were in the rear because your letters never mentioned anything.'  
10 And I said, 'Well Mom, what did you expect? I wasn't going to tell you that we got hit  
11 by mortars at night or anything like that.'

12 RV: Right. Right. Ok. Did you ever make any MARS phone calls?

13 DT: I did not. A couple of my men, I think when they had a chance to go to Chu  
14 Lai, they would make those calls in Chu Lai.

15 RV: Ok. What about news from the United States? How did you keep up with  
16 what was going on back in the 'world'?

17 DT: Good question. I think we used to get a mimeographed newssheets from the  
18 battalion headquarters from time to time on just some snippets of what was happening in  
19 the world, with sports scores, that kind of thing. Other than that, as I recall it basically  
20 came from the men receiving magazines from home. *Time*, *Newsweek*, that kind of thing.  
21 It wasn't something that really we paid much attention to. I basically had divorced  
22 myself from the rest of the world, and I think a lot of my men did. What was important  
23 to them was what was happening at home with their families, not what was happening on  
24 the national scene. It was just what was happening at home with their families and then  
25 what's happening to them in Vietnam. The days just ran so close together, I never knew  
26 whether it was Monday or Sunday or Saturday or anything. We just never knew. It  
27 wasn't important to us. Every day was the same.

28 RV: That's a very interesting comment. What are the dangers of losing touch  
29 with that kind of reality that you'd been used to all your life? Or were there dangers? Or  
30 was that necessary to do over there, kind of divorce yourself from that?

1 DT: I don't know, it just...to me, it did not seem important what day it was. It  
2 was just another day to go out in the field. I may have known the date. Let's say the 4<sup>th</sup>  
3 of April. But I didn't know if the 4<sup>th</sup> of April was a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, nor  
4 did it matter. It was just the dates. Here's today's date, and by such and such a date,  
5 you're going to be doing this and this.

6 RV: Did you keep up with when you would be going home?

7 DT: No. I was in the early months there, that was the furthest from my mind. I  
8 think after three months, I was already thinking in my own mind that I would probably  
9 extend my tour. After my time in the field, I did not want to get stuck with sitting in the  
10 rear at LZ Gator. I was planning to volunteer to get advisory school training in country,  
11 and I was going to ask to be a Vietnamese advisor for six months.

12 RV: Why?

13 DT: It was just that the war was kind of an exciting thing, and I wanted to  
14 witness all aspects of it, and I thought an advisory tour would give me another side of the  
15 drama that was playing out. So my plan was, if I could stay healthy six months as a  
16 platoon leader when I was told to come out of the field, I would try to go to advisor  
17 school and be an advisor with the Vietnamese, and then maybe after that if I still wanted  
18 to stick around, then I would volunteer to be a company commander.

19 RV: Dave, was disease a problem within your unit?

20 DT: Yes, in a sense of infections and heat. We had a big problem with heat  
21 illness, heat casualties. I remember one time in the Rocket Valley, one of my men really  
22 came down with a lot of heat problems. We took all his clothes off. Fortunately, there  
23 was a stream nearby and we were able to put him in the stream to bring his body  
24 temperature down. I don't know what we would have done had we not had that stream  
25 there. But he had suffered from heat, and so we put him in the stream and cooled him  
26 down, waited a couple hours to let him cool down, and then as I recall we got his clothes  
27 back on and we moved out. So heat was the biggest problem. Infections every once in a  
28 while might be an issue that would take a man out of the field. And then the other thing  
29 we had to guard against was malaria.

30 RV: What was that like? It was a constant threat? I know you were taking  
31 malaria pills, but what about...how else were you dealing with this?

1 DT: That was basically it. The key was taking your pills on time, and truthfully I  
2 don't think I had been taking my pills on time, and that's probably one of the reasons I  
3 got malaria. When we were in the Rocket Valley on ambushes one night, it was one of  
4 our last nights there. We were in an ambush and again, no one put repellent on because  
5 we didn't want that smell pervading in the air, and the mosquitoes just ate us alive.  
6 Several days later, I think about the time of incubation, we were out on the Batangan  
7 Peninsula and I came down with malaria. So I think it was a combination of not having  
8 mosquito repellent and maybe not taking my malaria pills faithfully that caused me to get  
9 malaria.

10 RV: Tell me about your experience with malaria.

11 DT: Well, we were on LZ Minuteman, and it was at this point in time that I  
12 alluded to earlier, that the word had gone out to the Army in Vietnam that General  
13 Abrams wanted night patrolling. He wanted more night patrolling. He wanted to own  
14 the night, and I was the only Ranger-qualified platoon leader in our company at that time,  
15 and so the company commander asked me to start night patrols. And I had...and the  
16 Batangan Peninsula was bad enough to patrol during the day with all the mines, let alone  
17 at night. But I went down to the mortar platoon that used to be mine, and made  
18 prearrangements with where I was going and call in mortar fires at certain positions, and I  
19 codenamed those Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and so forth. And so our  
20 mortars were registered very well. So I was prepared to go. We were not going to do a  
21 lot of walking, but we'd move short distances from one position to another throughout  
22 the night. And my men were ready. They were not comfortable with doing this at night,  
23 but they were ready to go out, and it was at that night that I came down with malaria, and  
24 I was running a hundred and four degree temperature, which was getting too high, so they  
25 called in a medevac to take me to Chu Lai, and I remember my medic coming to me  
26 saying, 'The men are sorry that you're coming down with malaria. We don't want to see  
27 you leave, but on the other hand, we're not going to have to go out on patrol tonight.'  
28 And so that's what happened. I was lifted off to Chu Lai for several days. They put me  
29 in an ice bath and some other things and got my temperature pretty much back to normal.  
30 While I was there in Chu Lai, and I think this was maybe two days after after I got there,  
31 my platoon leader – my platoon sergeant, who had been a former drill sergeant, had the

1 platoon, and in combination with another platoon, they went out with a captured Viet  
2 Cong who was going to show them a hidden cache. So they had this Viet Cong and they  
3 were going up a hill on a trail, but they thought it would be ok because the Viet Cong was  
4 walking the trail in front of them so they wouldn't trip any booby traps, and as they were  
5 going up the trail, the Viet Cong were waiting for them. And there were no booby traps,  
6 but they were command-detonated mines. And so, the mines exploded. I believe there  
7 were two that exploded and the Viet Cong were so sinister, the booby traps were put off  
8 the side of the trail, realizing that as soon as a bomb went off on the trail, the men would  
9 instinctively jump to the side of the trail for cover. And that's when they hit all the  
10 booby traps. My platoon sergeant stepped off the side of the trail and actually hit another  
11 command-detonated mine, which took off both of his legs above the knees. And my  
12 medic took care of him, and then there was another...that explosion created kind of a  
13 little crater, and so my medic went down into the crater to get someone else that had been  
14 wounded. So here I am in the hospital, and one of the orderlies came in and said, 'Hey,  
15 Lieutenant Taylor, what...did you say you were with the 5<sup>th</sup> of the 46<sup>th</sup>?' And I said,  
16 'Yes.' And he said, 'We're just bringing in a bunch of men that were hit with...heavily  
17 hit by mines.' And I said, 'Well, what company?' And he said, 'Charlie Company.'  
18 And I said, 'Well, what platoon?' And he said, 'Well, I don't know the platoon.' And I  
19 said, 'Well, give me some names.' And then he started naming off my platoon sergeant,  
20 two of my squad leaders. One had lost a leg; one had lost a forearm. And I believe there  
21 were two or three that were dead. So I got out of my bed and I got in a wheelchair. We  
22 weren't allowed to walk on our own at that point, and wheeled myself down to the  
23 emergency recovery room and went inside. My men had already come out of surgery,  
24 and so there they were, laying in cots side-by-side. And behind a curtain were the two or  
25 three men that were dead. And they asked if I'd identify them, and I did. And I just  
26 spoke briefly to the men, and I was struck by how positive they were. And I think that's  
27 because they were just happy to be alive, and the thought process of how this is going to  
28 change their lives just didn't enter into it yet. There was no way they could process that  
29 far. So they were just happy at that point to be alive, and they were upbeat and cheerful,  
30 and I was very surprised at that.

1           RV: What was that like for you, emotionally and psychologically to be there in  
2 the hospital while they underwent this and then to actually see them right there inside the  
3 hospital?

4           DT: I was very angry, because I thought maybe had I not gotten malaria, I could  
5 have been in the field and we would not have done what they did. Maybe we would have  
6 done something different and we wouldn't have fallen into that trap. So I was very angry  
7 that I was in the hospital and I let my men get into that situation. I do remember also on  
8 my way back and forth to this recovery room, we passed by the Vietnamese ward, and  
9 inside the Vietnamese ward were not only Vietnamese civilians that were being taken  
10 care of, but they were also prisoners of war. And they had a Viet Cong...not a Viet  
11 Cong, they had a military policeman at the entrance to the ward. I asked an orderly,  
12 because I felt very strong that we should not be giving the prisoners that kind of care.  
13 And I asked the orderly why they had the MP there, and he said, 'You know the reason as  
14 well as I do.' He said, 'We have too many wounded soldiers passing back and forth, and  
15 we had to make sure they wouldn't go in and do something to these men.' So they were  
16 protected under the rules of war with the military policemen. And I talked to one of the  
17 nurses later who happened to work in that ward, and she had told me it was probably the  
18 toughest assignment that they had in the hospital, not only with the enemy prisoners,  
19 taking care of them, but also the Vietnamese civilians, that they simply had never seen  
20 things like sinks or toilets before, and the one gal they had in there had just given birth to  
21 a baby premature, and when it came time for her to urinate, she would actually climb up  
22 on the sink and urinate in the sink because she had never seen plumbing before. And so  
23 it took a special kind of person to work that ward, for both reasons. For the cultural  
24 reasons and also the fact that they had prisoners of war there. And at that very time that I  
25 was there in that hospital, one of the nurses working in that ward was Lieutenant Sharon  
26 Lane, who was killed in June, just a couple months later, when a 122-millimeter rocket  
27 was fired from Rocket Valley, where we had patrolled, into Chu Lai and hit the hospital.  
28 And she was to be the only female soldier in the war killed by hostile fire.

29           RV: Do you remember her?

1 DT: No, I never met her. She lives nearby – lived nearby in Canton, Ohio. I’ve  
2 met her mother since then. But...she caught a tiny fragment in the throat, I think.  
3 Carotid artery and died from that fragment.

4 RV: How did you feel, Dave, about those prisoners being in there? Did you have  
5 any thoughts about, ‘If that MP wasn’t there, I’d like to get in there and have some words  
6 with them,’ or coming back from seeing your men?

7 DT: I don’t...I felt bitter. I’m not sure what I would have done. I don’t think I  
8 had it in me to just kill them. Probably I wanted to beat on them, but not shoot them or  
9 anything like that. It was just, I just felt bitter. And bitter that I was in the hospital  
10 probably more than bitter at the enemy that were using the hospital. I do remember  
11 another time when I was there with malaria, we got some rocket fire at the Chu Lai base  
12 and they came close to the hospital. I had no weapon and there was a master sergeant in  
13 the bed next to me, and so we both went underneath the bed, and this nurse came into the  
14 ward and I was screaming at her, ‘Get me an M-16.’ Because I looked at the other end of  
15 the ward, which had a door that went out into the open, and I could just picture some Viet  
16 Cong sappers coming through that door. Now we were probably the furthest in the base  
17 as anybody could be, but still. I felt naked without a weapon. And she said, ‘Don’t  
18 worry, we’ll protect you.’ And she had a helmet on that was over half of her eyes; she  
19 could hardly see. And she had an M-16, and I don’t think she knew even how to use it.  
20 And I just felt so frustrated, and the master sergeant under the bed next to me said, ‘Don’t  
21 worry LT, you’ll be all right.’ I was just, it was a situation I was not used to being in. I’d  
22 rather be in the field where I had rifles and grenades and machine guns, and here I had  
23 nothing.

24 RV: Right. You’re in your hospital gown under the bed.

25 DT: Yeah, right. Precisely. Precisely.

26 RV: Dave, have you dealt with that incident, your men being wounded and all  
27 that since the war? Or was that something you never really had to overcome?

28 DT: I never...it was something that I could manage and I never had any  
29 depression over it or anything like that. More sadness at times. But no, I never had any  
30 lasting effects from that.

31 RV: Ok. Dave, let’s take a break.

1 DT: Ok.

2 RV: Ok Dave, continuing now. Let me ask you a couple of other general  
3 questions before we continue with what happened to you when you returned to the field  
4 from the hospital. If you could comment on R&Rs...did you take an R&R?

5 DT: No, I was not there long enough. I only lasted about four and a half months  
6 in Vietnam. And so I was not eligible for an R&R. That usually occurred after your six  
7 months of field duty for an officer, but usually around the six-month period. Some of my  
8 men had been on R&R and came back to the company and I would ask them where they  
9 went and one went to Australia, another went to Thailand, and based on what he told me  
10 about Thailand and Bangkok, I had decided that when it's my turn for an R&R, I would  
11 go to Bangkok, Thailand.

12 RV: Why?

13 DT: Well, he said there was a lot to do. You could go down to the beach. Lots  
14 of pretty, young girls around. And you know, being in the city, there was a lot more to  
15 do, and so I decided that that's probably where I wanted to go.

16 RV: Ok. Tell me a little bit about entertainment. What would you all do when  
17 you did have down time and you were able to kind of just sit back and relax a bit?

18 DT: All of my men had tape cassette recorders that they played music from the  
19 States, the music from the '60s, particularly the Motown music. The Temptations, that  
20 kind of thing.

21 RV: Do you remember specific songs that you hear today that take you back  
22 there?

23 DT: A lot of The Temptations kinds of music. Their favorite hits, that kind of  
24 thing. And so...now, the other favorite song of course was when an entertainment group  
25 would come through on LZ Gator, we had a little bit of an amphitheater on Gator. I may  
26 have said this earlier in the interview, I'm not sure. But either a Filipino group or a  
27 Korean group, I think I saw one of each. And then they would sing a lot of the rock tunes  
28 as well. But the most favorite song they would sing would be, *We Gotta Get Out of This*  
29 *Place*. And so that was always...and it's amazing to me that people would tell me later  
30 that these singers who sang in fluent English did not speak English. A lot of these groups

1 would literally memorize the songs and sing it, but they couldn't speak a word of  
2 English. And it was amazing how fluent they were when they were singing the songs.

3 RV: Did they sound pretty good? Did you guys...maybe you didn't care, you  
4 just wanted...

5 DT: Well, they sounded good and then the females in the singing groups really  
6 looked good. They wore low-cut dresses, tops, and mini shorts. Which is probably not a  
7 good thing for GIs because when you've been in the field, even those old mamasons with  
8 the Betelnut teeth started looking pretty good. So this was not good to be looking at these  
9 entertainers, but it was quite a treat.

10 RV: But wasn't that good for morale overall?

11 DT: Yes it was. I was always uncomfortable sitting there because I looked  
12 around in this amphitheater with so many soldiers and thought we were just sitting ducks  
13 for a mortar fire, and I was always uncomfortable about that. And of course we used  
14 civilians inside Gator as part of the winning the hearts and minds and paying locals with  
15 currency. They would fill sandbags; they would do odd and end jobs. At least half of  
16 them, if not all of them, were Viet Cong and I remember...

17 RV: How do you know that?

18 DT: Well, it was just...we surmised that first of all. Second of all, the incident a  
19 little later when the battalion was overrun, some of the men that were killed inside LZ  
20 Gator we recognized as being the laborers that were used. In fact, one of them was the  
21 barber. We had a little barbershop inside Gator and the Vietnamese cut hair. He was one  
22 of the Viet Cong sappers that was killed. And I remember when we had this  
23 entertainment troupe – and this would have to be I think about maybe late April '69. We  
24 were back on Gator, and I was watching the show and one of the soldiers who was kind  
25 of the guard for these civilian laborers brought the laborers to watch the show. And I was  
26 sitting back kind of halfway up the amphitheater where the officers sat, and this group of  
27 Vietnamese laborers were brought up and they were to my left. And I'm watching the  
28 show and I glanced to my left, and instead of watching the show, the Vietnamese laborers  
29 were surveying the bunker line. And one was talking out the side of his mouth to another  
30 one. And I really got pissed over that, and I had my M-16 because you always carried  
31 your weapons with you inside Gator. And to make a point, I took my M-16 and I pointed



1 it towards the Vietnamese. And the one Vietnamese looked at me with these eyes that  
2 could kill, you know. And he's kind of a glaring eye and then he took his eyes off me. I  
3 never forgot that. And I just...it wasn't my place to say anything, but I just, it pissed me  
4 off that we were doing this. That we had them inside the wire. It was common sense told  
5 us it was not a good thing, and it just rubbed me wrong that we were doing this. And sure  
6 enough later on, a few weeks...a couple weeks later, the perimeter was overrun by  
7 sappers and our battalion commander was killed.

8 RV: Wow. And you think it's a direct result of these folks?

9 DT: Oh absolutely. They knew the bunker system probably better than some of  
10 our soldiers knew it. And when they came through, they came through the right spot.  
11 They went directly to the tactical operations center and the battalion commander's bunker  
12 and before he could get out, they threw a satchel charge...actually, he got out of his  
13 bunker, his sleeping quarters, and he went into a bunker that was next to his sleeping  
14 quarters, which was the proper thing to do. And he was wounded getting out of his  
15 sleeping quarters, then when he went into the bunker, they just watched him go in and  
16 threw a satchel charge in the bunker.

17 RV: Geez.

18 DT: And they were peeling pieces of him off the wall when they finally got to  
19 him.

20 RV: Yeah. Dave, how do you feel in a situation like that? A war where you  
21 literally can't officially particularly tell, you know, that this is the enemy sitting right  
22 beside you, right inside your own lines, working for you guys. What do you do in a  
23 situation like that? How do you deal with that psychologically? It has to be frustrating.  
24 As a warrior, it has to be frustrating.

25 DT: Yeah, it is very tough. It was probably the toughest war we've ever had for  
26 that reason, and it required certain precautions that at times were taken, other times were  
27 not taken. Such as allowing people to work inside your base camp. And we did the same  
28 thing in Chu Lai. There were literally hundreds if not thousands of Vietnamese civilians  
29 that worked inside the Chu Lai complex every day. And a number of them were Viet  
30 Cong, and they were spotters for the rockets that would be fired in from the Rocket  
31 Valley. They would walk in the next day after rockets landed and probably take a look at

1 where they landed, and then at night they would get back and send the messages back,  
2 'Ok, you were off by so many meters from where you last shot, so adjust your fire.' I  
3 know when I was at the battalion division combat center for my in-country training when  
4 I first arrived in Vietnam, we had received some rockets that hit the beach by the long-  
5 range reconnaissance company headquarters. The next morning, the company  
6 commander looked out the window of his orderly room and saw one of the Vietnamese  
7 workers actually walking off the yardage of where the round landed to where their  
8 ammunition point was. And I knew that because I would go down there every day as I  
9 mentioned earlier to see if I couldn't get assigned to the LRP unit. And after the rockets  
10 fell one night, I went down there because I knew that they had landed on the beach, and  
11 fortunately they missed the company area, and the company commander related the story  
12 that he had seen the Vietnamese marking off where the rounds had landed, and I asked  
13 him, 'Well what happened to the Vietnamese worker?' And he said, 'Well,' and I'm  
14 quoting now. 'Well, let me put it this way. He didn't go home that night.' So that's the  
15 kind of thing you had throughout South Vietnam and in my judgment, when you had  
16 forward operating bases out in the boonies like we were at LZ Gator, that was the wrong  
17 place to put civilian workers.

18 RV: Do you think that kind of thing is going on in Iraq for example today where  
19 you simply can't tell if these are insurgents or allies?

20 DT: Yes, I think a certain part of that is going on. Absolutely. And as witnessed  
21 by the camp that was blown up in Mosul, where there was an insurgent in an Iraqi  
22 uniform, and he was strapped with lots of...and he got inside I guess the mess area or  
23 something and blew himself up. So.

24 RV: Ok.

25 DT: Had we had some Vietnam-era commanders there, maybe that could've been  
26 prevented, because that was...they should've at least been searched before being allowed  
27 to go in there.

28 RV: Right. Dave, a couple of other general questions. How much alcohol use  
29 did you witness? I'm guessing little in the field, but back in the base area, back at LZ  
30 Gator?

1 DT: When we were assured that we would not have to go out for a couple days,  
2 we drank. We got all the cold beer we could muster, and certainly that was true when we  
3 went for a stand down, which was only once at the Chu Lai beach. The beer couldn't  
4 come fast enough. I also remember that when we came back from the field once on LZ  
5 Gator, we were told we were going to be there a couple days. One of my men got a Dear  
6 John letter, and so what you did in a situation like that is you immediately took his  
7 weapons, his grenades, all his ammunition away from him. Our company, the  
8 commander's jeep driver was going into Chu Lai to the PX, and I gave him some money  
9 to get a bottle of bourbon. He came back and I gave the bottle to the guy and just told  
10 him to have at it, and we kind of kept an eye on him so that...usually they would just get  
11 plastered drinking if they got something like that, or just to be back in the rear if we were  
12 assured we weren't going to the field, yeah. We would drink lots of cold beer and play  
13 cards and have a good time.

14 RV: What other kind of entertainment? You mentioned music and you  
15 mentioned the drinking and cards. What else would you all do?

16 DT: That's about all I could remember. For me, it was you know, having a few  
17 cold beers was a real luxury. And cleaning my weapons, making sure my platoon got  
18 their weapons cleaned before anything took place. Because maybe we would be told we  
19 would be back on Gator for a couple days, but that didn't always turn out. I remember  
20 one time, we got back to Gator and we were told we would be there for two days, and  
21 later that afternoon the company commander sent me back to the field with my platoon.  
22 So we always cleaned weapons, turned in ammunition, extra ammunition, extra grenades.  
23 I did not like grenades being in our platoon tent, so we would turn those into the supply  
24 room until it was time to go out to the field again.

25 RV: Right. Dave, what kind of contact would you all have with women in  
26 Vietnam?

27 DT: The only contact we had...well, we had contact with Vietnamese women  
28 when we would be passing through a hamlet, and every once in a while you would come  
29 across a young Vietnamese girl. By girl, I would say in her teens or early twenties  
30 possible. And so I'd have to just keep an eye on my men. They would always want to  
31 try to strike up a conversation, that kind of thing. The other contact with Vietnamese

1 women would be on LZ Gator. Sometimes they would be at the base of the hill, beyond  
2 the bunker line, selling themselves. They would make motions of why they were there,  
3 and sometimes you would find some GI that would just go on down there, go through the  
4 wire to go down to get satisfied. I was walking my bunker line one time and I saw a cut  
5 in my wire in front of one of my bunkers, and I looked down and I saw a guy come out of  
6 the bushes, a small bush with this Vietnamese girl, put his pants on and start coming up  
7 the hill right through the opening that he made in my wire.

8 RV: Wow.

9 DT: And this man was not part of my company. He was with another company.  
10 And I just stood there watching him, and when he finally got up to the top of the hill, he  
11 was pretty out of breath. He said, 'How are you doing, sir?' And I chewed him out for  
12 making an opening in my wire. And so I got his name and I walked over to his company  
13 headquarters and talked to the first sergeant, and I was pretty pissed. And so the first  
14 sergeant took care of this guy. I think the greater problem was putting a hole in the wire  
15 rather than going and getting laid. But then he sent some men over to repair the wire. So  
16 that was another kind of contact. And that happened all the time. That happened all the  
17 time with these women selling themselves. The other one would be at the village on  
18 Highway 1 that connected the dirt road leading from LZ Gator down to Highway 1 right  
19 at the intersection of the dirt road and Highway 1 was a little village called Nuch Mau.  
20 That's N-U-C-H and then M-A-U is how that was spelled. And it was always interesting  
21 because just before you got to Highway 1, while you were still on the dirt road, there  
22 were some hooches there, and one of them was a whorehouse. And so when we were on  
23 Gator, every once in a while, I would be tasked to take a patrol at first light in the  
24 morning with a portable minesweeper and sweep the dirt road from LZ Gator out to  
25 Highway 1 to make sure the VC didn't put any mines in the road the night before.

26 RV: Tell me about a portable minesweeper.

27 DT: Right.

28 RV: What is that?

29 DT: It's just basically a hand-held, kind of looks like a broom but at the end of  
30 the broom instead of a broom there's a flat metal surface that detects metal under the  
31 ground and gives off a static noise like a Geiger counter. And the soldier using it would

1 have earphones on, and so he could hear that. And so basically, you just walk very slow  
2 and you move the detector from left to right across the dirt road and just move slowly as  
3 you swept the road, kind of like sweeping with a broom. It was a slow process, but you  
4 just took your time. Sometimes we could speed it up if we had two metal detectors, and  
5 so...but at first light in the morning, not every soldier really wanted to get up and do that  
6 kind of thing. I could understand that; if I gave them orders to do it, they would do it.  
7 But in order to incentivize them to do it, I would go through my bunkers when it was our  
8 turn to patrol and say, 'Ok, who wants to get laid this morning?' And some people would  
9 say, 'I'm up for it, I'm up for it,' and that's how I would get my patrol together.

10 RV: (Laughing)

11 DT: So I didn't have people grouching. There was a purpose for them being out  
12 there. And I remember the first time we did that, we swept the road down to the village  
13 and the military police from LZ Bayonet, which was the brigade headquarters up across  
14 from Chu Lai, would always try to get down Highway 1 at first light to go into the village  
15 to keep the GIs from using the whorehouse. And so what I did is when we got to that  
16 point where we were still on the dirt road but we were entering the village and the  
17 whorehouse was right there, I would keep the man with the metal detector out on the dirt  
18 road going back and forth, but he wasn't going anywhere. My men, I would tell my men,  
19 'Ok, go in and do your business.' And I remember after the men had gone into the  
20 whorehouse once, I looked down at Highway 1. I could see visually, and here came the  
21 military police. And I waved at them, 'Don't come up here, I haven't swept the road  
22 yet.' And they said, 'Ok,' and they took off. And then I remember going in with my  
23 platoon sergeant, into the whorehouse, which was a series of rooms, and I went in and I  
24 locked and loaded with my M-16, thinking there might be Viet Cong in there. And I  
25 went in there and the mamason got upset that I had my rifle pointing around. There were  
26 two Vietnamese males in there. I don't know if they were local soldiers or what. And  
27 the mamason was kind of upset that I was pointing my rifle, and my platoon sergeant put  
28 his hand on my right soldier and said, 'Take it easy, LT, these are friendlies.' And so  
29 then he went ahead and did his business, and then when everyone was done, we came out  
30 and...I did not partake, incidentally. I was afraid of catching disease. So when my men  
31 came out, then we all walked back to LZ Gator. And then the only other female contact I

1 had was during the one stand down at Chu Lai. We were having a good time on the  
2 beach, frying steaks and drinking beer, and there was a gal from the...I think she was  
3 either the USO or the Red Cross. Most probably the USO who came over kind of  
4 flaunting her stuff. And my men, who hadn't seen a white female for a long time were  
5 kind of just hanging all over her, and I suppose if we were back in the States, they  
6 wouldn't have given her a second glance, but she was a queen in that environment. One  
7 of my men wanted to get a photo and he put his arm around her to hug her and  
8 everything, and she snapped at him and pushed him away, and that really got me mad.  
9 You don't do that to my men. I mean, you brought it on. So I cursed her out. And just  
10 then, a staff sergeant walked over who had been working with the USO, and I cursed him  
11 out too for allowing her to come over and enticing my men and then rebutting them. And  
12 now you understand, I had had a few beers as well, so they walked away, and I just  
13 thought that to be extremely unfair.

14 RV: What ended up happening?

15 DT: She never came back, and I don't know. I mean, we went on with our  
16 business of drinking beers and eating steaks.

17 RV: Right, ok. What about homosexuality? Did you ever encounter that in  
18 Vietnam?

19 DT: No, not a bit.

20 RV: Didn't hear about it, see it, nothing?

21 DT: No, never. Never, never. That was not even thought of or...I never heard  
22 anything about that whatsoever.

23 RV: Ok.

24 DT: We always thought...and it was strictly culture. The Vietnamese men would  
25 walk holding hands.

26 RV: Yes.

27 DT: And some of the guys, particularly from the country and everything would  
28 always look at that like, 'That doesn't look right, they must be queer.' And I would tell  
29 them, 'No, that's simply the culture.' But no, homosexuality never entered my radar  
30 screen the whole time I was over there.

1           RV: Ok. Dave, when you're out in the bush, did you come across any wild  
2 animals that you remember?

3           DT: No. Only the one time in the Rocket Pocket when we were on an ambush,  
4 we had a wire going...it was an L-shaped ambush, so at both ends of the L I had a wire  
5 going across to each of the two men that were on the end that they would pull at night to  
6 make sure the other was awake. And apparently an animal ran through our ambush and  
7 broke the wire, and I remember a black soldier that was there on ambush at night, and he  
8 was so scared he kind of screamed and I could see the whites of his eyes. But other than  
9 that, never ran into...I could hear them at night sometimes, and I thought it was most  
10 likely an animal, but we could never be sure if it wasn't a sapper or someone like that.  
11 But we never ran into snakes or tigers or anything like that.

12          RV: Does that surprise you now, looking back that you're in this tropical area out  
13 in the jungle in the mountains?

14          DT: Yeah, it did. I think the more likely time you would run into that would be  
15 at night with ambushes, and I guess I just lucked out. Lots of leeches of course in the  
16 water, but animals, I never had an experience with them.

17          RV: Ok. Did you or anyone in your unit keep pets?

18          DT: I believe we had a dog. And I believe another platoon may have had a  
19 monkey.

20          RV: Ok.

21          DT: And I think we did, one of the guys had a dog, but I didn't pay much  
22 attention to it.

23          RV: Ok.

24          DT: The dog, the pets did not go to the field. They always stayed back with the  
25 company.

26          RV: Sure. Sure. Can you talk about any civic action that you all participated in  
27 while you were out in the field?

28          DT: When we had time, if we were passing through a hamlet and if we had the  
29 time and if we had the supplies, my medic wanted to work with the local people and find  
30 where there were some sores or cuts or anything like that, where he could bandage them  
31 up and I would allow him to do that, regardless of how friendly the village may have

1 been or may not have been, I thought that it was just a human thing to do. And so we  
2 would do that. The battalion itself, we had a battalion surgeon, a captain who would go  
3 out on what they called MEDCAPS. And they would go to local villages with a lot more  
4 supplies and that kind of thing. So that was the right kind of thing to do in terms of  
5 winning hearts and minds. Having Vietnamese civilians come on your base and working  
6 inside the base was not the right thing to do.

7 RV: Ok. How did the villagers treat you all when you would come to a village?

8 DT: Usually they were very friendly. Sometimes they would just stare at you.  
9 You got to a point after a couple months of Vietnam, you had a sixth sense of whether a  
10 village was friendly or not. First you would, if you were near a village, you could call  
11 that in and the battalion intelligence officer would call you back and tell you to the best  
12 of his knowledge whether that was a friendly village or not. But you could also sense it  
13 by the way the people looked at you and the way the village was. If you saw a village  
14 that had a lot of animals in it, dogs, that kind of thing, it's possible it was a pro-VC  
15 village. If you saw a village that was somewhat impoverished that didn't have a lot of  
16 animals running around, it may have been a pro-government village and the VC would  
17 just take the animals from them.

18 RV: Ok, can you explain that for people listening to this, we're not going to  
19 understand why.

20 DT: Well, because if you did not support the VC, then they would take all of  
21 your rice supplies, your animals for eating and that kind of thing. If you supported the  
22 VC, then they would let you stay healthy as it were as a village because you were  
23 providing them active support. Now that was not always the case. As you got closer to  
24 the major towns, then the hamlets that had a lot of animals and that kind of thing tended  
25 to be pro-government. But I'm talking about further out near the mountains. That's  
26 when you could tell which villages were supporting the VC and which were not.

27 RV: That's interesting. I've not heard that before.

28 DT: Yeah.

29 RV: Dave, could you briefly or at whatever length talk about something that  
30 civilians might not understand and often when I speak with individuals at reunions or  
31 students, they don't understand the closeness of the relationships formed within a military



1 unit. And I'm talking about personal relationships with the men to your right and to your  
2 left. Can you comment on that? And how that comes about and how strong that is?

3 DT: Well, this is a fact of our humanity. I remember in the business world, I  
4 lived in Venezuela for three and a half years for BF Goodrich, and down there, your  
5 friends became your family and we became very close to other expatriates who spoke  
6 English, and we're friends to them today. And so that's even magnified more so in war.  
7 Your family is not there, so your comrades become your family and you depend on them.  
8 You depend on their willingness to be in the field with you, their willingness to expose  
9 themselves to danger in order to protect each other. And so you become close, and close  
10 in an interesting kind of way, where you criticize each other, you have lots of jokes, you  
11 call each other names, you have nicknames for everyone. You rarely called anyone by  
12 their name. It was always a nickname, and it was easy to find a nickname for someone  
13 based on their characteristics or based on something that happened or based on their  
14 name itself that would lend itself. So they were your world and you didn't see much  
15 outside that world. They were with you day and night. You didn't have much contact  
16 with anyone else, and so they became very important to you. I mean, very few of us have  
17 a mindset of becoming a monk, taking a monastic existence. We need other people, and  
18 when you're placed into a war situation, those other people are your fellow soldiers that  
19 are out in the field with you every day.

20 RV: Right. What about the discussion amongst veterans after they returned from  
21 a war experience saying that the reason that they fought was for the people they were  
22 with, their unit. Not first and primarily for the country or for the cause, but it was really  
23 for those who were in that foxhole with them. Is there any truth to that?

24 DT: Absolutely, and I think that goes with every war, even World War II, where  
25 the reason for the war and the objective of the war was a lot more defined than an  
26 unconventional war such as Vietnam. But when you get with the soldiers on the ground,  
27 they don't think of things in terms of geopolitical considerations. It's far beyond their  
28 capacity to even be concerned about that. All they know is what is in front of them and  
29 what they are told to do day by day. They don't generally get caught up in the grand  
30 scheme of why they are there, other than the fact that by luck or happenstance or in some

1 cases by their own way that they are there and that's their reality. So they deal with their  
2 reality every day on a very localized level.

3 RV: Dave, while out in the field, did you ever come across areas that had been  
4 sprayed by defoliants? What kind of contact did you have with defoliants, if not there out  
5 in the field?

6 DT: Fortunately for me, my platoon had never been in an area that had been  
7 sprayed. Usually, those areas were further out in the mountains where members of our  
8 battalion would go from time to time. I was fortunate not to be sent into any of those  
9 areas when I was in Vietnam. And I don't know of any time that they sprayed in any of  
10 the areas during the four and a half months that I was there in Vietnam. But it did  
11 happen, and in hindsight I talked to veterans of our battalion who actually operated in  
12 those areas. They may have been called in to assess the damage after a B-52 strike, and I  
13 remember one soldier telling me that he went in there and they were out of water and  
14 they could see that the trees, the leaves on the trees were starting to rot away from the  
15 spraying. They didn't think much of it and they put their canteens right down in the  
16 water to get something to drink because you know, they just didn't think of that being a  
17 danger. And of course the official word was that it was not harmful to humans.

18 RV: What do you think about that now?

19 DT: Well definitely it is. And I know in the two trips that I made to Vietnam  
20 since the war, one of the things that came up from a former Viet Cong that I talked to was  
21 how badly the Vietnamese people suffered after the war from the effects of Agent  
22 Orange. And I know that Americans suffered from that, but the Vietnamese people  
23 suffered more because they were left there.

24 RV: You know that the U.S. government's official position here is that based on  
25 long-term studies, especially of Air Force personnel, that it does not cause these severe  
26 deformities and whatnot. Why do you think that is?

27 DT: I don't know. I don't know whether the government looks at it in terms of  
28 liability. I'm a strong believer in cause and effect, and I can't think of any other reason  
29 for that to occur other than the use of defoliants.

30 RV: Ok. Dave in general, tell me what Vietnam the country looked like.

1 DT: I think Vietnam is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. It was  
2 always a pleasant escape from the war to be up on a hill looking down through a valley,  
3 looking at rice paddies and especially in the evening as the sun started to set, what a  
4 gorgeous country. It was just beautiful. Of course we could not....what marred that  
5 vision for us was the fact that we knew down in that valley that looked so pretty, there  
6 were lots of mines and booby traps and a possible ambush. But to be able to once in a  
7 while just to have a view of the country and look out over the South China Sea and see  
8 the Vietnamese fish in the ocean and everything...just absolutely gorgeous. Just  
9 beautiful. Breathtaking.

10 RV: What about the weather? I know you described the heat, but what was the  
11 weather generally like during the months you were there?

12 DT: During the months I was there, I escaped most of the rainy season because I  
13 arrived in late February and I left in mid-June. So it was always hot, very hot, and it  
14 would get hot to...I think it would get to be about 95 degrees by ten o'clock in the  
15 morning and it would pretty much stay at that the rest of the day. It was just the  
16 unbearing heat.

17 RV: Ok, getting back to your specific tour. Once you finished at the hospital and  
18 you get back out to your unit, tell me about what you all do and what happened?

19 DT: Well, two things happened when I was in the hospital. First was the mine  
20 incident with my platoon sergeant and those men, and then a little later on – and I believe  
21 the mine incident occurred around May the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>. And then on May the 12<sup>th</sup> was  
22 when LZ Gator was overrun by sappers and our battalion commander and a number of  
23 others were killed. Shortly after that, I returned to the battalion. The protocol was for  
24 people who suffered from malaria, we were supposed to be sent down to Cam Ranh Bay  
25 for rest and recuperation and physical therapy, just to get our bodies back in shape and I  
26 refused to go. I told the hospital to just send me back to my unit. I was not going to go  
27 down to Cam Ranh Bay. I wanted to get back to my platoon. They had lost me, they had  
28 lost the platoon sergeant, and so I needed to get back to the field, which is what I did.  
29 Shortly after that, our company was tasked to go far south of our area of operation under  
30 operational control of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which operated west of Quang Ngai.  
31 The intelligence was that there was an NVA regiment that may be on the move coming

1 out of the mountains to attack Quang Ngai or the Binh Son district town. And the 1<sup>st</sup> of  
2 the 52<sup>nd</sup> needed some extra help to cover that area. So we went out as a company since  
3 we were going to work against a possible NVA regiment, we were allowed to go in  
4 company size. And we maneuvered in an area that was mostly hills, low-lying hills with  
5 a lot of scrub brush. Not a lot of jungle, but very, very hot. And we worked our way  
6 through that area for a number of days. We came at the end of one day, close to the end  
7 of one day, we were getting resupplied with water. It was extremely hot. One platoon  
8 leader asked the company commander, because of the heat, if he could turn in their  
9 helmets on the resupply chopper that was bringing in the water and wear their soft caps,  
10 or boony caps. The company commander left that up to each platoon leader as to what  
11 they wanted to do. One of my men saw the other platoon turning in their helmets on the  
12 helicopter and ran over and asked if we could do the same, and I said, 'No.' And so he  
13 bitched about that, but I wasn't going to change my mind. That night, we got up on a  
14 small hill for our night position, and my platoon led the company. We always pointed the  
15 company when we worked as a company because I think my company commander had  
16 confidence in me. And that night as we got up on this small hill, my point man saw two  
17 NVA soldiers on a trail in front of us and just saw us coming up on the hill and then he  
18 took off. The soldiers took off. And so he reported that to me, and I reported it to my  
19 company commander, and I was not very happy about this. The enemy definitely knew  
20 where we were and they were NVA. The next morning, we took off, and because of the  
21 situation, we had to walk on that trail. We had to be at a certain point at a certain time,  
22 and in that area the country was very rugged, so we basically had to walk down this trail  
23 that was in a ravine with the sides going up on both sides of the trail. I was not very  
24 happy about it, but we had to do it. And so I spread my men out as far apart as possible  
25 and told them to walk on rocks and stones as much as possible to keep from hitting a  
26 mine. We walked down this trail and all I could think about is an NVA regiment that  
27 might be on either side of the trail up on the ridgelines. We were sitting ducks. We got  
28 through most of that to where we started coming out to a vast expanse of rice paddies.  
29 We came out of that rugged terrain. Let me go back. My point man, before we came off  
30 that trail, had stopped and the whole company had stopped, and I called ahead to my  
31 point man to find out what had happened and he had just stepped on a Bouncing Betty

1 mine, and the mine had shot up (bounced), but it was an old one and it did not go off. So  
2 in a fraction of a second, he stared death in the eye. And his shotgun, his bird dog, the  
3 guy that protected him, told me on the radio that they needed to take a five minute break  
4 while he collected himself, and I told him to take ten. Then I called the company  
5 commander and told him what was going on. He was getting – the company commander  
6 was getting unsettled because we were kind of stuck there and I agreed with him, so after  
7 ten minutes, we took off and it wasn't too long after that that my point element came out  
8 finally out into this open area. The point called back and he said that they saw a bunch of  
9 North Vietnamese across the field over by a wood line. I radioed back, 'Did they see  
10 you?' And he said, 'No.' And I said, 'Well, take some cover, I'm coming up to call  
11 artillery fire.' So while I'm going up the trail with my radio operator and my – I had a  
12 grenadier behind me, I told the company commander what I was going to do. As I came  
13 out of this trail, there was some scrub brush around that allowed us to get behind the  
14 brush so we could not be seen. Now the point man and his shotgun had moved out, and  
15 they were hiding behind some scrub brush. And then I came out of the trail. My radio  
16 operator came out behind me, and then this grenadier with an M-79 grenade launcher had  
17 come out behind him. All five of us were stepping over a mine, but my grenadier had  
18 stepped on it and tripped it. It was a small anti-personnel mine that the rest of us had  
19 stepped over and had not tripped it.

20 RV: Did he just not see it or was he careless, or...?

21 DT: It was just by luck or lack of luck that he tripped it and we did not. We must  
22 have just stepped over it.

23 RV: Oh, so this was not seen at all?

24 DT: No, it was not seen, and we all stepped over it and he hit it. And so the anti-  
25 personnel mine went off and my point man and his bird dog, his guard, and myself, we all  
26 got shrapnel in the head and the neck and the ear and everything else. And the man of  
27 course had tripped the personnel mine got hit. It just so happened that the bird dog, the  
28 point man's guard caught a piece of fragment, of metal shrapnel in the side of his helmet  
29 to put a dent in the helmet.

30 RV: And, oh my gosh, your decision earlier.

31 DT: Well, he is the very man that complained. That wanted to wear soft caps.

1           RV: Gosh. Wow.

2           DT: And so my medic came forward and patched us up, and we certainly had to  
3 get a dustoff for the man that hit the anti-personnel mine. He had received fragment  
4 wounds in his legs and on his foot. I was going to stay, I just had some shrapnel, a little  
5 bit in my temple and my neck and ear, and I was patched up and I was just going to stay  
6 out there, and my medic tried to pull rank on me and give me orders to go out. And the  
7 company commander said, 'No, you better go out.' So Sergeant Arias, my E-5 squad  
8 leader, came up and took over the platoon and we were medevaced up to Chu Lai.

9           RV: Dave, what does it feel like to get hit with shrapnel from a mine?

10          DT: I didn't – I heard a bang and I didn't feel much. The fragments were fairly  
11 small and fortunately they didn't hit my eye or anything. I was bleeding from the neck  
12 and the ear and the temple, but I don't recall...it didn't hurt me that much. And certainly  
13 the individual who hit the mine was hurting. And the other two that were hit in the head  
14 with the same kind of wounds as me were not hurting that much. It was just small  
15 fragments. So we were lifted off by dustoff and went back to Chu Lai, where we were  
16 sent in for...the man who hit the mine was being prepped for surgery. I'm not sure if he  
17 lost a toe or what. I do not think he lost a leg or anything. But they were prepping him  
18 because he had more shrapnel in his legs than us. I remember being on one table and this  
19 doctor was picking out shrapnel out of my head and ear and neck with tweezers and the  
20 man who stepped on the mine was being prepped for surgery. He had two nurses  
21 prepping him and he was feeling kind of low, moaning and that kind of thing. I looked  
22 over at him and I winked at the doctor working on me, and I told him, I said, 'What are  
23 you complaining about? You have two nice-looking nurses working on you, and I got  
24 this ugly doctor working on me.' And immediately, that just changed his attitude, and all  
25 of a sudden he started saying, 'Well, some of us got it sir, and some of us don't.' And it  
26 just changed his attitude just like that. And so they got him ready and he went in for  
27 surgery and after this shrapnel was picked out of me, then one of the nurses came over to  
28 finish the job of patching me up, putting a few stitches in my head. Nothing major. And  
29 I remember her as very cute, had short hair, which was the style in those days. Dark  
30 eyebrows, and just cute. And she had a little hint of perfume on her. And coming out of  
31 the field, I would have married her on the spot. She was just gorgeous.

1           RV: What happened to the gentleman you were talking to who was being  
2 prepped for surgery? Do you know?

3           DT: I never saw him again, so I think...my take is he probably was injured bad  
4 enough to be sent back. I don't know for sure, but I never saw him again. I assume that  
5 was his ticket home. My point man and I were not hit that bad, and so we were released  
6 from the hospital with bandages on us and we had dried blood on our faces, but we were  
7 stitched up. We were ok. And so we called by radio at the hospital to our battalion to  
8 have a jeep come up to Chu Lai and pick us up, and while we were waiting, we decided  
9 to walk around a little bit. There was a...the hospital was very close to the division  
10 headquarters, and that was the reason why it was always in danger of being hit by  
11 rockets. They weren't trying to hit the hospital; the Viet Cong were trying to hit the  
12 division headquarters, but it was very close. There was also a major PX nearby, and so  
13 my point man and I walked over to the PX and they had a hot dog stand out there. We  
14 looked at each other like, 'Can this be for sure?' And so we walked over to get a couple  
15 hot dogs, which were like...we hadn't had them since being in Vietnam, and the rear  
16 echelon people looked at us walking. We were filthy dirty, we had our weapons, dried  
17 blood with bandages, and they looked at us like we were the dark side of the moon and  
18 stayed away from...I remember one guy looking at me. I could read his eyes like, 'There  
19 must be a war going on somewhere.' So we had our hot dogs, and later we were picked  
20 up and brought back to LZ Gator and I had...the point man, because he had stepped on  
21 that Bouncing Betty like a half hour before we got hit by the mine, he was pretty well  
22 spent, mentally. And he had been my point man for a number of weeks and he was very  
23 good at it. He had been in Vietnam longer than me, and he talked to me when we got  
24 back to LZ Gator and said, 'If you want me to go out the walk point again, I'll do that,  
25 but I'm married and I really need to get something else.' And I talked to the first  
26 sergeant. He certainly had done his job in the field, and so we got him a job at the  
27 helicopter pad back on LZ Gator.

28           RV: How hard was that to do?

29           DT: The first sergeant, I had worked closely with the sergeant major. All of the  
30 first sergeants did, and when they saw someone who had truly done their job in the field  
31 but was losing their effectiveness, they always had rear jobs they would give to those

1 men. And I told the pad to let me know when the resupply chopper came in that was  
2 going out to Charlie Company, that I would go back out to the field in the evening. And  
3 for whatever reason, I was not told when the helicopter came in, so I missed my ride out  
4 that evening and I stayed the night at Gator. As it so happened, that evening, the  
5 company got mortared heavily by the NVA, and I believe one platoon in particular, the  
6 mortar rounds landed in their part of the perimeter, and I think that we had about twelve  
7 casualties.

8 RV: Wow.

9 DT: So I missed that that night.

10 RV: Dave, it sounds like fortune was with you. Something was with you.

11 DT: Yeah. So the next day I did go out to the field and we continued on with our  
12 mission.

13 RV: Ok. Let's take a break just for a minute, Dave.