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

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

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
2 interview for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project with Mr. David Taylor. Today is
3 May 4, 2005 and it's approximately 8:34 AM, Central Standard Time. I am again in
4 Lubbock, Texas, in the interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University and
5 Dave, you are again in Medina, Ohio. Let's pick up here where we left off. You had just
6 got back in the field and you had been wounded. When you came back, tell me what the
7 reaction was of your men and how they...could you sense anything from them, like 'It's
8 good to see you, good to have you back in versus having another leader'?

9 DT: Well, I was not out that long. I had been wounded and had the shrapnel
10 picked out of my head and neck and went back to the battalion base camp, and then I was
11 supposed to go back to the field that night, but I missed the helicopter, the resupply
12 helicopter. And as it so happened, that evening, the company was on the top of this hill.
13 Because it was so rocky, they couldn't dig in, and the North Vietnamese popped some
14 mortars on the hill. I think about eight mortar rounds, and a lot of them fell along the one
15 position of another platoon. And so...and I believe they had like ten or twelve casualties
16 from that. So when I arrived the next morning, the mood of the men was rather somber
17 because they had taken a beating the night before. I remember down at the base of the
18 hill, this...it's maybe three hundred, four hundred meters; they had killed this individual
19 who was walking along. We were in this so-called free fire zone, and it was a male,

1 military age, and yet no one had bothered to go down to check out the body. And so I
2 thought that was strange and I told the company commander I was going to take a squad
3 down there to check out the body, which is what we did. And I took all of my new men
4 that were new to the field. I wanted them to have a reality check, and so we went down
5 to the body and he...it was a strange thing. This individual had no weapon on him. He
6 was carrying a pair of military pants. He was wearing shorts and a shirt, but he had these
7 North Vietnamese Army pants that he was carrying. By then, the sun had been baking on
8 him for a while, so rigor mortis had set in and he was pretty stiff. And my men were kind
9 of looking at him; this was the first dead body they'd seen, and I had each one of them go
10 over and touch this dead enemy. I wanted to get across a point, and I told them, 'I want
11 you to look at this dead body real hard, because if you sleep at night when you're
12 supposed to be on guard or you lose concentration on what you're supposed to be doing,
13 you're going to be looking just like this guy.' So I don't know if it had much of an effect,
14 but it seemed like something drew me to make that lesson when I had these new guys.
15 So we went back up on top of the hill and the company moved out shortly after that.

16 RV: What kind of a reaction did they give you? Did you notice anything?

17 DT: Yeah, they were kind of stunned, but I think they needed a reality check that
18 war was for real, and I know the first time I was in the field, I didn't have that reality.
19 Sometimes you just needed to be shot at or you needed to see death just to get that reality
20 and get your head on straight.

21 RV: Did you feel any guilt at all for being gone that night when they were
22 shelled?

23 DT: Yes, I did, because I thought I needed to be with my men. With that kind of
24 thing, you don't want to be involved in that or experience that, but you need to be with
25 your men and share that as a leader. I wasn't there and you know, I felt bad because the
26 dumbasses back at the battalion were supposed to tell me when the resupply helicopter
27 came in, and I was never informed. So no one took that against me. I think they were
28 even surprised to see me out in the field the next day after I got shrapnel in my head,
29 so...but I should have been there the night before, but I wasn't.

1 RV: Dave, tell me about how...how does it feel as a commander, as a leader to
2 have men under your command, whether you're present there or not, wounded? What do
3 you do as a leader?

4 DT: Well the first thing I do is, I have to keep my mind on the mission. So if
5 we're in the middle of a firefight or we're getting mortared and the enemy is close by, the
6 leader has to keep concentration on number one, trying to nail or kill as much of the
7 enemy as you can but at the same time, a very close second is, you need to take care of
8 your men. You need to save lives. And I guess if given the choice, if I had to leave some
9 enemy get away because I had to take time to save the lives of my men, that actually
10 takes precedence. But you try to balance it, too. And so that's basically, there's two
11 things. Accomplish the mission, however large or small that may be, but then also take
12 care of your men and make sure they live to get home. I made it a point never to get
13 close to my men because I did not want to grieve unnecessarily in the middle of the heat
14 of battle, and so I was not their buddy, but we had a cordial relationship, and I think they
15 respected me because I looked out for them.

16 RV: Is that one of the keys to leadership then in the field? Is kind of, keep your
17 focus on the mission versus trying to get – or allowing yourself to get very, very close to
18 your men?

19 DT: It was for me. I remember seeing some other platoon leaders becoming
20 more like a buddy for their men, and I don't think you can do that in war, because
21 sometimes you have to make some hard decisions, and if you have developed a rapport as
22 a buddy, it's sometimes those decisions are not made that should be made. And I've seen
23 that with other junior leaders.

24 RV: I was going to ask you, did you witness that yourself?

25 DT: Yes, I did. I mean, when you become a buddy, then you lose your role as a
26 leader. Then the mission suffers. You just can't do that.

27 RV: How do you figure out how much distance to keep? Is that something
28 you...is it personality dependant, or is that something that is just...most people, if I went
29 out there, I could figure that out? Or is that simply your style of leadership?

30 DT: I think...well, it should be not my style, but it should be the style of
31 leadership. And you don't have to be someone's buddy to be liked and respected. What

1 a soldier wants out of their leaders is to know number one, they care for them, and
2 number two, that the leader is technically and tactically proficient. That you know what
3 the hell you are doing.

4 RV: Right.

5 DT: And you're not going to put them at unnecessary risk. War has risk, and I
6 think soldiers accept that, but they want a leader who is proficient, that's not going to put
7 them at unnecessary risk, and that will keep them informed as to why they are doing what
8 they are doing. You know, how far do you have to march in the hot, ninety-five degree
9 weather with a sixty-pound rucksack, why you are going where you are going, what you
10 are trying to accomplish. And if you keep the men informed and they know that you are
11 looking out after them, that's all they require.

12 RV: Right. When you said 'so-called free fire zone,' why did you term it like
13 that?

14 DT: Well, the free fire zones, and I think we mentioned this before, sometimes
15 were a misnomer. Basically, a free fire zone was set up where there was knowledge that
16 there were no friendly forces in the area, whether friendly military or friendly civilians,
17 and that if you were fired upon, you did not have to go through a lot of coordination in
18 order to get permission to fire artillery or gunships and that kind of thing.

19 RV: Right.

20 DT: It still does not preclude the fact that you could see civilians in the area.
21 Now they may have been supporting the government, but you don't fire on unarmed
22 civilians. But it's simply a methodology to let people in the rear that can offer you fire
23 support, either helicopters or artillery, that you're in a free fire zone so it requires less
24 clearance to give you support.

25 RV: Ok. Do you want to continue chronologically with where you went after?
26 You know, you came back in and you described that morning.

27 DT: Yes, we...shortly after that, we – and here we're talking about the late May
28 1969 timeframe. Shortly after that, we came back to LZ Gator, our battalion base camp,
29 and we were supposed to have a night or two off for some rest, and my company
30 commander, we were just turning in all of our equipment and my company commander
31 came to me and he said, 'Well, the rest of the company are going to have the night off

1 here, they can stay at Gator. But I just got a mission that I want you to lead.' And
2 essentially, it was a village that was just north of LZ Gator oh, about a mile north. That
3 was a friendly village and the Viet Cong had threatened to attack it. They only had about
4 four or five local popular force soldiers in the village, and these people were poorly
5 armed. And so the mission was for me to take my platoon into the village as a show of
6 force. My men, needless to say, were not happy, but I told them to saddle up and get
7 their gear together and get a basic load of ammunition, grenade, that kind of thing that we
8 were going to walk off the hill at LZ Gator that night, once it got dark. So they
9 grumbled, but we did it, and here again is if I were their buddy, they may have felt that
10 they had a chance to talk me out of it, not understanding that shit flows downhill and you
11 know, those are orders and we have to follow them. But I didn't have that problem,
12 because I was their leader, not their buddy. Interesting, we're getting ready to walk off
13 the perimeter at night, and I did a double-check with some of the men, a spot check, and
14 some of them had no ammunition, and I found that incredible but the GI sometimes wants
15 to be lazy, and I think maybe they thought they were going to get off there with a lighter
16 load and that since it was a local mission, they would get by without carrying much
17 ammunition. And of course I had an ass chewing and sent the squad leader back to get
18 ammunition for them. They had a minimal amount, and so we plussed them up. It was
19 just incredible how sometimes GIs can get lazy. We walked off the firebase that night in
20 the dark. We went oh, maybe a quarter of a mile and then we set down for the night, and
21 then the next day, we entered the village. And even though my men were upset that we
22 had to do that after coming back from the field, as it turned out, it was a great duty. We
23 stayed there for a week in this village. It was very idyllic. Lots of shade trees, there was
24 a little river that passed through it. And we had the best time. It was a nice R&R. The
25 place was never attacked, the people took care of us, we gave them our C-rations that we
26 didn't like, the ham and limas and the other things, and they mixed it in with hot rice with
27 herbs and spices, and every day would bring this big bowl of rice with C-rations in it, and
28 it was absolutely fantastic. And we managed to get some beer in there, so it was a nice
29 R&R for a week with nobody messing with us while the rest of the company was up on
30 LZ Gator you know, probably doing a lot of duties such as filling in sandbags and that
31 kind of thing.

1 RV: Right. How typical was that experience, just coming and seeing a village,
2 because part of that civilian Vietnamese life in a positive way like that?

3 DT: It was a good opportunity for me to get a sense for how the Vietnamese
4 lived. They appreciated us being there. The people, they had a little worshipping temple,
5 Buddhist worshipping temple, and each night they would tell me you know, 'You will
6 hear noise coming from the temple,' and that's just them praying, and 'Don't be
7 alarmed.' And I even had my men escort some of the young women to the temple, since
8 it was dark and they would feel more safe. I placed my headquarters, platoon
9 headquarters on the western side of the village, which was facing the jungle area. All the
10 north, the south, and the eastern side of the village was all open rice paddies. And so I
11 figured if we would get attacked, it would come from the jungle area and so that's where
12 I placed most of my men. And I do remember at night, walking along the edge of the
13 village by the rice paddies, and they would have these bamboo platforms set out at
14 different sections, where some of the men of the village would sit on the platform, taking
15 turns all night looking out over the rice paddies as an early warning system. If they saw
16 someone coming, they would ring a gong, and then that way I and the Popular Force
17 soldiers could go in that direction to see who was approaching the village. And I
18 remember sitting there with these men at night, and I could not speak no Vietnamese but
19 I would share with them American cigarettes and they would share with me their hot tea
20 and rice bread. And it was just an experience that I'll never forget. And parenthetically,
21 a long time later in 1997 when I made my first trip back to Vietnam, I went into the same
22 village and I actually found the little hooch where I stayed at. It was still there.

23 RV: Really? Wow.

24 DT: It was just a very special occasion for me.

25 RV: I can't even imagine that. That is incredible...I can only imagine what you
26 might have felt there.

27 DT: Yes, it was a little...it was actually a cement dwelling, small dwelling where
28 the people during the war, they would use that to stack their bags of rice. And they said
29 that it was empty at the time when I was there in the village with my men, and so they
30 said, 'Well, you can use this location.' And it was on the western side of the village, so it
31 was a good location, and there was a dirt...like a dirt area in the front that was cleared up,

1 kind of an open area that we could sit and eat and everything, so it was just ideal, and in
2 1997 I went back, that little cement building was still there. And I took pictures.

3 RV: Wow.

4 DT: When I went back in 2003, the cement building was gone and in its place,
5 someone had built a brick home. And so I was glad that I was able to see it when I did in
6 '97.

7 RV: Were you able to talk to anyone there in '97 about who you were, what
8 you...and why you were there? Why you were coming back?

9 DT: No, I...you know, I think a lot of the people that were there during the war
10 had probably already passed on and there were younger people there. And I felt like I
11 was intruding on their village. They just kind of stared at me. The children had smiles,
12 the older people, you know, they just kind of stared a little bit, so I did not want to intrude
13 too much. But they were very gracious, and I actually rode through the village on the
14 back of a little motor scooter from a local kid that I paid a few bucks out on Highway 1 to
15 be able to go into the village. I just pointed the direction I wanted to go, and then I saw
16 the whole village that way, and then I left.

17 RV: That's very, very interesting. Dave, let me ask you a couple of general
18 questions while we're here in the middle of your tour before you're evacuated, finally.
19 Can you tell me or make some comments on the following topics about what you
20 witnessed in Vietnam, either personally or things you heard about? And then perhaps
21 comment on what it means to you today. The first topic is fear. Could you tell me your
22 thoughts on that? What did you feel then? Personally for you, and then in your men and
23 possibly what you heard?

24 DT: The fear came in degrees, and it depended on the mission that you were
25 assigned to or the area you would be going into would raise or lower the fear level.
26 There are certain areas over there that there was less fear primarily because there were
27 fewer mines, and so for example when we operated in the Rocket Pocket, there were no
28 known North Vietnamese regulars, just a few scattered Viet Cong who tried to fire
29 rockets into the Chu Lai division base. And so while no place is secure from being
30 attacked or ambushed, the Rocket Pocket for me and my men had less fear than working
31 south of LZ Gator by the Tra Bong River, where there were NVA elements around. You

1 knew there if you were going to meet up with them, it was going to be a tough fight. Or
2 the highest fear level was working east of Highway 1 on the Batangan Peninsula, which
3 ran from Quang Ngai city and the Pinkville/My Lai area all the way north up to Chu Lai.
4 That area was heavily laden with mines. And whenever we had to go out there, the fear
5 level went up quite a bit because it was just...we lost so many. Injuries; if not killed in
6 action, certainly lost arms and legs from all of the mines out there.

7 RV: Dave, how did you personally deal with fear? I mean, do you remember you
8 being scared?

9 DT: I was scared. I tried not to show it. If they don't have confidence in you the
10 leader, then confidence pretty well falls apart. But yes, I was afraid and I channeled that
11 two ways. I mean, I channeled that in terms of being very concentrated on not making
12 mistakes, not walking on trails, not walking through natural hedgerow openings, cutting
13 our own way. Those kinds of things. Not trying to set patterns of movement. So I
14 became very demanding of my men, and that kind of is how I treated my own fear.
15 When we were under attack or small arms fire or that kind of thing, then I channeled my
16 fear into anger. Anger for the enemy. That was the way I treated my fear. And so I
17 became very angry that they would dare attack me and my men, and I'd had men
18 wounded and that kind of thing. So the way I covered my fear is I got very, very angry
19 and aggressive towards the enemy in terms of calling in artillery fire and helicopter
20 gunships, those kinds of things.

21 RV: Ok. What about bravery?

22 DT: I think you know, it's said a lot, but it is so, so true that bravery exists every
23 day just by being out there in the field. Particularly in a heavily mined area such as we
24 had on the Batangan Peninsula. Every grunt showed bravery every day just by going out
25 and walking, never knowing when one step or the other might hit a mine or a booby trap.
26 That took a lot of bravery. A lot of guts. In terms of bravery that might earn an award,
27 you just don't think of those things. You don't go out looking for those. I never did. I
28 don't know of anybody that did. I think that the higher up you go in the command level,
29 I hate to say this, but I think sometimes – not always, but sometimes, your battalion
30 commanders or maybe battalion staff officers who are back in the rear, they kind of have
31 a tendency to look for bravery medals. But the grunt in the field, that's the last thing on

1 their mind. But as often happens just by being in the field and being a grunt and getting
2 the mission accomplished, sometimes you have to do something above and beyond, and
3 that's where the bravery medal comes. But you look at it and you say, 'Well wait a
4 minute, why did I get a medal for that? I was just doing my job.' And that is so true.
5 When I was back at the hospital at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, recovering from wounds, I was
6 notified that I was awarded a Silver Star, and I was very perplexed, because it's like,
7 'Why?' I was just doing my job. I did not think it was anything brave. And so I think
8 many times, the bravery comes in the context of other people looking at what you did and
9 saying, 'Yeah, that requires a medal.' You certainly don't look at that from your own
10 personal view.

11 RV: Ok. Did you ever question how you would react under fire before you got
12 there? I mean, I guess that's a natural thing to do. 'How am I going to do it? How will I
13 perform?' Did you go through that?

14 DT: Yeah, you question yourself, but you don't dwell on it because if you dwell
15 on it too much, then you know, you start getting a little more cautious than you should be.
16 But yes, it's always in the back of your mind. But the way you deal with that is you just
17 remember your training and you just react according to the way you were trained, and the
18 more time you have in the field, the more you develop your own SOPs and your own way
19 of modifying your training to be more effective.

20 RV: Right.

21 DT: Based on your experience. After a point in time, experience takes over from
22 the training that you had.

23 RV: Ok. What about humor?

24 DT: Oh yeah. Humor is every day. Sometimes it's gallows humor, sometimes
25 it's just humor of people laughing at each other. Of course, rarely did we ever call each
26 other by first name. Sometimes it was last name, and most times it was by nickname.

27 RV: And you were LT?

28 DT: I was LT.

29 RV: For lieutenant?

30 DT: Yeah, they just called me LT. And we had nicknames for a lot of the men
31 that they gave to each other. Sometimes I would call them by their nickname or

1 depending on the individual, because I didn't try to get too close to them, sometimes I
2 would just call them by their last name.

3 RV: Can you tell me some of the nicknames you had if you can remember? For
4 your men, or what you heard them calling each other?

5 DT: Well, yeah. For example, nicknames either come from physical attributes of
6 the men or something that happened. In the case of my point man, he was tall, redhead,
7 and he had a Fu Manchu moustache. We called him Genghis.

8 RV: Yeah, he's just inviting something like that, isn't he?

9 DT: Right, because we thought he looked like Genghis Kahn. He was very tall,
10 muscular, had this big moustache that hung down with the red hair, and he looked like
11 Genghis Kahn. So his name was Genghis.

12 RV: Ok.

13 DT: His shotgun, the guy that worked with him on the point who had a shotgun,
14 we called him Woody. His name was Woodrow. So those kinds of things. My squad
15 leaders though, I did call them Sergeant Scherf or Sergeant Backovich. That kind of
16 thing. Or my platoon sergeant was a staff sergeant, I called him Sergeant Green. So the
17 sergeants, I called them not by nickname but by their rank.

18 RV: Ok. Well, let's move on with what happened in the field after you leave the
19 village.

20 DT: Sure. Shortly after the week at the end of the week that I was in the village,
21 the battalion intelligence officer came to the village and told me that the village south of
22 us, between us and LZ Gator, which was a very pro-Viet Cong village, that they were
23 going to do a cordon and search. Now at the time, my company commander was back on
24 LZ Gator because when he was checking out a position by a quarry off of Highway 1,
25 one of the – where some of our men were there at the top of the quarry to guard it,
26 walking back down the trail to his jeep, someone set off a command detonated mine,
27 killing his jeep driver and he had some shrapnel in his foot. And so he was not in the
28 field for a while to let his foot get rested. The rest of the company was out in the Rocket
29 Pocket, and they came back from that into my village, and so I took command of the
30 company and we were going to do a cordon and search of this village just south of us. So
31 in the early morning hours, I was supposed to cover the east, the north, and the west of

1 the village, and then another company would cover the south of the village, which was by
2 LZ Gator. So we moved out at night. Early morning, I should say, and I had my men
3 spread out. The east and the north were all rice paddies, so I didn't put too many men out
4 there. I took most of the company on the west, where it was more scrub brush and trees
5 and that kind of thing. I was very proud of the job I did. I think we had a very tight
6 cordon and I was west of the village where I thought that we would see some action with
7 people trying to flee the village, and we set up ambushes and that kind of thing. But I
8 could see where I was at a high point overlooking the south of the village, and the
9 strangest thing happened. All of the villagers, they could sense that they were being
10 cordoned, all of the villagers ran out the south side of the village towards the LZ Gator
11 and towards Highway 1, and the company that was supposed to close the cordon never
12 showed up.

13 RV: Really?

14 DT: So I was pissed off as hell, and so was the battalion intelligence officer later
15 because it wasn't done properly, so the Viet Cong that were inside the village got away.
16 The other thing I remember about that is, here we are on the western side and all the
17 scrub brush. I had ambushes set out just in case someone would try to slip through, and
18 while we were waiting for the intelligence people, the South Vietnamese and our
19 American intelligence people to go into the village, I get a call that the assistant division
20 commander wants to land near my location. And so I pop smoke and he landed in his
21 helicopter and he walked over to me and I showed him how I had my company cordoned
22 around the village, and he was happy with that. And he said, 'Well, I hope this is
23 successful. There's some hardcore Viet Cong leaders in that village we want to get to.'
24 And of course by that point, I was thinking to myself, 'What's the point? They already
25 got out.' And so as he's walking back to his helicopter, he turns to me and he says, 'Oh, I
26 didn't give away your position by landing here, did I?' And this was a brigadier general,
27 a one-star, and I said, 'Oh no sir, not at all.'

28 RV: What do you say to that?

29 DT: Yeah, I mean what are you going to say to a general? It was a screwed up
30 operation at that point. And so I thought that was kind of interesting, how some higher-
31 ranking officers kind of lose touch with the obvious. After that day, we went back to LZ

1 Gator and a short time later, we were informed that we were on another mission. And
2 this was to be a road clearing operation. The Tra Bong Road, which was from just south
3 of the provincial town of Binh Son, that's B-I-H-N Son, S-O-N. The Tra Bong Road
4 went from Highway 1 out west to the Tra Bong Mountains and the Tra Bong Special
5 Forces camp. And it was called the Cinnamon Road because back during the French
6 colonial days, there was a cinnamon plantation out there in the mountains. And so the
7 French trucks would go out there to get the Cinnamon and haul it in. It was just a dirt
8 road. And the engineer unit had been out at the Tra Bong Special Forces camp to
9 improve its defenses. And so the mission was to land on this road at various places with
10 engineers attached to sweep the road for mines so the engineers could come out with their
11 vehicles from the Tra Bong camp and then also, there's some South Vietnamese soldiers
12 wanted to come to the camp from the east to reinforce the camp. So we were to clear this
13 road of mines. Our company was given the mission and each platoon, reinforced with
14 engineers, was to land at a different section of the road and sweep the road going east of
15 mines within a certain period of time so that the engineers could come through. The only
16 intelligence I had for this mission was that there were some Viet Cong tax collectors in
17 the area and that the road did have mines and we had to get rid of the mines. Of course,
18 tax collectors, I never cared for tax people anyway, so that was nothing I couldn't handle.
19 So something told me the morning, this is the morning of the 3rd of June 1969.
20 Something told me not to eat breakfast. I wasn't that hungry and I just decided I was not
21 going to eat breakfast. And so I went in on this assault with a fairly empty stomach,
22 which was to be good, as things turned out. We air assaulted into our area of the road.
23 No enemy fire. And so after the helicopters left, we were up and running, heading east to
24 clear our road. Our section of the road had a lot of mines, and so it was kind of slow
25 going, and every once in a while we would get sniper fire. North of the road was the Tra
26 Bong River. The south of the road was open area. It was just low scrub brush for about
27 seven hundred meters. And then there was a woodland, a wood line, and then woods
28 beyond that. And from that wood line, we were getting sniper fire. So, that held us up.
29 The company commander flew over in a helicopter and told me to you know, try to speed
30 things up. And this is where the local leadership comes in to play. Every time we would
31 get sniper fire, the men would go to ground. But the sniper fire was coming from a fairly

1 far distance away, about six hundred meters. It was more of harassment that being
2 accurate. So here I am, being told by the company commander, 'Keep things going, keep
3 things going, you're moving too slow,' and so whenever we had sniper fire and we went
4 to ground, in my judgment the fire was too far away to be effective, you don't as a leader
5 lay on the ground and tell everybody else to get up. You get up yourself. And so I would
6 rise and I would walk to the front of the file, and everybody watched me, and I would not
7 draw any sniper fire, and so then I would tell everybody to get up.

8 RV: Ok, Dave. Hold on. Wait, tell me a couple questions. How do you tell, and
9 this might be something very obvious to you, but for the people listening to this, how do
10 you tell what's harassment sniper fire and actual sniper fire coming in at you to kill?

11 DT: Well for me, the harassment meant that it was too far away to be effective.
12 And so I think they were just trying to slow our operation and maybe get us to leave and
13 not sweep the road. I think that was probably the mission.

14 RV: Do you just hear the gunshot, or do you actually hear the bullet, or what?
15 How do you determine that it's too far away to be effective?

16 DT: We could hear the fire. It was what we call a crack and thud. In other
17 words, you can hear the rounds go off, and then it takes you a few seconds and then you
18 can hear maybe the bullet coming nearby. Not always. In this case, I could hear the
19 rounds go off, but it takes a number of seconds for you to hear the sound after the AK-47
20 is fired.

21 RV: Ok.

22 DT: But I could judge it was coming from the wood line that was six or seven
23 hundred meters away, which was not that accurate. And so I would get up first, though,
24 and walk to show the other men I was not drawing fire, and then I would tell everybody
25 get on their feet and tell the engineers to keep working.

26 RV: What are you thinking as you're walking forward like that, going, 'Ok, I'm
27 going to check and see if they're accurate or not, or if it's safe or not...'

28 DT: I'm thinking, 'Oh, shit.'

29 RV: Yeah, I figured you were thinking.

30 DT: But it was a reasonable risk. You know, there's reasonable risk and then
31 there's imprudent risk, and I was taking a reasonable risk. I did not think they were

1 going to hit me and they did not. In fact, the sniper fire stopped. So this happened a
2 couple times, and then I heard a helicopter coming over. It was a Light Observation
3 Helicopter, a LOH, as we used to say. L-O-O-C-H. And this pilot in the LOH came on
4 to my frequency and he said, 'I hear you have had some problems with snipers. I'll be in
5 the area for a little bit. Is there anything you want me to check out?' And this was what
6 we called a Light Helicopter gunship team. It was just him and one helicopter gunship
7 following him. And I was happy to see him because it was getting to be a pain in the ass
8 with this sniping fire, and so I said, 'Yes, I am getting sniper fire from the wood line
9 south of my position about seven hundred meters.' And he said, 'Ok, I'll take a look.'
10 He started flying from the road over the scrub brushed area to the wood line, and he gets
11 about halfway over this area of low-lying scrub brush and he starts circling. He says,
12 'Oh, I see an NVA soldier. He just ran into a tunnel. I'll just drop smoke so you'll know
13 where he's at.' And I'm thinking, 'Oh my God, that's like three hundred meters away
14 and I didn't even see him.' And so then he goes on further south to the wood line, and I
15 am listening to him on his frequency as we are walking on the road, and I could hear him
16 say, 'Oh, I see uniforms hanging on a clothesline. I'm going in to take a closer look.'
17 And as soon as he said that, I heard this big explosion, and I'm looking at him over the
18 wood line and I see this big rush of black smoke. And he was hit. Undoubtedly by a
19 rocket-propelled grenade or some sort of small arms. And I heard nothing more from
20 him, but I heard all this dark smoke. The gunship that was following him was then on the
21 radio saying, 'Bird is down, bird is down, bird is down.' And then my heart sank,
22 because I'm the one that sent him over there. And so the gunship was flying around the
23 area shooting the area around where this LOH had crashed. And then I got my heart
24 really sank, because this guy was working for me, so I felt bad about that, plus the fact
25 that there was enemy there where there weren't supposedly any enemy. Shortly after
26 that, the battalion commander landed on the dirt road with the company commander in
27 his command and control helicopter and he came over to me and he said with this rather
28 stern look on his face, 'I want you to take the men in on my helicopter and go in and
29 protect that crew until I can get more reinforcements.' And I glanced at my company
30 commander, who was standing next to him, and the company commander had this look of

1 remorse on his face. And it didn't dawn on me then what that was, and I found out thirty
2 years later, which I'll relate in a minute.

3 RV: Ok.

4 DT: So, the battalion commander tells you to do something and so you do it.
5 And I was, my adrenaline was flowing because I was pissed off that the helicopter was
6 shot down, so I selected a machine gunner and his assistant gunner, one of my squad
7 leaders, and my radio operator and myself, and we started running toward the command
8 and control helicopter. As we were going there, another squad leader by the name of
9 Sergeant Backovich, that's B-A-C-K-O-V-I-C-H, came up to me and he said, 'You need
10 some extra help?' And I couldn't understand why someone would volunteer to go in on
11 this because we knew the enemy was there. The men that were getting on the helicopter
12 had this worried look on their face and I don't blame them, but you know they did what
13 they were told. So I said, I looked at this sergeant thinking, 'Why is he volunteering?'
14 But I said, 'Yeah, get on the helicopter.' And that was a decision that saved my life. So
15 we get on the helicopter and we start flying in the short distance, and I yell to my men in
16 the helicopter, 'As soon as we land, get behind some trees or brush or some cover, and I
17 will check out the crew.' I did not want everybody just wandering around. And so the
18 helicopter gunship that was flying over the area got behind the command and control
19 helicopter as we started descending into the site. The command and control pilot saw a
20 ditch near where the LOH had been shot down, and so at the last minute he decided to
21 make a left turn and go to let us out over the ditch so we had half of a chance of getting
22 into the ditch and finding some cover, which was a very good decision on his part. Just
23 as the helicopter pilot was starting to land, the gunship behind him said, 'Left turn, left
24 turn.' So the command and control helicopter moved to the left just as it was landing
25 over the ditch, and I was the first one that jumped out, and as I jumped out, the helicopter
26 gunship behind me was firing his grenade miniguns, M-79 miniguns. And so all of these
27 explosions, or these grenades are exploding all over the place just as I'm dropping out,
28 and that's probably what saved me, because the enemy had to get their head down. The
29 two squad leaders and the radio operator jumped out the right side helicopter following
30 me. The machine gunner and the assistant gunner jumped out the left side. My RTO got
31 into the ditch as I ran forward to the helicopter that was shot down. Unknown to me at

1 the time, the machine gunner and the assistant gunner that got out of the left side of the
2 helicopter, the North Vietnamese shot them as they jumped out. They cut them down.
3 The two squad leaders and my radio operator managed to get into the ditch. So I ran to
4 the helicopter that had been shot down. It was on its top, pretty much upside down, and I
5 saw the pilot and the assistant, the crew chief, were pretty much burnt up. They had
6 exited the helicopter, so they were alive, but the North Vietnamese had shot them. And it
7 was clear to me they were dead. Then to the left of them was another soldier, which I
8 thought was odd because they were only supposed to have two on a LOH, the pilot and
9 the crew chief. So I crawled to this individual, and he had been shot in the neck and the
10 stomach. I think they were using him for target practice. And in the meantime, I'm
11 being fired at from the bush around me and I'm firing at the same time I'm trying to
12 check this guy out. I thought the third man was dead, and as I started to turn to leave, I
13 saw his hand started moving and I knew he was alive and I think he was trying to signal
14 to me that he was alive, but he was too afraid to move because he had been shot twice
15 already. I emptied one magazine out of my rifle, my M-16, and then I loaded another
16 magazine and when I was loading the second magazine, in that brief interlude that it took
17 to do that, the NVA shot me in the side. Hit me in the left side, and it was like getting hit
18 by a sledgehammer. It just knocked me over. My rifle went one way and I went the
19 other. The AK round opened up a hole in my side about six inches. Fortunately, it did
20 not penetrate my stomach.

21 RV: Can we stop for a second?

22 DT: Sure.

23 RV: How far away are the people firing at you?

24 DT: I don't know where they are; I can just hear bullets coming in. The scrub
25 brush was probably no more than about twenty feet away. Where they were, I couldn't
26 see them. I could just hear a lot of fire and there was also fire coming in at my men that
27 were in the ditch. So we were basically surrounded.

28 RV: That's right, you're almost on top of them.

29 DT: Right.

30 RV: Describe how it feels to be hit by that AK-47 round? You said like a
31 sledgehammer.

1 DT: It was like, I had never been hit so hard in my life. It was just the force of
2 the round hitting the body just was like getting knocked over.

3 RV: Does it hurt? Sting? I mean, is there a bullet pain, or is it just the force of
4 the blast knocked you?

5 DT: That particular wound I did not feel at all. It was just the force of the blast
6 just knocking your body backwards.

7 RV: What are you thinking, feeling, when you hit the ground?

8 DT: I was just stunned. And then, so I got up and I crawled over to my rifle and
9 I'm firing again, and I decided that this is not going to work, I'm just totally outgunned
10 and I'm out in the open, so I started dragging this guy back to the ditch and firing behind
11 me, you know pointing the rifle behind me and yelling to my men, 'Cover me, cover me,
12 get some fire out this way!' Towards me. And so I remember getting just to the edge of
13 the ditch thinking to myself, 'Ha ha, you bastards, I made it,' and just then I got shot in
14 the lower right leg, and the bullet went in one side and out the other, breaking the tibia
15 and the fibula.

16 RV: What did that one feel like? That's different.

17 DT: That hurt like hell. I tumbled into the ditch and with some help, we got the
18 guy into the ditch, and that one really hurt because the tibia and the fibula bones were
19 sticking out of the leg and the lower right leg was just like jelly. And I think it's from the
20 trauma of the wound. The whole lower leg was just shaking. And it hurt like hell, so...

21 RV: You're immobilized, I take it.

22 DT: I'm immobilized. I can't even...I can't even fire anymore, I'm just laying in
23 the ditch. I can't even fire up, the leg hurts so bad. So my one squad leader, Sergeant
24 Scherf, S-C-H-E-R-F, crawled over and I told him to take the boot lace out of my left
25 foot and wrap both of my lower legs together to try to put some stability to that leg,
26 because it was just throbbing all over the place. And just as he did that, he looked up at
27 me, and he's laying in the ditch but he looked at me and he said, 'Don't worry, you're
28 going to be all right. I'm going to get you out of this.' And just then, he caught a round
29 in the head.

30 RV: Oh, God.

1 DT: Apparently, his head was just a little too far above the ditch looking at me
2 and he caught an AK round in the head and he just put his hand to his head. No noise, no
3 nothing. It was the strangest thing, and he just put his hand to his head like when you
4 have a headache, and then he just lowered his head at my feet and then he died.

5 RV: God. What do you do?

6 DT: Well, at that point, I was completely helpless. I couldn't move, he was on
7 my feet, I couldn't fire, so I'm just trying to yell instructions to my radio operator down
8 at the other end of the ditch and the other squad leader who was left, and that's Sergeant
9 Backovich. When all of that was going on that I was over by the LOH looking around,
10 Sergeant Backovich decided he needed that M-60 machine gun that was laying out in the
11 open with the dead gunner, and so he ran out to retrieve the machine gun, and just as he
12 got the machine gun, there was a North Vietnamese soldier that was walking out of the
13 bush with the same idea, to get the machine gun. But Backovich saw him first, so he shot
14 the NVA, grabbed the machine gun, and jumped back in the ditch. It was interesting
15 because my radio operator, this was the first time he was in the field, and I thought since
16 this was just going to be a road-clearing operation, it would be a good way for him to get
17 some experience without getting into anything heavy. Little did I know...

18 RV: Yeah, he's jumping right into it.

19 DT: Yeah. We thought it was funny because this radio operator was just short of
20 getting a Ph.D. in Chemistry. In Chemical Engineering. And when he showed up at the
21 company, we wondered, 'How the hell did he get into the Army?' He was just short of it.
22 The only thing he needed was a dissertation and he would've had his Ph.D. in Chemical
23 Engineering.

24 RV: Ok.

25 DT: And his name was Zimmerman. So anyway, I'm yelling to Zimmerman
26 what to say on the radio that, if they don't get in quick, we're dead. We're done.
27 Because we were clearly surrounded. I also learned that before I got back to the ditch,
28 the NVA had thrown a grenade into the ditch and Backovich was able to throw it out
29 before it went off. So Backovich told me later, many years later when I found him, that
30 they were flying a plane overhead. A piper cub with a loudspeaker, telling all friendly
31 units to mark their positions. What had happened was – now bear in mind that the only

1 intelligence I had for this mission was that there was some Viet Cong tax collectors along
2 the road. As soon as the helicopter got shot down, the word got up to division, and the
3 division intelligence people said, 'Oh yeah. In that grid square, we think there might be a
4 portion of a North Vietnamese regimental headquarters.' And they learned that from
5 radio intercepts from these radio stations that they had that the frequency of the radio
6 transmissions coming out of that area would be of a type of radio that would be at a
7 regimental headquarters.

8 RV: Ok.

9 DT: So in short order, they had fighter bombers dropping five hundred pound
10 bombs all over the area. They radioed to Backovich with the radio operator, you know,
11 'Where should we drop them?' And Backovich, he doesn't even know where he's at, and
12 he's saying, 'Just drop them anywhere, they're all around us.' I learned from the first
13 sergeant the following day when I came out of surgery that the pilots of these fighter
14 bombers were shouting like a bunch of kids because there were just NVA running all
15 over the place, and so they were having a field day. Apparently, we did hit...we did land
16 in a portion of a regimental headquarters, but the NVA were smart enough never to put
17 too many people in one location because of our firepower. So we did run into a portion
18 of that. After about, near as I can tell maybe a half hour from landing, armored personnel
19 carriers finally broke into the area we were at. And these armored personnel carriers
20 were working the Tra Bong Road in the road clearing operation as well, but they were
21 further east of us. And so when we went in on the helicopter to go after the crew, the
22 battalion commander contacted these three armored personnel carriers and told them to
23 go in as well. They thought that they were the only ones going in. They did not know
24 that we had already gone in there. The other thing that I remember is the helicopter pilot
25 of the gunship that was flying overhead, that followed us in, I finally contacted him many
26 years later. And he said that he felt helpless because he could see the NVA were so close
27 to us that he was limited in where he could fire for fear of hitting us. So after about a half
28 hour, the three personnel carriers came into the area, formed a quick wagon wheel. A
29 circle. They just wanted to get us on the choppers and get out. They were going to leave
30 the dead behind. They didn't want to be there, you know. They were afraid. And I
31 refused to be moved until they got the dead out as well. I screamed at them. Of course, I

1 may have been in shock at that point, I don't know. But I screamed at them, 'Don't touch
2 me until you get the dead in.' So the one helicopter, they put me inside the...or, the one
3 armored personnel carrier, they put me inside. They left the door ramp down and they
4 put the dead on the door ramp so that I would be protected from ground fire. And then
5 off we went back towards the Tra Bong Road, and Sergeant Backovich got into the
6 armored personnel carrier I was in as we went back towards the Tra Bong Road. And I
7 remember telling him, I remember telling him, I said, 'Backovich, I'm going to put you
8 in for a medal.' And typical GI, he said, 'Sir, I'll trade the medal for three days in the
9 rear.'

10 RV: Wow.

11 DT: That's all you think about. You know, medals meant nothing. For him to be
12 able to be in the rear for a couple days and get a shower, that would be fine. That would
13 be reward enough. When we got across where the scrub brush was close to the road, a
14 medevac helicopter landed and all the dead were put in on the floor and then I was put in
15 on a stretcher in the helicopter and then we went back to the hospital.

16 RV: Are you taking in morphine or anything like that? Are you...how much pain
17 are you in?

18 DT: No. No, as I can recall, I was not given any morphine. By then, it was
19 funny because my leg hurt so much, they had to take one of their cots out of the armored
20 personnel carriers and put me on the cot and then they folded the cot around me to
21 stabilize my body so my leg wouldn't wiggle. And that's how they put me back in the
22 armored personnel carrier, and then when they put me on the helicopter, the medevac,
23 they kept me in the same cot that they took out of the personnel carrier because my leg
24 was just hurting so bad. It was almost in two. There was just the skin holding it. And
25 some muscle. And so whoever I took the cot from in the armored personnel carrier never
26 got it back. So they put me in the helicopter and off we went. I remember arriving at the
27 hospital and they prepped me for surgery and I remember pleading with the nurse to save
28 my leg. She said, 'We'll do what we can.' And they were just cutting my pants off and
29 everything, and then they put an air bag around my bad leg and like, pulled a cylinder
30 that air came in and just...and it hurt like hell when it was filling up with air, but once the
31 bag was full, my leg felt like a million bucks because it put pressure on the leg and it

1 moved the bones back in place. And so one of the lieutenants came in from the battalion
2 to see me and I was more concerned about the leg. And then that's when he told me, it
3 never dawned on me, he said, 'You have a side wound as well.'

4 RV: Had you forgotten that?

5 DT: I had forgotten about it.

6 RV: And apparently it wasn't bleeding too bad, I guess?

7 DT: I don't know. It was bleeding, but you know it was a flesh wound more than
8 a stomach wound. And so I went into surgery, and then the next day is when the
9 company commander came in with the first sergeant and my first sergeant told me about
10 the NVA that were there. Later in the morning, the battalion commander came in with
11 our battalion surgeon. I was sitting up at that point, and he said, he told me he was up all
12 night thinking if he had made the right decision. And of course I did not know the
13 conversation he had had with my company commander until later, years later. But I told
14 him, I said, 'Well, sir, you did the right thing, because if I were shot down, I'd certainly
15 want somebody to come in after me.'

16 RV: Sure.

17 DT: And I think that meant a lot to him and I think that gave him comfort. So I
18 was, after a couple days there, then I was moved down to Da Nang. Or, not Da Nang. I
19 was moved down to Cam Ranh Bay in the process of being shipped to Camp Zama,
20 Japan. I remember at Cam Ranh Bay, I was there for a day or so. On the other side of
21 my ward were all of these South Korean soldiers, and some of them were pretty well shot
22 up. When a...you know, when an officer comes to an American soldier in bed, I mean
23 the American soldier kind of is just laying there and you know, talks to the officer. But
24 on that other side where the Koreans were, when a Korean officer came in to see them,
25 no matter how bad they were, they sat up in bed. That's the kind of discipline they have.

26 RV: Yeah, that's incredible.

27 DT: So I was sent to Camp Zama, Japan, where I spent about a week, and my leg
28 hurt quite a bit and they gave me pain pills, and I think it was the second day that the
29 doctor came on his rounds and said, 'Taylor, is that leg still hurting?' I said, 'Yeah, it
30 still hurts.' And he stared at the leg and then he started yelling, 'God damn son of a
31 bitch,' and here they had set the leg wrong.

1 RV: Oh no.

2 DT: And that's why it was hurting. It wasn't quite in line, so he drew a line on
3 the cast and said, 'Cut this cast and reset this leg.'

4 RV: What are you thinking here, Dave?

5 DT: I'm thinking, 'No wonder it hurts so much,' you know. So that's what they
6 did. They reset the leg and then after that, I was just fine.

7 RV: Wow. Are you thinking about getting back at the field? I mean, what are
8 your...

9 DT: Yeah, I did not want to go home.

10 RV: I was assuming that, but I wanted...

11 DT: I was pissed off that I had to leave my men, and I'm thinking, 'I wonder how
12 long it would take to get my leg done. Maybe I can get it healed here at Camp Zama and
13 then go back to Vietnam. At the other end of the ward that I was at was this helicopter
14 pilot who had been wounded in the foot. And as it turns out, he was the pilot that took us
15 in to the downed LOH. He was our battalion commander's helicopter pilot.

16 RV: Right.

17 DT: And what happened, I talked to him in the ward in Camp Zama, Japan, and
18 his plan was to hover there in the area until we checked out the crew and then get the
19 crew back on his helicopter with my men and then he was going to take off. And he is
20 the one that saw me, he saw the ditch and he decided to drop us off above the ditch. And
21 he was shot, he received a lot of fire on his helicopter and he was shot in the foot, and he
22 decided if he hovered there much longer, he would be shot down on top of us, so he told
23 his other helicopter pilot, his copilot, to take off. And he said, 'I hated to leave you there,
24 but if I stayed any longer, I was going to be shot down on top of you.' And I apologized
25 to him for being shot and wounded taking us in, and he said, 'Don't worry.' He said, 'I
26 guess they're putting me in for a Bronze Star. I got a Purple Heart, and my brother is
27 stationed here in Japan and he's bringing a Japanese girlfriend over here to be with me.'
28 And I thought to myself, 'God bless the aviators.'

29 RV: (Laughing) Really, this guy is set up.

1 DT: And sure enough, that afternoon I saw this gorgeous-looking Japanese girl
2 come in and spent the day with him by his bed, and I think it was only a day later that he
3 was able to start taking some overnight trips out of the hospital, and so he did just fine.

4 RV: Sounds like he did.

5 DT: The other memory I have from the hospital in Camp Zama, Japan, we would
6 gradually start talking to each other in our beds. You know, 'How did you get hit, what
7 happened to you,' that kind of thing. And the guy to the right of me was a captain and to
8 the right of him was this black helicopter pilot, who had been wounded. And so the
9 helicopter pilot and I are talking to this captain about how he got wounded. He was a
10 West Point career officer. That was his third tour, and he had been shot. A bullet entered
11 his helmet, went into his skull, down through his jaw, around, and went out the other side
12 of the jaw.

13 RV: Wow.

14 DT: And he was fine. Mentally, he was fine. They wired his jaw closed so he
15 could hardly talk, but it would be a long process for him to be healed, but he would be ok.
16 And he was moaning and groaning how he hated to be wounded because he wanted to get
17 back to the field. And this black helicopter pilot is looking at him and saying, 'Sir, are
18 you a religious man?' And the guy said, 'Well, kind of.' He said, 'If I were you, I'd be
19 on my knees praying that you're even here.'

20 RV: Yeah.

21 DT: But that was my sentiment. And about my second day I was there, the
22 chaplain came by and he asked me if I had written home that I had been wounded, and I
23 said, 'No,' And at this time in Vietnam, because of so many parents having heart attacks
24 and those kinds of things when their sons had a minor wound, they would get a telegram.
25 And just the fact of getting a telegram before they even read the telegram, sometimes
26 they would have a heart attack and die. There was a policy that was initiated that if you
27 did not want your parents to be notified, unless the wounds were very, very serious, you
28 could sign the form. And I had signed the form. And so they were not notified. And so I
29 was very bitter that I had to leave Vietnam, but this chaplain talked me into writing a
30 letter home. So I wrote a letter home telling them that I had been wounded and that I'd
31 be coming home.

1 RV: Did you go into the details of exactly what happened or that this was pretty
2 serious or, what did you say?

3 DT: No, I soft-pedaled it. I just said that I had been shot in the leg and that it
4 wasn't going to allow me to – the leg would be fully healed, but it would take too long,
5 and so they were sending me home.

6 RV: Ok.

7 DT: And I kind of left it at that.

8 RV: Tell me how you thought about going home.

9 DT: I was very bitter. I did not want to go home. At that point, I had decided
10 that once my field duty was over, rather than be sent to the rear for six months in a rear
11 job, which was the custom, I was going to try to get into the Vietnamese Advisor School,
12 which was down in Quang Ngai city not too far from us and spend a six-month tour as a
13 Vietnamese advisor.

14 RV: Ok.

15 DT: And maybe stay longer to see if I could get a company command. And of
16 course all of that was lost, but the biggest disappointment was, I left my men into the
17 field and God knows what kind of a leader they were going to get. And that's what
18 bothered me the most. They were my men and I didn't want to go home until they went
19 home.

20 RV: What about the, I've heard this from a number of people who were wounded
21 in a matter like you, as far as just being removed immediately from the field and you're
22 evacuated to a hospital and you're there for an indeterminate length of time. One of the
23 things that it's very hard to deal with is if they are sent home or if they are in a long-term
24 recuperation mode or period. They lose contact with their men. Not only can they not go
25 back, you know, in a short period of time and rejoin them and go forward with them in
26 whatever operations they're going to do, but if they go back home like you, you lose
27 touch. I mean, that's it. If you don't have your address book completely filled out, these
28 guys are gone. What do you do like that? Was that your case?

29 DT: Yeah, to a certain extent. I was not that close to my men, but I would like to
30 have kept in contact with them and also my company commander and another platoon
31 leader that I became very close with. And as you say, all of that is lost. I did have a roll

1 of film that I had taken, and it was at Chu Lai getting developed at the PX, and I wrote a
2 letter back to the company commander asking if he could get those pictures and send
3 those to me. It was a roll of film where I had worked with a Vietnamese company out on
4 the Batangan Peninsula with the company commander and also it had some air strikes.
5 We dropped Napalm once in the little valley and I was sitting on the side of the hill kind
6 of watching the show, taking pictures, and I valued those pictures. And he had written
7 me a letter saying that all of the photos were destroyed because we had walked across a
8 little river and the water came up to our chest, and I had forgotten to take the camera and
9 put it inside a battery bag, and so all the film was destroyed.

10 RV: Oh, no.

11 DT: So I came out of that with virtually no pictures. But yeah, the whole
12 disappointment, I thought I was cheating the government and cheating my men by not
13 putting my time in, and I was very bitter about it.

14 RV: Have you gotten over it?

15 DT: No. Still to this day, I wish I would've put my year in. But you know, God
16 sometimes has other plans and the fact that I was sent home early like that to the hospital
17 at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, where I was from New Jersey. I met my wife, who was an Army
18 nurse there and we've been married for thirty-five years, so who knows who I would
19 eventually have married had I stayed in Vietnam and how that would have worked. So I
20 think sometimes you've got to be open to God's will and not your own.

21 RV: Yeah, I mean what else could you do? I mean medically, you didn't have a
22 choice here, I don't think.

23 DT: Right. Right. Yeah, I asked the doctors in Camp Zama, Japan, 'How long
24 would it take to heal my leg?' And they said, 'About a year, and you're going home.'
25 And that's a fact both as a patient and as an outpatient at Ft. Dix. It took me a year to get
26 those bones healed up since both of them were shattered.

27 RV: Two questions about that. One, physically, how are you today?

28 DT: The Army did a good job. The bones, when you get that kind of a break and
29 lose bone, they don't grow back together. They kind of grow on top of each other. And
30 so on my right leg, I lost about a half inch. But the leg became so calcified that the leg
31 was probably stronger than the other leg. And I was able to go in the Army Reserve

1 Special Forces for twenty-two years, and I was able to get by with all the runs because I
2 was just at that point where a half inch, the spine would adjust without having to use lifts
3 in your shoe or anything like that. Although at the end, the last two years of my reserve
4 duty, my ankle and my knee started to hurt from all that extra pounding through the years
5 when I was running for physical fitness tests and that kind of thing.

6 RV: Second question. You said you had not gotten over this? Still to this day
7 that you're kind of struggling with this. I don't want this to sound like an obvious
8 question, but why is that? You know, obviously they're emotionally, physically, but tell
9 me a little bit more about that.

10 DT: I think that I missed my men. I would like to have been there to help them
11 get through their tour. I think that's the main reason. And secondly, I was planning to be
12 a career soldier and I missed opportunities that...or missed...yeah, opportunities for field
13 experience that I should have had. I remember later, about a month and a half after I was
14 wounded, the entire battalion went on an operation in the Tra Bong Mountains against an
15 NVA regiment. May have been part of the same regiment that I found, and they located
16 an NVA hospital and a bunch of other things, and I kind of wished when I found that out,
17 when I was at the Ft. Dix hospital, some men from the battalion came through there and
18 we talked, then I was really upset that I missed out on that as a career soldier. That was a
19 battalion-sized operation, and that would have been interesting to be on.

20 RV: Well, you made colonel, right?

21 DT: Yeah.

22 RV: I mean, you had a long, successful career after this. And your men, when
23 you say you miss your men, do you miss them as they were that day you left them, or do
24 you...you've been able to reconnect with some of them.

25 DT: Yeah, after a while, you kind of bury all of that and you get on with the
26 mission of life. I was married and I was trying to develop a career in the business world.
27 I decided not to stay in the Army. After Ft. Dix, my wife and I...well, my fiancé and I
28 were both assigned to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, where I was in charge of a small arms
29 training committee for the 3rd Advanced Individual Training Brigade, and my wife
30 worked at the hospital. At that point, they were bringing in the volunteer Army concept,
31 which was known as VOLAR. And the standards just fell out of the roof. I mean, the

1 standards were lowered because they wanted people to feel like this was an 8:00 to 10:00
2 job. 8:00 to 5:00 job. And so it wasn't the Army that I joined, and I decided that this
3 whole transition to a volunteer Army, which would be ugly for at least eight years, that
4 would be the key portion of my career, and so I just didn't want to deal with it, so I got
5 out. I finished my college at the University of South Carolina after I got out until my
6 wife finished her military tour, and I interviewed with the BF Goodrich Company, which
7 was located in Ohio, where my wife was from. And I had no desire to go back to New
8 Jersey. It was too crowded. And so I went to work for BF Goodrich and spent twenty-
9 eight years working for them and a company that my division was spun off to. And in
10 the business world, I did want to continue some military activity in the reserve because of
11 all the work I had done with all the training I had, and the only infantry reserve unit in the
12 state of Ohio was Special Forces. They had a Special Forces battalion. And so I applied
13 and I got into the Special Forces battalion and I went to the different training that was
14 required and I became Special Forces qualified.

15 RV: Ok. Dave, why don't we take a break for a moment and when we come
16 back, we can talk about some more Vietnam-related issues.

17 DT: Yeah, that's a good idea. I need to take a break.

18 RV: Ok Dave, continuing. Tell me, when you got back to New Jersey, I want to
19 ask about two things specifically. One, how much did you keep up the war and what was
20 happening and two, I want to know about how you met your wife. If you want to talk
21 about the second issue.

22 DT: Yeah, sure. I tried to keep up with the war as much as I could. The only
23 chance I had to learn what my unit was doing, my battalion, was if I were to find
24 somebody coming through the hospital from that battalion, and that happened two or
25 three times. But other than that, it was hard to know what was happening with my men.
26 And frankly, after a fashion when I met my wife, you know I got more involved in trying
27 to develop a life with her and getting on with my healing and my military assignments
28 and that kind of thing. I met my wife at the hospital. Her family thought that she was the
29 one who nursed me back to health, but in fact I met her at a party. When I was on
30 outpatient status, I stayed in the nurses' quarters, which was across the lawn from the
31 hospital.

1 RV: That's a pretty good deal.

2 DT: Yeah, it was. I mean, about half of the quarters were empty of nurses
3 because they were all in Vietnam, and so people like me who were on outpatient status
4 were placed in those quarters so we didn't have far to go to get to the hospital. And it
5 made for a delightful time at the end of the workday, we'd always in the warm weather,
6 we'd get out there. They had some picnic tables and some other things and somebody
7 would bring over a bunch of beer and we'd just sit around and talk. In those days, you
8 were either coming back from Vietnam or you were going to Vietnam. My roommate
9 and I decided to host a party one night. And so we had all the booze and everything in
10 our room and it was kind of a 'Come one, come all.' Just walk in the door, and my future
11 wife walked in. She had just been assigned there not too long. She was taking the
12 operating room nurse's course at Ft. Dix. And she came in. Her date was an artillery
13 officer, and so we met there. I had been sufficiently drunk, but I asked her for a dance
14 and I danced with her. And at that point in time, I had a full-length leg cast on my bad
15 leg, and I was not supposed to put any weight on it. I had two crutches. Well, I had been
16 drinking so much that I just threw the crutches away and I was just dancing on the leg,
17 feeling no pain. And at that point in time, my roommate – there were two of us. We had
18 two bedrooms, a common sitting area and a kitchenette for the rooms, and my roommate
19 was an orthopedic surgeon that worked at the hospital. And so...because these were
20 officer quarters. And so the next morning, I got up and I had this pain in my leg, and
21 looked down and here, the whole cast had cracked.

22 RV: Ooh.

23 DT: And so...of course I didn't feel it the night before.

24 RV: Right.

25 DT: And my roommate came over from his room and he looked at me and he
26 said, 'You infantry types are all the same.' And so he went over to the hospital and
27 brought back some Plaster of Paris and patched up my leg. Had he reported me, I could
28 have been in serious trouble. But you know, you don't do that to buddies. But anyway,
29 my fiancé was across the lawn in another building, and so I made contact with her and we
30 started to date and everything and then it got serious. I met her in October of 1969 and
31 by January, we were engaged and we got married the following July.

1 RV: Wow.

2 DT: So it was a short courtship, but we felt we were right for each other and I
3 guess we were.

4 RV: Yeah, it sounds like it. What kind of a reception did you have when you
5 came home? You went, I guess, military transport?

6 DT: Yeah, I was fortunate in the sense that I did not have to put up with any of
7 the abuse. I was unfortunate that I came back the way I did. And I'll never forget this.
8 The plane left Camp Zama, Japan, went through Alaska, and eventually ended up at Ft.
9 Dix at the air base next to it. And we were placed in a hospital bus with a lot of stretchers
10 and were driven to the Ft. Dix hospital. Walson Army Hospital, it's W-A-L-S-O-N, and
11 the bus pulled up to the dock. It was late at night and the doors opened and this Army
12 major came into the bus. His chest was full of medals, including I think he had a
13 Distinguished Service Cross, if I recall. And he said, 'On behalf of the commanding
14 general of Ft. Dix, New Jersey, and myself, we want to welcome you home and thank
15 you for serving your country.' And to me, that's all I require. And as they were
16 wheeling me out from the bus, I just looked at him and I said, 'Thank you. I appreciate
17 it.' To me that was all that I required. That was man-to-man, soldier-to-soldier, and you
18 know. I felt good about that. Most people didn't even get that.

19 RV: Yeah, you're exactly right. You're exactly right. Over the years, have you
20 shared that with other veterans in the Americal Veterans Association or others?

21 DT: Only when it comes up. I don't go out of my way to express that.

22 RV: Yeah. Ok. What...I mean, how long were you there, first of all,
23 recovering?

24 DT: I was there a year.

25 RV: At Ft. Dix?

26 DT: At Ft. Dix. After about six months or so, then I went on outpatient status,
27 and so I wouldn't be bored, the medical company at Ft. Dix was actually a battalion-sized
28 unit. They had medical personnel all over New Jersey and New York, headquartered at
29 Ft. Dix, and so the training officer, who was an MSC officer, was leaving and so I
30 volunteered to be the training officer so I could have something to do during the day.
31 And that's what I did, and so it worked out fairly well while I was there. My

1 roommate...my second roommate when I was bedridden was a helicopter pilot who had
2 been shot in the leg, and the bullet traveled up the leg and out the upper thigh, and his leg
3 looked like the Grand Canyon, and I became close to him and it was nip and tuck for him,
4 whether or not they could keep the leg. But they finally did keep it, although I mean it
5 looked ugly as sin. It was just a big gouge in the leg all the way up. But he was able to
6 eventually keep it. And this man was a warrant officer, and warrant officers know a lot.
7 They know all the ins and outs of the Army, and he told me that since I was going to be
8 there a year, I could apply for disability. Social Security disability. And that's what I
9 did. So I think I ended up, towards the end of my year tour, I think I ended up getting a
10 check for about fifteen hundred dollars, which was a nice piece of change in those days.

11 RV: Yeah. Definitely.

12 DT: My first roommate when I was first brought in to Ft. Dix, I was put into a
13 room. It was a young kid next to me and I couldn't figure out what was wrong with him.
14 And I think it was the next day after I was there, his wife visited him, who was a very
15 pretty young girl from northern New Jersey, and after she left you know one of the
16 orderlies came in and I whispered to him, 'What's wrong with this kid?' And he said,
17 'Well, he just couldn't make it through basic training. He just got too traumatized by the
18 situation. He was having a mental breakdown.' And I looked at the orderly and I said,
19 'You get me the fuck out of this room or I will be beating on him.' He said, 'Well, this is
20 the room you were assigned.' And I said, 'I'm telling you.' So his boss, a black
21 sergeant, a medic came in and I said, 'I do not want to be in the same room with this
22 man.' And he didn't question it and he got me out, then he put me in with that helicopter
23 pilot, which was great. So.

24 RV: Ok.

25 DT: But as I mentioned earlier, I went to Ft. Jackson, got out, went in to finish
26 my college, and went to Ohio to work for BF Goodrich, joined the Army Special Forces
27 Reserve, where I ended up putting in a career for twenty-two years in the reserve, and I
28 think for me, that helped a lot because I still had a part of the military in my life, and so I
29 wasn't totally divorced of the military, and I think hindsight, that was good for me
30 because the military meant so much to me. Had I been totally divorced from it and just

1 got back into civilian life, I think maybe I would have struggled more with the Vietnam
2 experience than what I did.

3 RV: And you're also a leader in the Americal Division Veterans' Association.

4 DT: Yes. This only happened maybe three or four years ago, I became active in
5 that because I was retired, my children were grown, out of the house, and I had more time
6 and I'm just really enjoying it.

7 RV: That's great. Tell me about your transition to civilian life back then. What
8 was that like? Was it hard for you when you went to work for BG Goodrich? Or
9 actually, when you went back to college.

10 DT: College was interesting because you had two types of students, and I had
11 two years of college before I went into the Army, so I wanted to get my remaining two
12 years for a Bachelor's Degree so I could get into the workforce. And having been in
13 Vietnam and being married, I had a sense of purpose. And the other veterans at the
14 university like me that had been to Vietnam all were the same way. We wanted to get
15 our degrees and get out. I finished two years of college in fourteen months with a 3.5
16 academic average in the business school. This they had brought in the computers and
17 everything else, so we were leading edge even though it was University of South
18 Carolina, they had an excellent business school. And so the veterans, all we did was
19 study hard and we just wanted to get on with our lives. Then you had the other students
20 on the campus that were just out of high school, and they wouldn't show up to class until
21 about eleven o'clock in the morning, whereas I would take all my classes starting at eight
22 in the morning back to back until lunch, and then I'd spend the rest of the day at home
23 studying until about ten o'clock at night.

24 RV: So, very disciplined.

25 DT: Very disciplined, very focused. We wanted to get on with our lives. Not a
26 lot of antiwar sentiment at the University of South Carolina. There was some, but you
27 know I would, mainly any relationships I had with other students were with other ex-vets.

28 RV: Ok.

29 DT: And the same thing at BF Goodrich. I met a number of folks that were out
30 of the Army that had been in Vietnam, and so the transition was good for me.

1 RV: Do you think that was typical of veterans in general across the country when
2 they went back to school after they were discharged?

3 DT: No, I've talked to veterans. A lot of them became very disenchanted with
4 college because as soon as the colleges and the other students found out they were
5 Vietnam veterans, they were...you know, they were pretty hard on them. And of course,
6 you had the college professors with all this antiwar rhetoric and everything else, and so a
7 number of these students were made to feel like they were second-class people. I did not
8 have that case. And these other good thing that happened to me was, when I interviewed
9 for the job at BF Goodrich, the manager from BF Goodrich that came down to do the
10 interviewing was a former infantry officer that had been to Vietnam.

11 RV: Oh, wow.

12 DT: And so I was the only veteran that interviewed that day, and so let's just say
13 I had a plus up.

14 RV: I would say so.

15 DT: And so we got along just fine and I was the only one invited to go up.

16 RV: How much did you talk about your Vietnam experiences when you came
17 back and after you left the hospital and you got back into civilian life, you were in college
18 and then into BF Goodrich. How much discussion was there? At first, initially, and then
19 through the years?

20 DT: I really never discussed it unless I came across someone else in the reserve
21 or in the business world that was...in the business world, if they were a veteran that had
22 been to Vietnam, I would discuss experiences with them. In the Army Reserve, many of
23 the people I came in contact with had never gone to Vietnam, and so they would ask me
24 and I would share things with them. Other than that, I discussed it with no one.

25 RV: By choice?

26 DT: By choice.

27 RV: Did that mood change over time?

28 DT: Yeah, only in later years, I think when my children grew up, and they would
29 ask me questions and I wouldn't want to share too much, but I'm at that point now where
30 I share a lot and frankly, one of the reasons I'm doing this oral interview is to leave that

1 as a gift to my children, because with the process of an oral history, it requires you to
2 really think about it, and I think this would be a nice gift to give to them.

3 RV: Absolutely. It's one of the reasons we do it as well. It's for you all and for
4 your families. And I wanted to ask you that. Why the detail now? Is it because of them,
5 or is it because of Dave Taylor, or is it because of history?

6 DT: I don't know. I do want them to know, and this is an orderly fashion to
7 collect all my thoughts, and also part of history. I think there are still a lot of stereotypes
8 of people's experiences in Vietnam, and they run across the board. It's very harmful to
9 generalize in any direction. Certainly not everyone was gung ho and certainly not
10 everyone was a drug head. And it's, everyone had their own individual story, and so
11 that's why I think it's important to get as many oral histories as possible.

12 RV: Yes. Let me ask you some questions, get your reflections on some general
13 Vietnam policies and issues. The antiwar movement. Your thoughts.

14 DT: I think it was...I understand why we had it. America is not culturally used
15 to long wars, nor should we be. Otherwise we would become a warrior state. I think that
16 President Johnson should be blamed for much of what happened. He was a liberal
17 President who would have preferred to have spent all his time and money on the great
18 society, the liberal programs of the time. And yet he had this war, and he should have
19 taken all of his time and his expertise and everything else to decide what to do about the
20 war, either to get out or to push it forward to reach a successful conclusion, and he did
21 neither, and that is totally unacceptable. We've learned that, and I think America's
22 policies since then have been reflective of that. We're still learning the lesson, but I think
23 Vietnam has held up every time we have to decide on military action.

24 RV: Do you think Kennedy or Nixon did better or worse than Johnson?

25 DT: I think Kennedy, we just can't judge because some historians say that he
26 probably would never have gone into Vietnam the way we did. Others think that he
27 would have, but we just can't judge. Nixon I think gets a bad rap because he did bring it
28 to a close as expeditiously as he could under the circumstances. And all of the liberal
29 politicians like to blame Nixon when in fact they should be blaming their own liberal
30 president, Johnson, who was far more responsible for the war than Nixon ever was.

1 RV: Right. Ok. What about Vietnamization? You're right there at the, you're
2 getting out in '69, and '70, '71, Vietnamization's in full swing, trying to get the South
3 Vietnamese to take over this war and fight it effectively. What do you think about that
4 policy?

5 DT: I think Vietnamization was good. The problem was, we started it too late.
6 The Marine Corps had the absolute correct idea with early starting into these Combined
7 Action Platoons, or CAP teams. That was the right thing to do, and my experience with
8 the CAP teams in our area, we had a number of them, they were very, very effective. So
9 I think we should have adopted that. The Marine Corps has a history of fighting small
10 wars and insurgencies and pacifying areas. It's in their bloodline, and I think they had
11 the right idea. Not all CAP teams were as good as others, but it was the right concept, the
12 right idea, and I think the Army should have adapted that as well, in addition to using
13 main forces to wipe out the big formations wherever we could find them. And had we
14 done that, I think we would have you know, been a lot further ahead than we were.

15 RV: What – I'm sorry, go ahead.

16 DT: I was just trying to recall a comment I read from somebody on an email who
17 was with an armored cavalry troop, and he made the observation that when he was there
18 in 1970, they saw very little action. He said you know, the enemy had been beaten down
19 so much that you know, it was hard to find them and his question was, 'Why did we
20 leave?' And it begs the question because we know we never lost the military battle. And
21 it was several years later that the North Vietnamese government came out and admitted
22 that they probably lost about a million men and they had around six hundred thousand
23 wounded. And so...but we got to that point too late, after too much time, and so we lost
24 it.

25 RV: Do you think we achieved peace with honor? And I'm quoting Kissinger
26 and Nixon.

27 DT: No, I would not...I don't think we did then. I think with history, to some
28 degree we did achieve peace with honor, looking back at what happened as a result of our
29 sacrifice of Vietnam. At the time, I don't think...at the time we were getting out of
30 Vietnam, I don't think anyone believed we were achieving peace with honor. And I do
31 fault Kissinger. I don't think he was very honest in the way we left Vietnam and leaving

1 all the MIA issue wide open and those kinds of things. But it was a sign of the times.
2 People were just sick of the war and we would get out at any price.

3 RV: What'd you think of the media coverage of the war?

4 DT: I think it was very unfair. I remember one officer at Ft. Jackson telling me
5 that he had been over there. He was a major, and I think he was with the 1st Cavalry
6 Division, and they had just had a major fight, and before that fight the reporters that were
7 with them would ask the GIs, you know 'What do you think about the war?' And the
8 general response was always, 'Hey, I don't particularly want to be in a war but I'm here
9 and I'm going to do the best job I can and do the best I can to get home.' And that was
10 the extent of it. That's not what the media wanted, apparently. After this major battle,
11 this major told me the media came in that had been with this unit before the battle and
12 saw this one soldier sitting on a rock with his head buried in his hands because he lost his
13 best friend, and the reporter came over with a cameraman and he stuck the microphone in
14 this kid's face and said, 'Now what do you think of the war?'

15 RV: Wow.

16 DT: And this major saw this happen. And if I thought I was against the media, I
17 wouldn't want to be a reporter in front of this major, because he never forgot that. And
18 so you know, I think by and large, the media did not do a good job. There are exceptions,
19 but I think they were a reflection of society in general and the frustration that the
20 American society was witnessing.

21 RV: Yeah. What do you think of the one-year rotation policy? This is very
22 different for past wars. Do you think that was effective in Vietnam?

23 DT: I think it was a mistake. I think it should have been more like possible a
24 fourteen- or sixteen-month rotation. And the officers should have stayed in the field
25 longer. Having said that, I mean the officers as it was, we had a rapid turnover of junior
26 officers. They just didn't last that long. But we kept relearning the lessons. There was
27 very little institutional memory for the ground troops. You get a new officer in, and I
28 witnessed this myself in the Batangan Peninsula. You developed an expertise in working
29 in the heavily mined areas, you gained a sixth sense. You could smell the enemy. You
30 could sense it, and yet after six months, you leave and some brand-new officer comes in,
31 and as well trained as he may have been, it takes him a while to gain that sense, and that

1 comes at a price. So yeah, I think we should have stayed in the field longer, but it was
2 not to be.

3 RV: Right. The body count policy. You know, this I'm sure you're familiar with
4 it, the government basically saying, or the military commander saying, one way to
5 measure progress in the war is to count the number of enemy killed and if we continue to
6 wear them down day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, then
7 eventually they're going to run out and they will lose their will to continue to fight. Was
8 this kind of attitude/strategy effective when it was really going, basically from '65 to just
9 post-TET. This is before you were there, but I just wanted to get your opinion on that.

10 DT: Yeah. I think that was an outgrowth of Westmoreland's conventional view
11 towards the war and other division commanders and brigade commanders, the same
12 thing. So success was measured by body count, and so you had some more of the
13 aggressive commanders, you know wanted those body counts regardless from what I
14 know from my battalion and the change from battalion commander to battalion
15 commander. But generally speaking in my battalion, body counts were not pushed.
16 What we placed more emphasis on was to control an area and keep the Viet Cong from
17 coming into the area to influence the civilians in the area.

18 RV: Right.

19 DT: And so, certainly at the time I was there in 1969, it was kind of hard to get a
20 body count because the Viet Cong were very elusive. If you were able to find them and
21 kill let's say, three or four, that was considered to be a pretty good job. And so that's the
22 stage the war had gotten down to. And so we were more concerned about keeping the
23 Viet Cong out of the populated areas so that the rice harvests could be gotten and those
24 kinds of things.

25 RV: Dave, I'd like to ask you a couple of more personal questions. Answer them
26 only if you feel comfortable and want to. Have you experienced in your thirty plus
27 years...well, not quite that much yet, of being back, PTSD incidents? Anything like that
28 going on for you?

29 DT: No, nothing at all. The only thing is loud sounds cause me concern. But
30 that's...and that's probably from Vietnam, but I know people that have never been to
31 Vietnam that it's the same issue. And that was a problem early on, the first two years

1 after I got back from Vietnam. Loud noises and sounds would upset me. But other than
2 that, no. I've been very blessed. I think part of it has to do with my faith. I was married
3 in 1970, never went to church. My wife went every week as a good Catholic. But I, you
4 know I was an Airborne Ranger, I didn't need church. Up until, that is, the spring of
5 1975 when my wife was at school at night and I was at home watching our baby, and the
6 final offensive where the North took over the South, and I know one night I was looking
7 at the TV. That view of the helicopter landing on top of that building in Saigon and the
8 last people getting on the helicopter to go out, and I just lost it because I thought we
9 should have won it, we could have won it. If we were willing to stay just like we stayed
10 in Korea until that country stabilized itself politically, economically, I think we could
11 have made it happen. But we abandoned them, and when I saw that image on TV and I
12 thought about all those people that died for nothing, and so I lost it and kind of fell to the
13 floor. And so I started going to church. I'd been on that faith journey ever since. So I
14 think that was a big help to me.

15 RV: That was a catalyst even for you finding some deeper spirituality?

16 DT: Absolutely.

17 RV: April 30 of '75?

18 DT: Absolutely. Maybe, you know it happened, it was in the Easter season and
19 all of that kind of came together for me.

20 RV: How has Vietnam most affected you, Dave, do you think looking back?

21 DT: Probably it has affected my personality in the sense that I don't put up with a
22 lot of bullshit.

23 RV: Is that you, the military, or is it Vietnam, or a combination?

24 DT: I think it was probably a combination. I tend to be, as my daughter says,
25 anal-retentive. Very detail oriented. Planning always ahead. You know, try not to take
26 too many risks. And I think that all stems from being a small unit leader where you don't
27 – you know, you always got to be thinking about what's down the road. But it hasn't
28 been so much of that that it...I think was really in a negative way, it's just the way I am.

29 RV: Right. What do you think was the most significant thing that you've learned
30 while you were there in Vietnam? And it might echo what you just said, but is there

1 something you can put your finger on that Dave Taylor did not have, really consciously at
2 least before you went and then something you've had since?

3 DT: I think the one thing as a military professional is the value of training. I felt
4 very trained and able to do the job over there and I saw some of my enlisted personnel
5 that were not highly trained, and how I had to get them trained. I think also the value of
6 motivation. When we got into the '69 timeframe when I was over there, my men were
7 not very aggressive. They were just trying to get through their year, and so I had to be
8 the aggressive one for the platoon, but I didn't get them into harm's way. It's just that if
9 you look back in the early years from '65 and '66 and those kinds of things, I mean the
10 men were over there, they had a mission, they were aggressive, just like they are in Iraq
11 today. And it's like, 'Ok, we have a mission, let's win this thing.' And I've had soldiers
12 tell me, officers tell me, I mean if anyone had a beef against America, it would be some
13 of these kids coming out of the inner city. This one officer had Puerto Rican kids from
14 New York; they were missing teeth and everything else, you know from the ghettos, and
15 if anybody had a reason to or had a beef about going to war for a country where they
16 were not getting a lot from the country, it was these kids. But yet they were – I mean,
17 they would put K-bar knives in their teeth and crawl down into these tunnels, looking for
18 the VC, and that's the way it was.

19 RV: Dave, why is that? Why do you think that people today don't see the
20 Vietnam veterans, and you guys over there, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one,
21 twenty-two years old, doing this kind of stuff? I mean, doing...serving the country,
22 doing the same thing that veterans have done in all past wars for the United States and
23 since?

24 DT: Because we didn't complete it successfully. And you know in the early
25 years, I'd say '65 to early '68, you had that aggressive spirit I just described that soldiers
26 thought it was still winnable and they wanted to be part of that. After that, you would
27 still find that when units came under fire. People would find the courage to do what they
28 had to do. They just weren't as aggressive without being pressed, but if pressed they did
29 do the job. And I think a lot of it has to do with the bonds they develop within the unit
30 and the dishonor of letting each other down and you know, they all wanted to get home,

1 but they wanted to make sure their buddy got home with them. And I think you know,
2 that created that spirit when it had to be there.

3 RV: Right. Ok. Is there anything that you would change about your Vietnam
4 experience if you could?

5 DT: Yeah, I would have zigged instead of zagged that day I was running to the
6 ditch. Other than that, I don't think I would have changed anything. I did the best I
7 could. I wish the battalion commander would not have sent me in that day. I know why
8 he did it. Oh, and I forgot to mention. Many years later, about four years ago, I
9 contacted my company commander. Company commander. And he told me; one of the
10 many things we talked about was that day the helicopter was shot down, and I told him I
11 remember that look of distress on his face, and I said I never forgot that look and he
12 never said a thing when the battalion commander told me to go in. And he said, 'The
13 reason was, when the battalion commander, when we were flying on the helicopter to
14 come into your location, the battalion commander said, 'I'm going to have Taylor take
15 some men on my helicopter and go in after that helicopter was shot down', and my
16 company commander said, 'I argued with the battalion commander, 'Don't do that. Once
17 you send him in on the helicopter, you've lost all control. Let me get the armored
18 personnel carriers that are further down the road, and I will put men on those and we will
19 go in over land so we have some control'. And the battalion commander ruled him out.
20 And so when they landed at my position, my company commander had lost the argument
21 and he knew that it was going to be bad things happening. You know, where he wanted
22 to control it and the battalion commander said, 'No, I'm going to do it my way.' And
23 so...and the other thing the company commander said was, the Light Observation
24 Helicopter pilot that contacted me, he was supposed to be remaining on LZ Gator with
25 the gunship and only to come off of LZ Gator if we needed them, and the company
26 commander was in charge of that operation, and he told that helicopter pilot in no
27 uncertain terms, 'You will not leave LZ Gator unless I call for you.' Because the
28 company commander wanted to control the situation. He did not want it to get out of
29 hand, he just wanted to clear the road, get the convoys through and get out. The
30 helicopter pilot had heard on the radio back at the battalion that I was catching sniper fire,
31 and on his own he decided to get in his helicopter and come down. He was not told to do

1 that, and so my company commander was very upset that he disobeyed the directions he
2 was given. And for that, he got himself killed and a number of other people.

3 RV: Yeah. That's tough.

4 DT: Yeah. I mean, he was...I talked to other pilots in his unit since then, and he
5 was an aggressive kind of guy, he wanted to go down where the action was, but you
6 know. That's what happened.

7 RV: Right. Dave, you mentioned this before. Could you just tell me about what
8 you think were the major lessons were from the Vietnam War for the United States?

9 DT: Never commit troops to war unless you're committed to win the war, to win
10 the military action. Always have a sound objective that everyone can understand, and
11 have an exit strategy. You've got to be able to define what winning is. When you've
12 accomplished the objective. If you can't do that, don't even get involved.

13 RV: Ok. Dave, let's take a brief break. Ok Dave, let's continue. A couple
14 questions about popular culture in Vietnam. Do you read books on Vietnam?

15 DT: Yes.

16 RV: Have you found any particularly revealing ones that you would want to
17 discuss or talk about?

18 DT: Let's see here. I had some recent books that I'm working on now that
19 looked good. I thought that the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* was very good.
20 Introspective book, Lewis Sorley's *A Better War* I thought was excellent. The book, *If I*
21 *Die in a Combat Zone* by Tim O'Brien, who was in our battalion. I thought that was
22 good. And you know, there are a number of them I think that are good. Some of them
23 are, if they're written by people who were there, they may not win any literacy awards of
24 anything like that, but I think they all have value in terms of talking about the war in the
25 context that they experienced it.

26 RV: Ok. What about movies on Vietnam? Do you avoid those, or do you watch
27 them?

28 DT: The movies by and large have been a big disappointment, and I remember
29 many years ago when the movie *Platoon* came out, I was not only disappointed, I was
30 angry because many mothers and fathers who lost their sons in Vietnam may have seen
31 that movie and had been given the impression that this is the way it was. And it was just

1 so far out, but the man who produced it or directed it, Oliver Stone, is so far out to the left
2 he had an agenda that overcame the reality. In fact, that particular movie, I came in
3 contact with the company commander who actually commanded the company Oliver
4 Stone was in and took him to task for the movie. And Oliver Stone's response was,
5 'Well, I'm in Hollywood. I have creative license.' And the company commander said,
6 'No, you don't. The minute you introduce at the beginning of the movie, you mention
7 the actual battalion designation, so you didn't give a fictitious unit, you actually gave a
8 real battalion designation and a company designation.' He said, 'From that point on, you
9 had an obligation to be accurate, and you are not.' And so this individual wrote a book
10 about what really happened with the company when it was there to try to set the record
11 straight. But I think by and large, all of them were disappointing. The movie *We Were*
12 *Soldiers* I think is good. It's still, factually they got some things wrong for the necessity
13 of Hollywood, I guess. But by and large, I think the movies on Vietnam were
14 disappointing.

15 RV: Ok. Do you think it's...I mean, how do you make a good movie on
16 Vietnam? What would you say? Is that doable?

17 DT: I think it's doable. And I think *We Were Soldiers* made a good attempt at it.
18 I also think the movie *Hamburger Hill* was very good and accurate. Towards the end, it
19 got a little off balance with the talking to the reporter on the hill at the end of the battle. I
20 thought that was a little off-balance. But by and large, I think that gave a good portrayal
21 of how the GIs lived and were buddies together, that kind of thing.

22 RV: Dave, you went back to Vietnam in 1997. Have you been back at all since
23 then?

24 DT: I went back in '97 mainly to see the country as a tourist. I only stopped in
25 the village where I was just for a few minutes and then on top of my hill where my
26 battalion base camp was because I was on my way down the coastline to Quang Ngai, so
27 I didn't have a lot of time there. And then in September of 2003, I went back for ten days
28 and I spent the entire time in the area that I was during the war, and this was in
29 conjunction with getting more background information for my book, as well as just to
30 take some time to really dwell on the ground, the people, and everything else. And that
31 was a very fulfilling trip.

1 RV: What was it like in '97, your first time back? What emotions did you
2 experience when you were landing I presume at Hanoi and...or did you go into Ho Chi
3 Minh City?

4 DT: Yeah, I came through Hanoi and then down to Da Nang. I was very
5 nervous.

6 RV: Why were you nervous?

7 DT: I wasn't sure how the people would receive me. I wasn't sure how much I'd
8 be able to get to see that I wanted to see. But by and large, the people were just very
9 friendly and I saw every bit as much as I wanted to see. So the one time that made me
10 very nervous was the last night I spent in Da Nang before I was to head south, and that
11 next day I knew that I would be able to locate LZ Gator and get up on that hill as well as
12 the village that I was at north of Gator, and I knew I'd be able to find that. I still had my
13 map and I was very apprehensive about that day, so as I did every day I was in Da Nang I
14 went to Mass, Catholic Mass in the afternoon. About three blocks from my hotel, there
15 was a large Catholic cathedral, Vietnamese, and the entire Mass was in Vietnamese. But
16 I went there and had some things happen that I think were God-incidents, and that just
17 calmed, you know made everything calm for me.

18 RV: Can you talk about that? Or would you like to talk about that?

19 DT: Well, what I would normally do every day when I'd go to Mass, there was a
20 grotto outside the cathedral, and so I would go there first to pray the rosary and then I
21 would go into Mass. And then walk back to my hotel and find some place to eat. This
22 time, I decided to go to the church to pray the rosary, and I walked up to the church there
23 was this Vietnamese man just standing there. I had not seen him before. And he's
24 waving at me to follow him. And I'm pointing to the church and the rosary in my hand,
25 as much to say, 'No, I'm going to go into the church and pray the rosary,' and he shook
26 his head no to say, 'Follow me.' And I'm thinking, 'What's happening here?' So I
27 followed him into this building next to the cathedral and we're walking through the
28 building and through these little corridors, and I'm thinking, 'What am I doing here?
29 What's going on?' And he finally came into this room with this priest that was on the
30 other side of the room at his desk. Now this priest had gray hair, he was old, he could
31 have been the bishop for all I know. I don't know. But this Vietnamese man was

1 chatting to this priest and I would think it's because he saw me going to Mass every day.
2 And I'm just like, mesmerized with the whole thing and I'm still holding the rosary in my
3 hand. This kindly old priest got up, his kind eyes looking at me. He came over, he took
4 the rosary out of my hand, went over, and blessed it with holy water, and then gave it
5 back to me. And at that moment, a country that was once a killing zone became a healing
6 ground. And that just calmed me down and I was ready to move on with the next day
7 with the full confidence that I'd be able to get through it.

8 RV: What was the other incident?

9 DT: Oh, that was it. Yeah.

10 RV: You said when you were coming in country you were nervous and you
11 didn't know how the people would treat you. Were you worried about you, Dave Taylor
12 the American, or you, Dave Taylor the Vietnam veteran? Or both?

13 DT: The American, because they did not know I was a veteran. Maybe they
14 could surmise that. The one thing that comes to my mind when I flew into Hanoi, I
15 remember during the war, *Newsweek* ran a cover story on the face of the Viet Cong. And
16 on the cover was this Viet Cong soldier being pulled out of a spider hole or a tunnel, and
17 he had this shock of black hair on him and these beady eyes, just very intense eyes. And
18 so I get off the plane in Hanoi and I go through customs, and here's this customs officer,
19 and it's the same guy. It looks just like the guy that I remembered on that cover many
20 years before. Shock of black hair, the intense look, you know, the beady eyes, and I just
21 went, 'Oh, my...' And then of course they had weapons just hanging around. But he just
22 looked at my passport and just waved me through. He didn't look at my luggage or
23 anything. And so that kind of...well, I thought, 'Well if they're not going to mess with
24 me, this will probably be a good trip.'

25 RV: Do you remember, I've been there a couple times in that airport, and this is
26 the old – at least in '97, that would have been the old airport?

27 DT: Yeah.

28 RV: And you stand there in those lines, and they've got...they're kind of
29 menacing looking. Well not purposely, maybe, but maybe so. They're staring you down,
30 they're in uniform, and you are thinking now, 'What are they going to do?' I can only

1 imagine you as a veteran of the conflict thinking, ‘This guy is going to harass me. He
2 might give me a hard time. He might make this very difficult’

3 DT: It was in the back of my mind, you know. And I can see other veterans who
4 may have had some mental difficulties or emotional difficulties, I should say. That may
5 have unnerved them, that experience. But I don’t recall in 2003 when I went, I didn’t
6 even see that. It was much more modern situation. A much more friendly building
7 décor, if you will. But I do remember that in ’97, it was a bit unnerving.

8 RV: Differences between Vietnam in ’97 and 2003. Anything stand out?

9 DT: Night and day.

10 RV: Yeah? How so?

11 DT: Night and day. When I went back in ’97, I could find the village and the
12 hooch I stayed in, everything looked pretty much the way it did during the war. Six years
13 later when I came back, I didn’t recognize the place because they had...in that six years,
14 they had developed a lot of cottage industries in the towns making brick. And so it was
15 very difficult to find a Vietnamese house that was with thatched what we call hooch in
16 the war. They had all upgraded their housing to brick. You would have to go off the
17 main highways in the hinter-land to find that. So I was just absolutely amazed at the
18 turnover. The towns were bigger, there were some new roads out on the Batangan
19 Peninsula that had just been built. They were building a refinery off the coast in the
20 Batangan Peninsula in that area that was just so heavily mined, so I think the Vietnamese
21 government had reached equilibrium where finally, they were on the upturn in terms of
22 improving their economy, and I think the Socialist government had relaxed enough that
23 now some Capitalism could take hold and the place was really starting to boom.

24 RV: Do you think in the future of Vietnam, you see more and more of the
25 Capitalist society and edging toward that Democratic society or a Vietnamese-style
26 Democracy, or do you see the current government being able to succeed in keeping
27 things going, even after the current generation of leaders dies out?

28 DT: No, I think it will be a Vietnamese-style Democracy down the road once the
29 old line die off, and many of them are. And the reason I think that is very simple. When
30 I was in Saigon my first trip back in ’97, I was at the roof of the Rex Hotel looking down
31 at the main plaza in front of the city hall, Saigon City Hall, and at night the Vietnamese

1 come out with their children when it's cooler, and they are all playing in the park and all
2 this, and it became very apparent to me that all they want for themselves and their
3 families is a better future. And that's from the human heart, and that cannot be stopped.
4 It's the yearning of the human heart to have freedom, to have a better future for their
5 children, and I think that's what's going to drive it. And the Vietnamese don't want to –
6 the Vietnamese government does not want to be left in the backwater of perhaps of the
7 antiquated system, much like Cuba is today under Fidel Castro.

8 RV: Right.

9 DT: And I think they're smart enough to see that. They've reunited their
10 country. The only thing that will keep them from growing now is their own foolishness,
11 and I don't think they're going to let that happen.

12 RV: Ok. Eighty percent of the country is under the age of forty. I want to ask
13 you another question based on my experience there. When I spoke to the younger
14 generation, I'm talking high school, college, and graduate students, but also those in their
15 thirties and forties, they really – what I got, the impression was they really wanted to
16 move beyond the war. They really could not understand, you know what they called my
17 fascination with the war, and as much as I tried to explain that I was a history student of
18 the war and a professional historian and trying to understand, they would smile and
19 answer our questions, but then they would want to change the subject. And it was not
20 because they were being monitored or that they felt uncomfortable. And I asked them
21 and they simply said, 'We want to move past.' Why is it – my impression again and you
22 might have something different. Why is it easier for the Vietnamese to move past this
23 thing than it is for us, the Americans? After all, the war was fought there in their country.
24 They lost much more than we did.

25 DT: Right. And I agree and I think it's because of that yearning of the human
26 spirit. The government's stand of course is that the people are still suffering from Agent
27 Orange and those kinds of things. The younger population, they just want to get on.
28 They sense that they can have a great future, there's more opportunity available for them,
29 and I think as young people everywhere, even in this country, that's more relevant to
30 them than what happened in the past. I do remember also when I went back in '97, there
31 were still more people alive that were there in the war. They were older of course, and I

1 spoke to some of them here and there, and as much as the government propaganda tried
2 to paint a picture of the Americans being all wrong and the North Vietnamese being all
3 right, and they do that in their museums with pictures of the My Lai massacre and those
4 kind of things. It was very apparent to me that the new generation could see past that.
5 There's enough people on the side of the South, the American side during the war that
6 have passed down through their families the sacrifice of the Americans, the harshness of
7 the Communists, the brutality of the Communists during the war and all their massacres
8 that all of the government propaganda is not going to erase that memory passed down
9 from generation to generation. And so I think many of the people in the South have a
10 much more balanced view of what actually happened there than what the government
11 propaganda would suggest. But at this point in time as you suggest, the people want to
12 get beyond all of that and just make life better for themselves.

13 RV: That makes sense. I mean, it's almost a logical conclusion to what the
14 human heart wants and desires.

15 DT: Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's the genius of the, I think our creation
16 that we can yearn for something better and not spend too much time dwelling on the past.

17 RV: Have you had much contact with Vietnamese here in the United States,
18 Dave?

19 DT: No. We have a Vietnamese community in the Cleveland, Ohio, area. I've
20 not gone out of my way to cultivate any connections there.

21 RV: Ok. You've touched on this in one of your recent previous answers, but let
22 me ask you this anyway. I think you can provide some good insight because of your
23 involvement with the Americal Association as well as traveling back to Vietnam and
24 looking at this bigger context. What do you think are the major myths and/or
25 misconceptions of the American soldier in Vietnam?

26 DT: I think the major myths are that in some sense, the Vietnam veteran is a
27 misfit because of his experience in Vietnam, and I think that's taken entirely out of
28 context. We must go back to the early '60s. We were going through a cultural
29 revolution. Young people questioned authority. I think frankly we got a little too much
30 from our World War II generation, and so all of this was starting to generate a lot of
31 questioning of authority. Drugs, all of these kinds of things. And I daresay, if we had not

1 had the Vietnam War, we still would have had all of this cultural and social upheaval
2 because those were the times we lived in. What the Vietnam War did was perhaps
3 aggravate that more because it became a focal point for protests and for questioning
4 authority. Had we not had that focal point, I think there would have been other things
5 that the generation would have grabbed onto, particularly social injustice with racism and
6 that kind of thing. And the other point would be that a lot of people blame drugs and
7 alcohol and all that kind of thing because of Vietnam, but the war had gone on long
8 enough that when you get into the '68, '69, '70 timeframe, you're actually finding people
9 being drafted in the Army and going over there that had already been weaned on drugs
10 and alcohol and antiwar sentiment, it's just they got caught up in the draft. Vietnam did
11 not do that to them; it was the culture of the '60s that made them the protestors and the
12 druggies and all that other stuff. It wasn't Vietnam, yet they got over there and that stuff
13 was easier to get to, and then they may find it convenient to blame it on Vietnam when in
14 fact, I think it was just a cultural thing that was happening anyway in the '60s. My
15 opinion.

16 RV: Yeah, well that's what this is about. How has the government taken care of
17 or not taken care of the Vietnam veterans since the war?

18 DT: I think the government by and large has done a good job. I do fault the
19 government for fighting this Agent Orange thing so long. I think they could have been
20 more forthcoming earlier with the Agent Orange issue. I have a disability from my
21 wound. It's not a lot of money, but I wanted that – I applied for that shortly before I left
22 the Army Reserve, and my only reason was because my leg was getting sore and I
23 wanted it covered in case in my old age I started getting arthritis or something. So I did
24 apply for disability and I have one. It's a small one, ten percent. And they were gracious
25 at that. The PTSD thing I think really deserves some real careful scrutiny. I think there
26 are a lot of people that suffer from PTSD. I also believe there are a lot of others who do
27 not, yet are collecting it because I think it's become a gravy train for extra income from a
28 generation that because of lifestyles and everything else from the '60s that maybe they
29 didn't take care of their bodies as well as they should have or their personal income or
30 anything else, and now they're looking for income streams to tide them over as they get
31 older. And this is typical of a government program managed by the government and it is

1 extremely unfortunate because some people really deserve PTSD monies and help, and
2 yet I know many others who have it and they just got into the system, knew how to work
3 the system, and eventually collected this income.

4 RV: Ok.

5 DT: That may not be a popular view, but it's my view.

6 RV: Ok. Again, this is what this is about. I want you to say exactly what you
7 want to say with these issues. Dave, for the younger generation today. What would you
8 tell them about the Vietnam War? I'm talking high school, college students in America.

9 DT: I would tell them, and I do because I go to schools to talk quite a bit, I would
10 tell them that these people were very brave. They were in a war where the national aim
11 was uncertain. They were in a war where they didn't get much support from home. They
12 were in a war that was intensely personal and virtually everyone was guaranteed to see
13 some combat, whether it was being rocketed in your base camp or up front and personal
14 in a firefight. All of the data that I've seen shows that the Vietnam soldier was exposed
15 to a lot more combat than those exposed to in World War II. And they did that with
16 honor, considering everything that was thrown at them, lack of support, unsure aims and
17 the rotation policy and everything else, by and large they did a hell of a good job.

18 RV: Ok. Have you been to Washington, DC and the Vietnam War Memorial
19 there?

20 DT: Yes, many times.

21 RV: Can you tell me about your first trip there, your first experience?

22 DT: My first trip we had, the children were small, or young, and we went for a
23 trip to Washington to go to the White House and the Capitol Building and everything
24 else. The things you could do before 9/11. And we did go to the Wall, and I could feel a
25 lot of emotion swelling up inside me, but I just held it. I just checked it. I did not want to
26 let go in front of my small children. And so we looked at it and then we moved on. I
27 think my wife was a little perplexed that I kind of showed indifference, but I was just
28 trying to manage myself. A year or so after that, I had occasion on a business trip to go
29 to Washington, and I took that occasion to go back to the wall by myself, and that was
30 when it became a healing point for me, and I could spend time there by myself. And
31 since then, now I go, the emotion has changed to awe and respect. It's a place that's a

1 catharsis, and so you know, and I've gone with my kids since they've grown and with
2 middle school kids that my wife teaches and that kind of thing. And it's amazing to me
3 how children of all ages come to that wall and they suddenly become silent and
4 respectful. It just has that ability to change people.

5 RV: Why do you think that is the case?

6 DT: I don't know.

7 RV: Is it the design? Is it...

8 DT: I think it is probably the design. It's just to look at all those names. And
9 anybody can identify with it. They can make it very, very personal. Even if a student did
10 not know anyone who was in the Vietnam War, they can look at those names and feel
11 drawn to them. They could, I think in a sense they could identify with those names, and
12 that makes it very personal for everyone.

13 RV: I imagine you tried to find names of those you knew.

14 DT: Yeah. Yeah. For me, it's the men I lost on the 3rd of June as well as that
15 helicopter pilot and his crew chief. The guy that I got back to the ditch, he eventually
16 lived. I was never able to locate him. He was a strong fellow and he lived. But those
17 names are within the span of about four lines on one section of the Wall, and whenever I
18 look at that, I kind of look for my own name. And it could very easily have been there.
19 So that's the way it was.

20 RV: What about the Moving Wall? Have you been to that?

21 DT: Yes. That came to Ohio a number of years ago and I went to that, and I
22 think that does a very good job as well. Yeah, I've seen veterans come to that. It's like
23 they were in Washington because the names are there, the design is there, the sacrifice is
24 there. So I think it has a lot of meaning for a lot of people.

25 RV: Ok. Dave, I wanted to ask you basically about your experience talking
26 about Vietnam and doing this oral history interview with the Oral History Project here at
27 the Vietnam Archive. What has it been for you? Has it been a good experience or what
28 kind of experience has it been for you?

29 DT: I think it's been good. It's caused me to reflect and kind of put everything
30 together. It's been a catharsis. I think any time that we want to gather and talk about this
31 is a good thing, and so I'm very appreciative of the opportunity you've taken up your

1 time to spend all this time to, you know talk to someone. So it's been good and I
2 appreciate the opportunity.

3 RV: Very good. Is there anything else that you'd like to add or discuss that we
4 have not covered?

5 DT: I don't think so; I think we've covered it all. God bless you and your
6 university and everything you folks do. And God bless America.

7 RV: All right. Thank you very much, Dave. We'll end the oral history interview
8 now with Mr. David Taylor.

9 DT: Thank you very much.

10 RV: Thanks.

11 DT: Bye bye.