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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Kenneth Dicus
Conducted by Dr. John Ron Milam
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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.

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Dr. John Ron Milam: My name is Dr. Ron Milam of Texas Tech University, the Vietnam Center. I am interviewing Ken Dicus today. Ken, first I'd like to just start out by asking you what your MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) was and what your goal was on November 14th, 1965.

Kenneth Dicus: I was a Chief Warrant Officer Two. I was a pilot and an aircraft commander. Our role was to belong to the B Company, 229 Air Assault helicopter battalion. We went in as support for the assault in LZ (Landing Zone) X-Ray and then we participated in LZ Albany also.

JM: Let's talk a little bit about before deployment. When did you arrive at Fort Benning? You were a part of the 11th Air Assault?

KD: Yes.

JM: When did you first get to Benning?

KD: I got to Benning, August of '55 was when I got—'65, I'm sorry.

JM: August of 1965, so you got there just about the point of time. The deployment took place in August of '65.

KD: Well no, I have to back up. I'm trying to remember. I went to Korea in '63, so I came back in '64. It was August of '64, I'm sorry.

JM: Okay, so you had almost a year with the 1st Air Cav in the training process?

1 KD: That's correct.

2 JM: Let's talk a little bit about that training process. There was a period of time
3 where you had to learn to fly these machines together. Then there was a period when you
4 had to learn to fly them with infantry onboard. Those were two separate things?

5 KD: Yes, absolutely. The initial training was—they were very, in fact they had
6 the first D model helicopters, and they were the very short-bladed version. There were
7 difficult and when I say difficult, they weren't difficult to fly, they had a characteristic
8 that they would lift everything you wanted them to lift. On a max performance takeoff,
9 we had several accidents because of the short blades. You had to have a special sign-off
10 on that particular model to learn how to fly. So everybody went to a training exercise and
11 then very shortly thereafter, they converted all of them over to still the same D model but
12 they converted them over to the forty-eight foot long rotor blades and still put the
13 extension in the tailbone, and it stopped the series of crashes that they had. Pretty much
14 made the aircraft a very, very reliable machine.

15 JM: So before they converted to the forty-eight foot rotor wing, the crashes were
16 without troops on board?

17 KD: No, they did have some crashes with troops on board, but as soon as that
18 series started, the helicopter made a fix for it, which was the new blades and the
19 extension. Even during the training phase when people came in and on into the short-
20 bladed version, you're still doing all the training on the assaults and learning to fly
21 formation. The training was very extensive, but it was very thorough also. They used
22 blanks on just like on a normal assault. Instead of using real ammunition, they used
23 blanks so the noise and everything was as realistic as they could possibly make it. The
24 training was very intense. We practiced quite a bit on nighttime assaults. They had
25 pathfinders and initial the pathfinder was supposed to be out in the parachute into the LZ.
26 Set up a series of very small lights and things like that. Well, that worked well and good
27 in training, and it worked well and good in Vietnam. But there were several occasions
28 where, for example, LZ Albany, that was a nighttime landing force and no lights when
29 Captain Spires had to come out with a flashlight and put it down. That's what we landed
30 to, a flashlight in the dark.

1 JM: So this training at Benning that you were going through, with what would
2 become the 1st Air Cav, did you ever anticipate—I know you knew you were going into
3 combat but because Vietnam had not experienced anything like you would experience at
4 X-Ray and Albany and quite frankly the whole war, there wasn't very many like this. Did
5 you anticipate, did you think as a young chopper pilot that you would be going into these
6 kinds of situations that ultimately you did? Do you ever remember having that feeling or
7 was that even less?

8 KD: I think they made it so realistic in the training end of it, that when we got
9 there, just about everything that we did was just like the training scenario. Except real
10 bullets were flying this time versus blanks. Our training prepared us very, very well for
11 all of the action that we saw over there. I would've, you know, I would highly
12 recommend the military to continue that because it's an excellent source for training for
13 combat. It really, truly is. It costs money, but the end result was very, very good.

14 JM: I think we know as historians now, as we go back and study the war, we
15 know that as a military, we got away from that. The kind of training that we used with the
16 1st Cav, the deployment of as a unit and that sort of thing, and after that it became mostly
17 a replacement. I appreciate what you're saying here that it was a special case that we
18 ultimately got away from. So you deploy of August of '65 by ship. You went over on a
19 ship along with your equipment and everything else and you go to Qui Nhon?

20 KD: Yes.

21 JM: Then ultimately on An Khe.

22 KD: Correct.

23 JM: How about in-country training? Compared to what you had done at Benning,
24 you now are in the real combat zone, you got jungles and little bit different weather,
25 although Fort Benning at certain times in the year can be pretty hot. How much in-
26 country training did you do before you started putting troops into combat?

27 KD: Actually, none. They had to work on the helicopters while we were—for the
28 first few days that we were there, because they had them all torn apart and we just flew
29 them off the ship and into An Khe. So most of the things were tuning up the helicopters
30 and getting them ready. It was shortly thereafter that we went into our first actual combat
31 situation and training wise, we had a training officer in the company IP (Initial Point) and

1 we'd go practice full touchdown our rotations, but other than that the training that
2 proceeded us, we just carried over into combat. So when I say training, the original
3 training versus the actual combat operations were basically one and the same.

4 JM: I see. And the base at An Khe, did you experience between your arrival there
5 in August of '65 and November 14th, during that period of time, did the base receive a lot
6 of incoming? Or—there was never a ground attack as I recall

7 KD: No, there was never a ground attack there. I don't—I hear people say that we
8 had mortar attacks, but you have to remember that base was extremely large. But we
9 didn't stay at An Khe a whole lot. We were in the field most of the time.

10 JM: Operating out of An Khe, that was your base camp? Or did you go out—

11 KD: No, we'd go wherever our troops were.

12 JM: Then you'd set up a perimeter and keep the choppers on the ground there, set
13 up with an infantry protecting them and then operating.

14 KD: Right. Then occasionally, we'd actually go out in the area where the troops
15 were at night, we'd spend the night with them out there actually. It didn't happen, you
16 know, that wasn't an everyday occurrence, but it happened quite often.

17 JM: During this period of time, from August to November, the enemy—when you
18 did come into enemy contact, was it basically Viet Cong? There weren't any—

19 KD: Yeah, yes. Most of it was and that was, well our initial operations was
20 primarily in Happy Valley, which was right over the mountain there on the other side,
21 away from An Khe. That was mostly the Viet Cong, the VC. Occasionally, they'd find a
22 North Vietnamese or in a couple of cases there was a Chinese, but other than that, most
23 of it was Viet Cong.

24 JM: And it was small units?

25 KD: Small units, yeah.

26 JM: So when you get word around November 13th I believe, the day before, that
27 there is going to be a major operation, did you go to Pleiku to set that up? Or I mean were
28 you in Pleiku at the time? Or were you still in An Khe?

29 KD: No, we were in Pleiku at the time.

30 JM: So, you were in Pleiku. You'd moved there, relocated your choppers, set up a
31 perimeter there. It wasn't at Camp Holloway though, is that right or was it?

1 KD: It was south of Camp Holloway.

2 JM: South Holloway?

3 KD: Yeah, we used—they actually had the hospital set up on the north side of the
4 runway at Camp Holloway and when you'd come in, you'd land right on the runway. Our
5 units were down on the other end, away from the hospital, south of Camp Holloway.

6 JM: Now, there wasn't yet a Pleiku Air Force Base at that time, is that correct?
7 The air force itself, were they operation out of Pleiku?

8 KD: No, they did not operate out of there, if I remember correctly. Wasn't until—
9 actually the 14th, when the battle got very heavy, they brought the air force in and they
10 were using the runway there.

11 JM: Alright, let's talk about your first knowledge that you're going into X-Ray.
12 You get word that you were going to be part of that operation. Did you have any idea—
13 did anyone have any idea of the extent to which this was going to be what it turns out to
14 be? Did you, as a young chopper pilot, realize this was the real deal and was going to be
15 extensive?

16 KD: Well, to be honest with you, I didn't know that we were even going until the
17 morning of the 14th. I was not informed of anything happening and we were just told to
18 go out and meet at Plei Me there at the base of operations that we were going to use there.
19 When we showed up, all we knew or at least all I knew at the time, was that we were
20 going to have an assault. The one thing that we had a real problem with was that we were
21 very short on maps of the area. Very, very short. Not every helicopter had maps. You
22 always had to go to somebody, to find out where the LZs were and I always took a pad of
23 paper with me and just general directions from where you're at and where you're
24 operating from. Figure out the mileage and say, "Okay, it's here and here," and you put a
25 frequency down. So that's where we knew or at least I knew we were going, and we had
26 the frequency. Now some of the other LZs out there, at that time, didn't even know
27 existed. Like Falcon, for example. Didn't have a clue that it was there. Only thing that we
28 knew at the time was the Plei Me, Pleiku, and LZ X-Ray. Later on in the day though, we
29 certainly found out that there were more places out there than what we knew about.

30 JM: So what was your assignment, that morning of November 14th? You were
31 going to carry troops onto LZ X-Ray. Were you on the first lift?

1 KD: First lift. We made four lifts that day. I was in all four of them. Just before
2 the LZ was closed, on our last lift in, I ended up making one more landing in there than
3 the other people did, only for the fact that one of the radio operators, the RTO (Radio
4 Telephone Operator) sitting in the back of the helicopter got tangled up in the seat
5 webbing with his radio. I don't have a clue how it happened, but all the troops jumped
6 out and he was trying to untangle himself. Well, I had to leave because we had one more
7 flight. Well, I needed the radio operator. So I took off, flew around and came in behind
8 the last flight and landed then.

9 JM: With one man?

10 KD: Well with one man, but I had to get him in! You can't—the radio (Laughs),
11 you need the radio.

12 JM: I see, interesting story. Now, you bring the troops, you bring your first lift in.
13 Hot LZ, first time in, nobody is firing. Troops deplane and did you set the chopper down
14 on that first landing? All the way?

15 KD: Yeah, just to make it all the way.

16 JM: All the way to the ground, troops come off, they fire into the tree line, and as
17 I recall, the area around that had been prepped for some period of time with artillery.

18 KD: You may be correct about that, I don't know about that, but I'm pretty sure
19 that you're correct, yes. The second landing was basically just like the first.

20 JM: So you're not getting any word back to your unit, your choppers, that there's
21 a battle going on through the first two lifts

22 KD: No, not during that time period. The third lift was, as far as I could remember
23 now, the third lift was where they started having some big-time action. Then, the fourth
24 lift was really bad then. You could look out and you could see the bad guys running
25 around, and you could see the muzzle flashes. I mean when they're pointing a rifle at
26 you, you can see the flash. You might not see it if it's sideways or something, but you can
27 see it when they're pointing it right at you.

28 JM: So by the third lift, you know you have something on your hands, by the
29 fourth one you're in it. The first two, it was sort of anticipation but no evidence that there
30 was a battle ensuing.

31 KD: That's correct.

1 JM: When you land the troops on the third lift, you get—you know that there's
2 contact going on, but is the chopper being hit? Is the chopper being fired at? Or are the
3 tracers coming around the chopper at that time?

4 KD: Absolutely. We weren't hit, the helicopter itself wasn't hit but you could see
5 the dirt kicking up where the bullets were hitting around us. Then, the same thing on the
6 fourth lift, but when I came back around, there was somebody that I don't know who it
7 was, the name—somebody told me the name, but I don't remember. They took a hit on
8 the fourth lift, one of the helicopters did. But then when I went back around to drop off
9 the troops—the radio operator, when I came back in we were hit on that particular
10 landing. The last landing that I made in there, the helicopter was hit. We made it back to
11 Plei Me, which was the base of operations for that day and had to have it repaired.

12 JM: I see, the chopper took a hit. Neither you or your copilot were not hit?

13 KD: No, we were not hit, no.

14 JM: You've brought in fifty troops approximately, four lifts. On any of those,
15 when you've gone back out on three or gone out back out on four, are you taking any
16 wounded back at that time, or was this pure—

17 KD: No, we were not taking any wounded back.

18 JM: No one had been wounded that they need your chopper at that moment?

19 KD: Not at that moment, no.

20 JM: You go back to Plei Me, that's where your headquarters is, and then you are
21 waiting for the next call to bring more troops back in or are you monitoring the radio?

22 KD: When we went back after the—well, actually the fourth strip, like I said, I
23 made the—I had to circle to get the RTO back in, but when we went back, Colonel
24 Moore closed the LZ at that time. So we were on the ground approximately, and I have to
25 use approximately because of different things that I read, everybody has a different time.
26 Approximately two hours that we were on the ground and during that time period my
27 helicopter was repaired, we were ready to go into action again. So we were on the ground
28 for that time period. Now, they did have a radio set—the infantry had a radio set up that
29 you could listen to, but mainly we were just sitting, we were waiting for word.

30 JM: But you knew in the camp that you were— that there was a serious battle.

1 KD: They knew that, yes. And I knew that, and I don't think that there was
2 anybody there that didn't know now that we were in a very serious battle.

3 JM: Now you went, now how many more—you made those four trips or five with
4 your passback, your RTO. Then how many more trips into X-Ray did you make
5 approximately?

6 KD: I went back in either five or six more times, I don't remember this. I know
7 five, but I think I went back in six times after that.

8 JM: Were those trips in all resupply or medevac? Or did you take troops in also?

9 KD: No. We took some troops in, we took some ammunition in and pulled out the
10 wounded. Now, the reason that—some people went back in there more than others, but
11 the only reason was that when I told you earlier about LZ Falcon, we didn't know about
12 Falcon. They had a unit; well it was a transfer station that went in the Chinooks to take
13 the wounded back to An Khe. We were flying, my company was flying from LZ X-Ray
14 back to Pleiku, to the field hospital to drop these people off. So we had two
15 contingencies. One going to Falcon, one going back to Pleiku. So our time frame was a
16 longer time frame going back into X-Ray versus some of them that were going for the
17 shortest distance over to Falcon.

18 JM: Did you have to, on each of those lifts, did you have to refuel? I've forgotten
19 what the flying time is for the Hueys. But did you have to refuel each time that you
20 landed?

21 KD: Yes. Actually, we refueled after the fourth lift and we were ready to go
22 again.

23 JM: But between lifts, say one and two, did you to refuel the choppers?

24 KD: Yeah, I refueled, if I remember correctly, twice in the afternoon during the—
25 because we had a longer flight. Some of them—the flight times, while they made more
26 trips into LZ X-Ray, the flight times all worked out pretty much the same, we're talking
27 flight hours now. For our going back there versus them flying a shorter distance. So it
28 worked out pretty well.

29 JM: So let's talk a little bit about trips five through nine. You're now resupplying
30 ammunition. Whatever they put on, your loaders are loading I assume M16 ammo and
31 grenades and laws and everything else that they're calling for from the field. So you're

1 going back with a loaded chopper of ammo and you know you're getting fired at. Did
2 that cause you anymore concern than when you just had troops onboard?

3 KD: Believe it or not, no. Maybe it should have, but it didn't. I don't think
4 anybody really gave that any thought.

5 JM: Because you know that's what they need.

6 KD: The one—I have to back up on the ammunition though. There was supposed
7 to have been a Chinook landed at Plei Me. Fully loaded with ammunition to take in and it
8 never showed up. So they sent two helicopters over to pick up ammunition, which was
9 Chief Warrant Officer Komich was in charge of the flight. They brought back all the
10 ammunition that they could carry. Before any of the troops on the ground, and I mean
11 nobody, he went in there with a flight of two and dropped ammunition off to the infantry
12 troops. He was the first one to pick up the wounded out of there. Coming out, his
13 wingman was hit, and it caught on fire and went down. Mr. Komich came back around
14 and picked up the crew off of that helicopter, plus they were wounded. Took them back
15 to Pleiku. Shortly thereafter, in essence, everybody went back in. The Major Crandall and
16 they left, not more than five minutes before the rest of the flight took off after them. They
17 had a lot of ammunition over there and I don't remember how long before Colonel Moore
18 called, and said he didn't need any more ammunition. It wasn't that long. It may have
19 been only two times and we went back in there. It wasn't many because with the two
20 helicopter loads of ammunition plus what was brought in after that, there wasn't any need
21 for more ammunition, they had plenty of it.

22 JM: There's also the issue of getting it from the LZ to where you needed it
23 anyway, you can only take so much and if you have enemy around you, you don't want it
24 falling into their hands, so it's a logistical movement matter. Okay, so when you go back
25 in for trips seven and eight or whatever, the ammunition isn't—you're going in for
26 troops. You're going into medevac the wounded, is that correct?

27 KD: Mhmm.

28 JM: When you get that call, you know that's what you're going in for. So you're
29 essentially taking an empty chopper or did you have troops on it also going in?

1 KD: We had people. Sometimes not the full load, but almost every trip in we had
2 somebody on board that we were taking in. But we'd always come out with as many as
3 we could possibly carry of the wounded.

4 JM: How did you determine what that number was?

5 KD: We had a very unique situation over there, because you can't determine
6 because of the weight of fuel versus temperature. The aircraft is designed to carry x
7 amount of weight. We had a very easy procedure was that if you pick it up to a hundred,
8 we had what you called an engine topping, and you did it every two weeks. You went
9 out, flew it, and pulled the engine down, actually pulled it down on a couple hundred
10 RPM (Revolutions Per Minute), the engine RPM. Whatever that was, that's the torque
11 that you can carry. That torque related back to weight. So if you're sitting on the ground
12 and they put so many people in it, most of the time you knew how many you could carry,
13 but if they were trying to put more weight or whatever, you can pick it up to a hover. If it
14 didn't meet that maximum torque of our topping thing, you could fly out with them. It
15 was a very simple process. You knew that you could go, so you always carried as many
16 as you could carry, because the more you got out, the quicker they get medical treatment.

17 JM: When you knew you were going in to evacuate the wounded, did you carry
18 onboard medics?

19 KD: No, we had nothing.

20 JM: You had nothing?

21 KD: Yeah, while I've heard it said it was never our job to carry wounded, it was
22 our job because you can't leave them to lay there. If you had to wait for a medevac
23 helicopter for example, not being derogatory towards the medevac, you have to get these
24 people out, you can't leave them to lay there. No, we didn't have medics onboard, the
25 medic in the field did everything they could do for these people and you had to get them
26 to medical faculties as quickly as possible. I think we did an absolute superb job on that.
27 It's true, some did die, but big majority of them survived and you got—you just can't
28 leave people laying out there in a combat area if you can do something about it.

29 JM: The decision to use new chopper pilots though and not the medevacs, that
30 was made by who? Was that made on the ground? Was that made by—

1 KD: I honestly can't say who made that because I'm sure Colonel Moore wanted
2 to get them out, the aircraft commander wanted to get them out. If it—I think the problem
3 would've been if somebody said no, that would've been a problem. But as far as saying,
4 "Yes, well do it." Again, you have to support the troops and that's apart of supporting the
5 troops.

6 JM: Let me ask you this.

7 KD: We were never trained as medevac pilots, if that's what you're asking about.

8 JM: No, I guess what I'm looking for is, on the ground, back in Plei Me, was
9 there any discussion about why it was you and not the medevac units that were assigned?

10 KD: To my knowledge, no. I mean it was just assumed that you were going to do
11 that, and if it needed to be, you know we did this in other places. If it needed to be done,
12 you did it. It's not a question of, "Well, geez that's not my job." (Chuckles)

13 JM: I understand. So let's talk a little bit about Albany. You've had your
14 approximately nine trips into X-Ray. There's a day or so in-between Albany and X-Ray,
15 and you're called into Albany. Was—you had two entrances into X-Ray that were
16 essentially not a hot LZ, as you've described it. When you went into Albany, was it the
17 same thing? Or was it hot from lift one?

18 KD: No, it was not the same thing. I went in twice into Albany, the first time was,
19 to my knowledge now, the very first helicopter lift that we took into Albany, and that was
20 just before—right before sunset or dusk. You could see, but not—but the fire, the bad
21 guys were all around then. We took troops in and ammunition in. The next flight that
22 went in, we—they came through and asked for volunteers that night. It was around
23 approximately nine-thirty. Different times, people remember different times of that. They
24 came in and asked for volunteers to take a flight into Albany, to take in more troops and
25 ammunition. I ended up on the lead flight, we took off, went out as usual over there, very
26 black, black night when you're looking down at the jungle. Although I had been in there
27 during the daytime, the only thing I ever remembered in there was one tall tree at the end.
28 I mean, just a big ol' tree and you had to go around it one way or the other, over it,
29 around it or whatever. When we got there, we couldn't see the ground. All we saw were
30 tracers firing back and forth. Bad guys were scattered all around. I mean they weren't just
31 in one concentrated spot. Our troops, I mean they were everywhere. We couldn't see

1 where we were landing. So infantry captain there, Captain Spires, he came out with a
2 flashlight and we made one circle because we didn't go in right then because we couldn't
3 see, it was just impossible to see anything other than tracers. We just sort of made a short
4 circle around, came back in, he ran out, threw a flashlight on the ground, and that's what
5 I landed to, was the flashlight. Now, we had many different names for them, but little tail-
6 tell lights on tail of the helicopters. You couldn't see it from the ground, very, very
7 dimmed blub that showed up just on the vertical fin. When you flew formation, that's
8 what you laid flight. Everybody had them on, you followed those two little lights. That's
9 what you landed by, like we had the flashlight. The helicopters behind us stayed in flight
10 formation, and we're able to land. When—I don't know how long we were on the
11 ground, we got the troops out, the ammunition out, and they were loading wounded. It
12 seems like forever when you're sitting there on the ground, it wasn't very long. The
13 enemy made a very concentrated effort to attack the helicopters, and that was that very
14 first flight at night in there. We took over fifteen rounds in our ship and it was damaged,
15 but we had already loaded with the wounded. We had to get out of there in a hurry
16 because they were just chewing us up.

17 JM: Your chopper took fifteen rounds, but the wounded didn't take any?

18 KD: No, there were no wounded. None of the wounded that were on board were
19 hit. They seemed to be shooting just a little bit high, which was fine.

20 JM: This was AK47 rounds? Or did they have any of the big guns?

21 KD: No, they had automatic, they had machine guns.

22 JM: Machine guns? They also had some heavy machine guns that were probably
23 more than .30 caliber or more than .762.

24 KD: Yeah, that, you know, you're talking about the .50 caliber now, they had
25 those. Now, I didn't see the helicopter after we landed it that night. They took it and it
26 was gone. Once we made it back, we did get it out and counted over fifteen rounds. It
27 was shot up pretty bad, we couldn't fly it again. It was grounded, we got it on the ground,
28 got the medevac, all the people unloaded and that was it for the helicopter. But I couldn't
29 get to another one in time to you know lead the formation. So Mr. Komich was in the
30 next ship. He took the three helicopters back in the second time.

31 JM: Did you go back in after your chopper was shot up?

1 KD: No, I couldn't get another helicopter to, we were—that second lift, as far as
2 our company was concerned, we were done for that night. C Company went in, don't
3 quote me on the number of times, but I think they went in once more later on around
4 midnight. We had two flights in there. I lead the first one, got shot up pretty bad and then
5 the helicopter wasn't flyable.

6 JM: So, for you personally, Albany was worse than X-Ray?

7 KD: Personally, yes. Yes.

8 JM: Did the NVA (People's Army of Vietnam) use RPGs (Rocket Propelled
9 Grenade)? Or tried to use them against your choppers? Or were they not close enough to
10 the LZ to use those?

11 KD: I don't ever remember anytime during my first tour, at any time of having
12 the enemy using RPGs on us. They may have somewhere else and they may have with
13 some of the other units. But we never had an RPG, that I know of, during my tour with
14 the 1st Cav over that time period. Now, I've read where they had them, but I don't ever
15 remember at all.

16 JM: They had to get closer to the LZ for one thing. But they were also not real
17 reliable. So you had your experiences at X-Ray and Albany and then did you go— you
18 had a twelve month tour, so you went home in '66 then?

19 KD: Yes.

20 JM: Okay, did you have a second tour?

21 KD: I went—I didn't spend my full tour in the 1st Cav. The last three months
22 somebody realized that, "Good grief, we've got thousands and thousands of pilots that
23 are all going to leave at one time. We can't have that." So what they did was that they
24 took, I don't know what the percentage was, I've always assumed it was fifty percent.
25 The last three months they shipped out fifty percent of the pilots and that's my number, I
26 don't know what it actually was. Then all the new pilots that were coming in country,
27 went into the 1st Cav for replacement. So they didn't have a mass exit of all the pilots. I
28 ended up down in Soc Trang for the last three months.

29 JM: Then you came home and then you had another tour?

30 KD: No, I resigned then.

31 JM: So you had your three years in. Did you ever fly again?

1 KD: Oh, I flew all the time. I still fly today.

2 JM: Do you?

3 KD: I flew for a living all my life.

4 JM: Rotary?

5 KD: Pardon?

6 JM: Rotary engine?

7 KD: Both. Fixed wing and rotary engine.

8 JM: I see.

9 KD: I still fly part time.

10 JM: I see. But your military career was the three years that you spent and doing

11 that?

12 KD: Yes. Well, I spend thirteen years in the army. The last three were as a pilot.

13 JM: Did you—when you came home after that tour in August of 1966, I guess or

14 approximately, having had the experience at X-Ray and Albany, and that was the biggest

15 battle up to that time and as we now know as historians, there weren't very many other

16 ones like it. But did you anticipate that it would be like that for the rest of the war? Do

17 you remember thinking about that as a young man?

18 KD: Oh, I was surprised that they hadn't had large battles like that before we got

19 there. But that was just the icing on the cake. Once it started, which the 1st Cav got

20 involved with, that very first one as you know, they've had several large ones after that

21 and I was just surprised that they didn't have one prior to us getting there.

22 JM: Well, I guess you can say that it had to be—

23 KD: It escalated the war as far—

24 JM: The PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) also learned, as you know, that

25 those kinds of battles, they were at a disadvantage. So they started fighting with—they

26 tried to dictate when and where. So they downsized their units and they didn't want to

27 fight in these regimental side units anymore, and they started fighting in company sizes

28 and that sort of thing because the technology that could be brought to bear against those

29 large units would ultimate destroy a lot of men in their case. I was intrigued by some of

30 the things that you said about your unit back there in Plei Me and those decisions that

31 night. I really appreciate you comment because your men—these were men you guys had

1 trained with all the way from August, in your case August of 1964. So you knew those
2 men. How much do you think, that made a difference on your desire to get back in there
3 and help those men out? Do you think it made a difference?

4 KD: Yeah, you know you have to remember that I don't know or did not know
5 every person that we flew in with, that's an impossibility. Some of the faces you
6 recognized, even from training days. One of the greatest compliments of the entire war
7 that I ever received was that night at Albany when I came out of there, and to this day I
8 do not know who it was. But one of the wounded, when we landed back in the hospital,
9 one of the wounded gave me an AK-47 that he had gotten out of there. I mean, how much
10 more—you know, it's just a—I thought that was one of the greatest gestures that I ever
11 received. They all, all of them, tried to make some sort of gesture or something to thank
12 us, unless they were unconscious or something like that. That was always an absolute
13 great feeling that you know that you've accomplished something and—

14 JM: I think it's the reason why as an old infantry solider, I talked to all my
15 buddies. The thing that we always say is that there was never anything bad about the
16 sound of a Huey helicopter. When you think about what the Hueys did for you, you can
17 say they took you into combat, but that was just a deliver process. But the Huey
18 helicopter brought us the mail, the Huey medevac just when we needed it, it brought us
19 ammunition, it took us home at the end of our tour. So, to this day, the sound of a Huey
20 for an infantry solider is just the best sound in the world. We owe a lot of tribute to what
21 you did for us over there.

22 KD: Well, I appreciate that. The one thing is when you're all supporting the
23 troops, the 1st Cav was a completely different than an ordinary infantry outfit, you know,
24 they didn't carry their heavy backpacks with their sleeping bags and everything else.
25 They went in with as much ammunition as they could carry, enough water, whatever their
26 medical kit was. Normally, we would bring their packs and stuff at night, pick them up in
27 the morning. But in a case of a battle like that, they're not going to use their packs
28 anyway.

29 JM: You don't get very hungry.

30 KD: Normally, we'd take food into them at night. But in a case like this, we
31 didn't take food, the first night anyway. All it was, was supporting the troops on the

1 ground, to help them stay alive and if they were wounded, get them out. Same thing with
2 the ones that were KIAs (Killed in Action), get them out. We did everything that we
3 could possibly do. They had Huey gunships up there, helping us support them. They had
4 the Air Force with their fighter bombers supporting them. I think as far as helicopters are
5 concerned, I think we did an excellent job. We did absolutely everything we could
6 possibly do to help them out.

7 JM: You sure did. Ken, I've enjoyed very much interviewing you and I would just
8 tell you this is a short interview compared to what we try to do out in Texas Tech and if
9 you're ever out in Lubbock, or if we can—if you ever would want to submit to a longer
10 interview over the telephone, we're there to do that, that's what we do for a living. We
11 want to keep these—we want to get this down on record. So we appreciate very much
12 you coming in today.

13 KD: Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate talking to you.

14 JM: Thank you.

15 (End of interview)