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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Dacen DeLaPaz
Conducted by Dr. Philip F. Napoli
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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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 Dr. Philip Napoli: [Editor's Note: Audio cuts in] 12th of November 2005. I'm
2 Philip Napoli with Dacen DeLaPaz in the Crystal City Hilton Hotel. We are going to talk
3 a little bit about your father and your life, the relationship between your father's life, your
4 life and this particular moment in history. So let's start with an introduction to who you
5 are today. Tell me a little bit about where you live, your age, and those kinds of things.
6 Dacen DeLaPaz: I was going to save that for last, but this is a surprise, the rest of
7 the story, but I'll tell you that. I'm a dentist. Product of the GI (Government Issued) Bill.
8 Hard working, the GI Bill. I've lived in Belton, Texas, which is right near Fort Hood. So
9 I see a lot of active duty dependents and families and even 1st Cav guys currently. It's a
10 really strange way how this small world comes together. Belton is a little quaint area. We
11 live on a lake, beautiful life and beautiful home. Two children, Presley, I named after my
12 father, his middle name. His name is Presley Hilario DeLaPaz. There's more to the
13 Presley story of course, named him after Elvis. My other son is Pierson. Presley is 11,
14 Pierson is 4. Pierson's got my grandmother's first name. Pierson Rafael DeLaPaz. Two
15 good boys, beautiful. Wife, Annette, nicknamed Nancy. She was a barber for twelve
16 years and once we had our oldest son, she hasn't worked. We have a great home, a great
17 family. I work in a community with a lot of military dependents, so I see current veterans,
18 you know Iraq. Actually, because you're in a community like that and you're naturally

1 doing marketing, PR, type things, donations, charities, becoming entwined with Fort
2 Hood. You know, as a donor to things it's just a really strange deal how all this came
3 about.

4 PN: You feel very connected?

5 DP: Pretty connected. Anyway, that's kind of where we are now. But it's
6 probably a strange and winding road to how we got here.

7 PN: So how should we start?

8 DP: I think probably what I wanted to give is a little perspective at four. I want to
9 start in the beginning. At four years old, I tell people—kind of like maybe a highlight of a
10 movie you see on a commercial. You glance over there and you get to see one little clip
11 and you say—it goes into your mind in a second or maybe something you saw thirty
12 years ago, forty years ago. You can only remember tiny little pieces. Well, as four you
13 can remember like two little pieces. Sometimes it gets intertwined with somebody telling
14 you a story. You start to think, “Did I remember that or did they tell me that?” Or photos,
15 not a lot of video back then, of course. You might see a photo and I think that's easy to
16 get into the memory as do I remember that? But I could tell you what I really believe I
17 remembered. I remembered one time, this sounds strange, but my father drove a little
18 milk truck. They grew up dairy farmers and the milk trucks in those days carried those
19 big cans, not what we perceived as a milk truck. He came home one time from work
20 before the military and he brought me some Vennie Weenies and I'm riding in this truck
21 with him and this is a strange thing to remember, but at four years old I could remember
22 eating these Vennie Weenies you know with dad. Then, I can remember the funeral, I can
23 remember the taps. Twenty-one gun salute, seeing him in a casket. He was shot in the
24 head. It was very well done, there was no wounds visible. He was hit by a sniper back
25 then. My mother made me look at him. She told me that day, “You need to see your
26 father.” That's all I could remember at four, and really that's it. Anyway, what happened
27 over time, I used the GI Bill to go through college, worked my way through. Knew that I
28 wanted to be a dentist. Part of the GI Bill is that they make you determine your major and
29 if you change it, you have to pay the government back any courses that don't apply. So it
30 leaves you pretty determined and straight.

31 PN: You better pick right the first time. (Laughs)

1 DP: You better pick right and you better make good grades and you better move
2 on. Anyway, I kind of thought I wanted to be a dentist the whole time, but I have a
3 biology with a chemistry minor. I threw some interactions with some friends growing up.
4 I thought I could always fall back to be a secret service agent, I used to stay very fit. I got
5 through the process though as you can imagined. I attended North Texas State and then
6 Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas, graduated in 1987. So as you know, as you're
7 going through all these degrees and hard work, it's kind of really fast. Dental school
8 seems like two years, but it's four. Anyway, get out and start working in Temple, Texas,
9 which is about 20 miles from Fort Hood. But I knew nothing about the 1st Cav, I knew
10 nothing about really any of the incidents surrounding dad. My mother remarried, so she
11 didn't talk much about dad. It's just not a subject that you're going to talk about with a
12 new husband. I have two half brothers and sisters. Anyway, my grandmother and
13 grandfather, my dad was the oldest son. It was just heartbreaking for him. My grandfather
14 really had a difficult time with it, so they didn't talk about it either. The only thing you
15 had there was his old photo from past basic. So you had no history in other words. Well,
16 so I'm going through life trying to get on myself, new dentist and all that. I worked for
17 another doctor in Temple. Worked there for about two and a half years and this is where
18 the story starts to come together. In 1990, I went to work for the state prison system. One
19 day I'm in the breakroom for a minute and I pick up this *US News & World Report*. I
20 glanced down there and see the dates on there. The one thing that I had from my dad, it's
21 really bad that your dad is this hatbox with a few things in it. I glanced through there at
22 times and noticed the dates, I read all these things that it had in there. Most of them were
23 who received commendations, an actual kill list, things like that. Anyway, but I noticed
24 the date on that article about Vietnam was the same date. So I grab that *US News &*
25 *World Report*, took it home and stuck it away. Didn't even read it, I don't think, I might
26 have glanced at it for a second. I noticed some names on there, names I thought I
27 recognized from those lists. So anyway, I put it away and scurried on with life some
28 more. About—it was '90, about '92, I opened a practice right in Killeen, which is where
29 Fort Hood is. I was working and I went down and noticed these Cav guys, they were
30 having a reunion right next door in my building, hundred yards. I said, "I'm just going
31 over there and see what's going on." They allowed visitors, ten bucks and you can go in

1 there and meet people. So I walked in there and if you haven't meet Clinton Poley, you
2 will, trust me. Clinton Poley is a farm boy. Talked to a tree, but he was in the Ia Drang
3 Battle. He's in the book, he's the guy with the big bandage wrapped around, looks like a
4 big dental bandage. I just said, "Hey, my dad is—" He said, "Well, I don't think I knew
5 your dad, but we'll find somebody." These guys, Comer and Poley were the first guys
6 there, I think they were from 2 of 7th. They took me around, "You know? You know?
7 You know?" Pretty soon I'm talking to people, I can't remember who I first met. I'm not
8 sure that day I even met anyone that really knew dad there. I did have some of his
9 documents and knew he was Delta Company, 1 of 7th. That was about '92, must've been
10 '93 because they have those reunions on odd years. Then one day, time goes by again and
11 in 1995, I got a phone call. It was some soldier who knew my father. They said, "We are
12 going to have a reunion thirty years in Houston and we want you to come, we've invited
13 the rest." My uncles and things in Houston. My dad grew up in the Cypress Fairbanks
14 area of Houston. So we go down there and I met about thirty guys that went through all
15 of basic with him. These are the guys that really knew him. So each one, a lot of them,
16 probably twenty of them gave me just a little bit. I mean, it was thirty years since a lot of
17 them seen one another. They were—I think some of them were overtaken with emotion
18 not just by me, but by meeting one another again. Some of them, glad as can be of course.
19 Some dealing with it difficult. I'm a little bit on that outside looking in when I'm around
20 these guys. I see guys struggling and I see guys doing well. I see guys who I think when
21 they meet one another and they meet me, they feel better. I can tell they feel better. Some
22 struggle with obviously the deaths. I hope at times when I'm talking to them, and that's
23 why I said life's been good to me, it lets them see the good that's come. Because I know
24 a lot of them probably think, "Well, he had some kids and oh man it was a tragedy." I
25 think if I give them something that's what I hope to give them, that things are good. I
26 think it does help some of them. You know, that little bit. Each little bit probably helps
27 those guys a little bit more. Anyway, so that was 1995, we got to meet all of these guys. I
28 met a guy who was next to my father when he was shot and my father's hit was by a
29 sniper on the 15th. He was mortarman. The stories I get, again bits and pieces of each man
30 tells you just a little bit. The story I get is that he had been through all this heated time
31 through the night and this was a heated time until—I think the stories I've gotten and

1 again their a little like a hodgepodge, decopodge , that's the word I look for. They said it
2 was a little bit of a lolled action. Again, they're trying to help wounded and we got a little
3 time in there and they warned us, "Snipers in these trees", you know. Anyway, I met the
4 guy, a man named David Nieves, told me he was next to my father. Matter of fact, seen
5 this meeting and I'll probably been in seven, eight meetings with these guys. But this
6 meeting is one of the first times I've met a guy named Sergeant Warren Adams, who was
7 a World War II vet, Korea, Vietnam. He was the main Sergeant there with my dad's
8 group. It enlightens you. Sergeant Niemeyer is the guy that kind of knew my father. It's a
9 bizarre long story. But let's try to put it together. So that was in '95.

10 PN: You were hearing pieces of your dad's story and what happened that
11 afternoon is what I think you began to learn about that day in '95, right?

12 DP: Right. So that reunion occurred and it was some of the first things and again
13 emotionally and for everyone. So then, time went by and I went to two more reunions in
14 Killeen, which are odd years and all the 1st Cav is there. Again, just kind of meet a new
15 guy here and a new guy there. I brought up Sergeant Niemeyer because he was very
16 important, he knew my father very well. He was one of his—and I don't understand the
17 whole basic training type deal, while they were in Georgia, Fort Benning. My Father was
18 married, so a lot of the guys run off into the town and have fun. He said, "Your dad—",
19 Sergeant Niemeyer lost his leg. I don't know if you know, in the book he lost he leg,
20 grenade. Sergeant Niemeyer told me that he would come over on the weekends and
21 Niemeyer had this, sounded like a little farm pond and they'd fished and do stuff and he
22 kind of took him under his wing in other words, took care of him. Each one of these guys
23 tells me these stories and what's really becoming more and more obvious is the role of
24 genetics. Being a little bit of a scientist, studying science you just have to believe in some
25 of these things other people find difficult. But the more they tell me, the more they are
26 just describing me and my dad. I have to touch on the Presley thing. I kind of grew up,
27 probably one of those kids that entertaining a little bit, sing around a lot. I probably did
28 that at seven, not some later age. I'd do Elvis all the time, joking around. Anyway, one of
29 the times I'm talking to these guys, they said, "Yeah, your dad used to do Elvis all the
30 time! We'd go to these places, pick up something and started doing Elvis." And my
31 mother had never told me that. Obviously, she knew I did Elvis all the time and I thought,

1 “Oh my god, that’s really bizarre!” Because I named my son Presley before I knew this
2 story. He was born in 1994. So ’95 is when I met those guys. I named him Presley after
3 Elvis, so those things are funny. It sounds like he was—dad was a little bit of an
4 energetic, wired up kind of guy and that’s definitely me. Little too much fun at times, but
5 determined and anyway, it’s amazing the role of genetics. Now my son Presley, he plays
6 violin and piano, he’s eleven. He sings a little bit already, he’ll have a little more musical
7 talent though. My wife’s father played six instruments by ear. So we pushed him a little
8 that way, but I don’t want to shove him that way. Anyway, I had to put that in there
9 because I think it’s a good personal note.

10 PN: Right.

11 DP: Let’s see, we get passed about ’95, ’96, ’97. I meet some more of those guys
12 and I came to the wall here in 2003. Was that the 30th year anniversary of the wall?

13 PN: 2002 would be the 20th because it was ’82.

14 DP: Yes, that’s when it was. So we came up here and I think that’s where I met
15 Niemeyer actually, first time I came to the wall. By the time you go through dental school
16 and you start children late, you see I’m forty-four at this point. I started children in the
17 family late. You’re building a practice, you’re just doing so much. Obviously, school
18 debt. People think you’re millionaire after dental school, (Chuckles) but anyway finally
19 you get to take a day. Seriously, you cannot take extended days building a practice to
20 come to Washington D.C. and see the wall! It’s the sad, sad truth. So that’s the first time I
21 came to the wall and you know it’s one of those things. You saw me talking here and
22 emotionally I don’t feel like I have these crisis moments, but obviously you go to the
23 wall.

24 PN: It’s pretty powerful.

25 DP: Anyway, got to go to the wall with a lot of the comrades. We read the names,
26 I was actually a name reader. Jack Geoghegan’s wife read my father’s name. Actually, I
27 think I had my father’s name and switched. She read Jack’s name, he’s very close on the
28 list. I think she read my name. Anyway, I know I traded. They were going to let me read
29 dad’s name, but I didn’t think I could do it. Obviously, I met her, she’s standing in line
30 out in front of me and the wall for me it’s a little different I think. I’m just personally not

1 one of those people—I almost don't like the wall in a sense. It bothers me in some ways,
2 I don't know how to say it really. I like it and I don't like it. It's a love hate maybe.

3 PN: Well, I think that's perfectly understandable.

4 DP: So anyway, yesterday was a good day. I think that was one of the nicest
5 presentations I've ever seen. I felt a lot of heart with the presenters yesterday. General
6 Pace astonished with his career, in brief with what I saw. I think probably what happens
7 is that initial wall is probably like your wedding day. It's so emotional and caught up in
8 the moment that it takes a while to digest all of that. Then so the second time, even
9 though I had a moment there, you can just see the rest of it. It's probably like a great
10 athlete in a Super Bowl game. The first one, he probably has no idea what went on or a
11 guy in the heat of a battle. He doesn't realize at that moment what's going on. At the end,
12 he tries to reflect and put it all back together. I think that's what happens when you go to
13 the wall for the first time. There's just so much going on, stimuli that it takes some time
14 to put it all together. Subsequent visit, you can probably actually enjoy it a little bit more.
15 These guys filled me in, all these meetings about the 11th Air Assault. I'm not a historian,
16 but I can probably get closer to most people about the history of this battle. Trying to read
17 the book comes from different viewpoints and it's a little difficult to piece it all together.
18 Then, the same thing I've said too, I think when you read a book you place the setting
19 and you start to put that in your mind, everybody is different though. If I describe a town
20 or a grassy knoll or whatever, everybody's mental picture is what you can imagine. Until
21 you start seeing some actual photos of the battle ground, that helps you again. All these
22 guys are bringing the photos and even the names. As you got this guy's name in your
23 head for example, you say, "That guy was really close." And then you finally get to meet
24 him. It just helps put all those pictures together. So I think the whole thing for me is again
25 kind of like—it's probably like an editing room where they make movies. These clips are
26 everywhere and they're trying to piece them all together and put them into a sensible
27 order. Anyway, in summary it's coming together as far as the history. Knowing dad more
28 because again really all I knew from my dad was what was in that hat box. That's a little
29 sad, but you know you got a purple heart and a bronze star and some data in there
30 essentially. Now these guys fill in all these gaps and you start to get a whole person
31 again, a whole story. Now, what I hope to contribute for those guys, for them is some

1 peace in their minds at times. Let them see that somehow good has come from this
2 conflict even. My father's family was dirt poor family. My grandfather—this is
3 interesting to me. When older folks you know, start telling the stories, people go,
4 “They're getting dementia.” And “They're losing their minds.” But I think it could be a
5 little more, I think it could be a little more that they aren't losing their minds. They're
6 telling you the important things.

7 PN: If you're listening. You got to listen hard.

8 DP: My grandfather told me that—to summarize it quickly, basically they came
9 from South Texas. They are from Falfurrias, which is near Refugio. Near where Joe's
10 from, very close. He came to the Houston Area. He traded—my grandmother traded a
11 little cooktop, a little two burner cooktop—these are poor Hispanic folk in south Texas,
12 for some car a brother had. I can imagine only, it was the 40s. They didn't have enough
13 gas even to get there. They found a lady on the side of the road. Her husband had run out
14 of gas and baby or something. The bottom line is that dad had some water and a
15 watermelon, gave them this. The husband had money and gave him enough gas to get to
16 Houston and my grandfather told this story as he got old. Kind of the same story over and
17 over.

18 PN: Mm-hmm.

19 DP: He had two cents when he got to Houston. My father was an only child at the
20 time, fortunately. He milked cows for a gentleman. Kind of works, they had this tiny little
21 house and milked cows. You milked cows seven days a week, twice a day. There's no
22 stopping. He got one milking off at Christmas. So my dad started working, I think about
23 twelve, helping. I don't know if he quit school or not, I think he did to help. He was the
24 oldest boy, they had eight children total. So he's helping grandpa milk these cows and
25 just get through this tough life, you know?

26 PN: I just want to get clear. Your dad—you figure your dad started working
27 outside the house at age twelve? For cash?

28 DP: No, just helping. I don't know, I don't think he worked. I think he probably
29 started working early, I don't know the age. I think he might've—no, I don't he worked
30 for cash, no payment per se. I think that it was a role that he—maybe he stayed in school
31 and did that, I don't even know. I know that he did have to start working and helping,

1 obviously. Running these cattle and doing stuff like that. They were so poor, but what I'm
2 getting at is where they started. What I think is, if you want to call it a legacy—but his
3 family's future in other words was changed by this battle. If I were to grow up in that,
4 who knows? I mean, obviously we can't predict what would've happened. But the odds
5 of him putting me through college. The odds of him probably getting the base education.
6 Anyway, my mother remarried, but we get social security and you get the benefits that
7 allow in other words, you to take that first step. I took some of those steps myself. But I
8 had first few steps is what I'm saying, which probably would not have had. Now,
9 becoming a dentist is so far from that beginning. I have dental school friends, the ones
10 that really know me, you get those close friends. One's a doctor and they tell me, "It's
11 unbelievably really where you came from and where you go." But what I'm saying good
12 about that is, now my son obviously, they might have the first three steps. They have
13 such an advantage that I think that this battle in itself has changed possibly the entire
14 family for years to come. Depending on how well I do raising them. I think you have to
15 take that good and think about that. Those things, those weird things that happen for
16 whatever reasons and unexplainable. That's where we are with where we're going.

17 PN: You father's sacrifice was a gift?

18 DP: That sounds crazy sometimes and I would not—you would never give that,
19 you would never ask that obviously. It's like, kill my child and let me win the lottery. No
20 one would ever do that, but maybe somehow it was meant to be in other words. To get
21 our family in the next phase of life. Anyway, I wanted to bring up—I lost it. I can't
22 remember, I can't remember I what I was going to tell you.

23 PN: I apologize. Did you bring things you wanted to share?

24 [Editor's Note: The following segment consists of interviewee showing photos to the
25 interviewer and camera]

26 DP: I brought a few photos that I thought maybe should become some kind of
27 recorded history. A few things. It's a tough picture, but I'll try to get through it quickly.
28 This photo is a duplicate, which is really odd in 1960, whatever it is, three or so,
29 probably. It's a duplicate of what my father carried in Vietnam. The one that laminate
30 and put in your wallet. I have the original laminate. I'm really washed out in the laminate
31 because of wear and tear and water etcetera. But this is my sister, her name is Loretta. My

1 sister has had some difficult times. Maybe some of this, I don't know. We had some
2 tough stepfathers, but she had some difficult times. She never really used her benefits as
3 far as educational. Anyway, this is the photo my father carried through Vietnam. Maybe
4 it's not as significant. These are cute photos, this is good ole KP (Kitchen Police) duty.
5 That's Fort Benning.

6 PN: Sure enough. Peeling potatoes.

7 DP: This is as classic of KP as you get, buddy. Peel some potatoes. These are
8 some photos of these guys having fun. This is, I don't you'll be able to see this, but this is
9 where they milked cows out there. This is my sister and my dad. Probably eighteen
10 maybe. These are some friends of his that I haven't actually located. Again, that's
11 difficult to see him at Fort Benning. I did want to show this to everybody because this is
12 the kind of thing you get in the box in other words. This is your notification from the
13 White House. I can remember, believe it or not the guys coming to my house. I was—
14 maybe it's boys, maybe it was youth, but I remember the soldiers coming. Probably
15 youth to be honest with you. I remember soldiers coming to talk to my dad, the soldiers
16 did come to my dad's house. We lived in a rural area though, we weren't on the base or
17 anything. I do remember that, I do remember my mother crying and my sister crying, but
18 I remember not crying. I had no idea what was going to be honest with you, I know that.
19 But I could remember you know, kids try to comfort their mother. I can kind of
20 remember that. But anyway, this is—I always love it because it says mastery on it. Then,
21 you get a love-hate relationship with Lyndon Johnson but—

22 PN: Are you willing to read it? At least the first part?

23 DP: Okay. Let's see. December 23rd, 1965. Dear Dacen and Loretta. It is with
24 deep regret that I learned of the death of your father, Specialist 4 Hilario De La Paz Jr.
25 United States Army, as a result of a wounds received due to hostile action while serving
26 in Vietnam. From the time your father entered the military service to his most recent
27 assignment, he exhibited the qualities of a fine soldier and preformed his duties in an
28 outstanding manner. His exceptional soldierly qualities and unselfish devotion to duty
29 earned from him the respect and esteemed of his comrades and the officers with whom he
30 served. As you grow older, you'll realize the full importance of the service your father
31 gave to our country. We will take pride and comfort in the knowledge that his

1 countrymen are deeply grateful. Praise contribution to the security of the nation, he has
2 been awarded the Purple Heart for his valuate sacrifice in Vietnam. Mrs. Johnson joins
3 me in extending our heartfelt sympathy to you in your tragic loss. Sincerely, Lyndon B.
4 Johnson. Those letters are probably difficult to write as their to receive if you have
5 anything in your soul, you know. So I can understand that. I'm sure I missed something I
6 wanted to tell you guys and I wanted the soldiers to know. More than anything, I want the
7 soldiers to know that we're living a better life than we probably would have as a result of
8 all of this and what I want them to know in their heart in other words is that some of the
9 comrades that fell it's not all horrible in other words, for their survivors and dependents
10 and etc. Somehow in this tragic story they are good things that come of it. I hope that
11 people get that. When I come to these- to be honest with you, now after I've come to
12 eight of them or so, I hope I give more than I take. I do meet somebody now new, I do get
13 new information and I hope that somebody else gets a little something in other words, an
14 old soldier.

15 PN: Do you have your history back?

16 DP: My history?

17 PN: Yeah, your history. You came in and said you grew up without a history and
18 you had to put it together yourself.

19 DP: Most of it. I do have most of it back. I think sometimes you wonder—oh, I
20 know what I wanted to bring up, now that helped me. When you grow up without your
21 father from this and I had stepfathers, I quickly figured out how to please them. I was
22 very athletic and hey liked that. So a child will do that, they'll figure out what pleases
23 people, they're perceptive. But anyway, three things. One, there is difficult times in my
24 life. Through college, it seemed like always somebody stepped in there. Teachers,
25 professors and mentors of different sorts. Almost surrogate fathers, I told people in the
26 past at times, it's really strange. You hate to say, but like some of these soldiers told me
27 they pray all the time for our family and I thought at times, tough times I think.
28 Something always happened. Positive in other words, good. Get you past that hump.
29 Those things are, I think those are amazing. How that happened that at times—I'd have to
30 give you some much details, it's not worth it. I an just tell you that they were times were I
31 was that close to, "I'm not going to get through this degree program" or "I'm not going to

1 get through this financially.” Anyway, something always came in there, so that was odd. I
2 still didn’t get to where I was trying to go to. But it had something to do with my son. I’m
3 trying to think about it. The history though, is some there, mostly there. Oh, I know what
4 it was now, I’m going right to it so I don’t lose it. You don’t realize what you missed in a
5 father until you have your own children. So now that my boys—every time you do that
6 one little something. When my first son reached four, I remember thinking, “God, I hope
7 I don’t get killed somehow. If I got on a—” I have no fear of flying, “But if I got on a
8 plane during his four year old age, I would do that.” But anyway, when you see kids and
9 your own kids, that’s when you realized what you’re missing in your father. Your own
10 children in other words, boy they really start to say—that’s when I start to say, “Man, I
11 miss this.” So obviously you do as much you can with your kids. Probably every father
12 hopes they are as loving and caring as they can be. I think that some of that—those kids
13 have given me some of that back, what a father would mean at times. That’s when I do
14 miss that. I say to myself, “Man, I miss that from my father.” When you’re growing up,
15 you don’t know that you’re missing that. You have no clue that a father would this for
16 you or that. So the kids have done that for me, I think. That’s actually bittersweet at
17 times. Sometimes I’ll dwell on it a moment and it bothers me at times a little bit. But I
18 just think that I’m going to give them—that’s probably the one thing that cuts a little at
19 times in your mind when you’re saying, “Wow, I did miss that.” It doesn’t really hurt
20 you, I shouldn’t use those terms. But you do kind of get that one second of, “Wow, I miss
21 that.” The rest of life is like any child man, you’re just trying to get on your new bike or
22 whatever. Children don’t—I don’t think we dwell on that in other words. We don’t think
23 about death, children don’t think about death. Children think about doing something fun.
24 They think about playing baseball and something like that. So I don’t think you as a
25 child—maybe when you get to be a teenager at times where things are a little tough,
26 conflicts with them or whatever. I think mostly now is where I noticed that the children
27 gave me back that. It’s bittersweet. That kind of rolls around the sea, now this whole
28 thing has turned the tide and now I’m the father. My youngest son is four now. So again, I
29 got a little bit of that, “I don’t need this plane to crash.” (Laughs) But I think, I don’t want
30 my son to have to go up being raised without his father. Maybe after when he’s five, he’ll
31 be five soon, I won’t have to worry so much. But because really, I thought in my mind, in

1 a strange way I know how much memories I have at four and it'll be horrible to leave no
2 memories in a young man. I guess in your mind if they died and they were ten you'd
3 think, "Well, now at least they have something." Probably when I think even other
4 dependents I meet, their age is young, I know that they don't have any memories. They
5 really don't have memories. That's a little sad. You would hope that they would have a
6 little something and I do, I have that little bit. But I know some don't have any, there's no
7 way. Because probably really, they left. You see they went off to basic and everything. I
8 know he came home one time, I do have a little memory of that, I think I do. One time he
9 came home a moment. I know that some of these guys I met some of them who were
10 eighteen months and that's a hard thing for those people. They really are piecing together.
11 The mind, probably—again, the photos, you get to see these photos and they start making
12 up their own mental film. Anyway—

13 PN: Do you know your dad at this point?

14 DP: I know him a lot better. He's just a lot like me.

15 PN: Good. Then he was a nice guy, that's good.

16 DP: It's difficult to say it like this without sounding boastful, but I'm probably the
17 most determined person, you know. They're out there like me, but there's no one more
18 determined than me. Sounds like my dad was a very determined person and probably his
19 father came along and raise his kids—I think it's with genetics, passes on. I'm one of
20 those guys that I told people, I was sixteen. I told people, "I can run through that wall.
21 May take me awhile, but I can run through it." It's kind of how I pursued life at times. I
22 can get through that wall. He was a determined guy, real fun guy. Tended to be a little
23 more fun at times than it probably should be. I'm very energetic, I don't sleep much, I'm
24 one of those people who don't need much sleep. It's been a huge asset.

25 PN: Working like you do.

26 DP: Well, especially young I'd sleep two hours, you know. You've been through
27 enough school to know. I'd work waiting tables, you worked until two, then you clean up
28 and I might go to bed at four and then I might need to study thirty minutes to an hour—I
29 think I had to refresh something for a test the next day. It was crazy at times. We did that
30 multiple—that wasn't one event, in other words. I don't think anybody becomes a doctor
31 without some commitment. (Laughs)

1 PN: With some family commitment, with some debt!

2 DP: But anyways, the no sleep stuff is really strange and also when I go with
3 these guys I'll just stay up half the night or whatever. It's always been like that. I'm one of
4 those guys that, these guys tell me—Sargent Niemeyer for example, knew dad well. Tells
5 me about how he was. You hope that what you put together in your mind—the more they
6 tell me though, I have to almost perceive him to be just like me, just a different version.
7 That completes the history pretty much.

8 PN: It sure does.

9 DP: Probably most sons are like their dads. Not just through—this could get into
10 huge debate, but not just through social economic arguments or etc. You're going to be a
11 lot like your genetics. I think any scientist could go there easily. Things can change
12 though and I'm proof. I think that I have my history, I'd say that and my dad's. I'm very
13 content. The emotional part is just natural when you talk about these things. I don't have
14 any issues about that, I think now I'm just busy taking care of my family and coming to
15 see these guys. Invite them to my house, they come to my house. I have a beautiful home
16 and I try to really take care of them. When they come over, I just feed them and drink
17 them and take good care of them. It's always good. I met the general—this is a little
18 significant, I met the general at one of those meetings at Fort Hood, probably around '93.
19 Anyway, he spoke—first of all, it was an amazing moment. I'd been going around there
20 and of course everybody is with him and I'm not one of those people that really likes to
21 break into anything, I wanted to wait for a time when he wasn't bantered by everybody.
22 So I finally got an opportunity and walked up to him and looked him in the eyes and he
23 wasn't a young man, but General Moore was still a strapping—you can tell he was a
24 strapping gentleman. This is twelve years ago or more. He looked great and he looked
25 stilled jaw still. He looked me in the eyes and I was wearing a little tag, I always put my
26 dad's name on there and I put Dr. D on there because my name is difficult. So I put Dr. D
27 on there so these guys can get that real easy. So this guy is looking at me and the minute
28 he fixed gaze, I could see his wheels turn and it's like he's reading that name going,
29 "Hilario De La Paz" and that clock is going. I shook his hand and I couldn't tell you
30 exact words he said, but I can tell you if he didn't really know dad, he chose the right
31 words. I think he knows everybody, I do believe he knows everybody killed in action. It's

1 a little mind-boggling when you meet the son of someone killed in action. He talked to
2 me a little bit and I think it's amazing to me that one of the best parts of seeing this movie
3 was when you go to some of the preface parts—anyway, they have a clip of there the
4 immediate post conflict interviews and you would think, in other words some of this
5 current day verbiage would be to support the book or movie. But if you really paid close
6 attention to that post-conflict interview, he actually says, "I want people to know what
7 my boys did today. I want them to know that they fought bravely", etc. Right after the
8 conflict, and this is actual footage. That really let me know that his heart is good. That's
9 really big for him. It's amazing that after this huge conflict he says that. It's not some
10 presidential speech written for him by some guys and practiced.

11 PN: It came from a human heart about an honest belief.

12 DP: That was amazing to me, that told me a lot. That one little thing told me a lot
13 in my heart about Colonel General Moore. Anyway, one of the best parts of the movie,
14 you have to jump to the preface part. Anyway, I think I've told you most of what is
15 important.

16 PN: Good.

17 DP: Everybody hopes that the sacrifice was made, that it was made for something
18 good and the story is told, and I commend you guys for taking the time to do these things.
19 I think it's very important that these soldiers get their stories out. Someday, history will
20 look back at these individuals because we do lose touch with the fact that these are
21 individuals.

22 PN: Right.

23 DP: And these guys that did survive, I've meet enough of them to know. Believe
24 me, some are very scarred by their experience and the guys they lost and coming home. I
25 don't know if there's a cure for those guys as far as how me make it up to them. There is
26 no make it up to people forty years later, but I do believe our nation is trying. What's
27 good, I see these active duty guys now, I think our nation is doing a better job. I had
28 patients, who've lost their husband in Iraq right now. Kids who've lost their fathers. It's
29 tough for those people. I just hope that they get through those times. As well as I have,
30 hopefully they will. There's nothing like seeing somebody who just lost their spouse or
31 their father. Most of my patients, have actually done some newspaper stuff in town. Some

1 know that my father was in this conflict, but most don't. So when they come in and we
2 know this, they've lost their husband, that's hard for me. You'd like to—doctors don't
3 hug their patients.

4 PN: No they don't, yes that's true! (Chuckles)

5 DP: Too often.

6 PN: Should we stop?

7 DP: I'm fine now, we're close to a closing point. I just wanted to be sure we got in
8 that today's soldiers is no different than forty years ago. If we lose one soldier, obviously
9 it's affecting that family and the future and the children. I hope that all these things that
10 you guys are doing for example lead to just better and better how we treat these guys. The
11 ones we lose and the ones that come home. I also see some of these active duty guys, I'm
12 worried about some of them. We got wars that I've never been there, but gosh I get close
13 to it with these people and there's no doubt in my mind that's not something you just
14 come home and put your civilian clothes on.

15 PN: Yeah.

16 DP: Thank you.

17 PN: Thank you.

18 (End of interview)