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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with David Hammond
Conducted by Richard B. Verrone, Ph.D.
May 2; May 11; May 15; May 31, 2006
Transcribed by Hailey Yeilding**

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. David Hammond. Today is May 2nd, 2006. It's approximately
3 10:24AM, Central Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Vietnam Archive's
4 interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University. Dave, you're in Beaverton,
5 Oregon. Before we begin, let's go over the interview agreement that we discussed before
6 we began recording. I need to know if you agree or disagree with what I covered.
7 Basically, that you agreed to doing this interview on your own accord, that you are aware
8 that this interview will be made public, including putting it up on the internet in the
9 Virtual Vietnam Archive, as well as doing the interview is your consent to donate the
10 interview to the Archive. Do you agree or disagree, Dave?

11 David Hammond: I agree.

12 RV: Okay, great. Well, let's start. I wonder if you could give me a biographical
13 sketch of yourself, where you were born, when you were born and a bit about your
14 childhood.

15 DH: Sure. I was born in Cottage Grove, Oregon, August 19th, 1951. Raised
16 close to that in a logging town, primarily in Springfield, Oregon. Graduated, had a
17 normal, pretty normal childhood, middle-class family, my father was a city surveyor and
18 my mother worked kind of part-time in town, went to the public schools, grade school
19 junior high, high school and graduated high school in 1969. From then on kind of hit the
20 military.

21 RV: Okay, tell me about your parents.

1 DH: Well, both my parents as of now are gone. My dad was injured in his
2 younger days. He had a logging company and had actually lost his hand, but that sent
3 him to college from there on out. He became a surveyor and did well in his life as far as
4 a career. Kind of a quiet, nice, everybody liked him type of guy. My mother came from
5 a, I think, kind of a tougher background, from East St. Louis and came out here, boy, at a
6 very young age from East St. Louis and was a homemaker. My parents, though they,
7 they did split up when I was, I think I was twelve. So I was one of the, it seemed like that
8 was a little different for that age of a, there wasn't too many kids that had divorced
9 parents at the time. But I think I adjusted well. I lived with my mom from then on and
10 had a step-dad, but kept in contact with my dad and saw him all the time, too.

11 RV: How about siblings?

12 DH: No, I'm an only child.

13 RV: Tell me about Cottage Grove, or, you were actually raised in Springfield.

14 DH: Yeah, I was raised in Springfield. Cottage Grove was just where the hospital
15 was. Springfield was a sawmill town, probably ninety percent or maybe eighty percent of
16 everybody's parents that I knew, or fathers anyway, worked at the local lumber mills.
17 My dad was one of the few that didn't. I think the population, as I remember, when I was
18 younger was like seventeen thousand. We thought that was quite a few people, but it
19 wasn't. It was the kind of town that, on a Saturday or during the summer, my buddies
20 and I could get on our Stingray bicycles and grab our fishing poles and pack a lunch and
21 play in the Willamette River and fish and spend all day and nobody ever really seemed to
22 worry about us. We all did fine.

23 RV: You were, you mentioned public schools and moving through those. Tell
24 me about education in your family. Was it emphasized? How were you as a student?

25 DH: I was an average student. I think my dad wanted me to go to college
26 because he did, I think, and he knew that would be an advantage. I think through grade
27 school I did very well. In fact I think one, was the up for student of the year, I think, in
28 fifth grade once. The junior high I think I did okay, and then once I got in high school, I
29 did fine. I was what you'd call a Cs and Bs type of a student, but I wasn't real interested,
30 I think I went to high school more for the social part of it and just because you were

1 supposed to go to high school. I never had any real ambition at all to go to college. I
2 always, I think, I always in my mind wanted to be self-employed. So I was.

3 RV: How much of an influence was your father on that, as far as, you know,
4 working for yourself?

5 DH: Not a lot, because he had always worked for someone else. My mother,
6 when she worked had always worked for someone else, but even my high school days I'd
7 work for McDonald's way back when, when McDonald's there on the University of
8 Oregon campus, which is in Eugene, which is just right next door to Springfield. I would
9 work there for a stint and they would only hire guys, which is, nobody can hardly believe
10 it now, but it was, that was the rule. No girls could work there, just guys, but I happened
11 to know the college kid that was manager and ended up owning a few stores and I always
12 thought, "Boy, if I could just own a McDonald's." After that, or about the same time, I'd
13 work in the gas station that my friend's father owned for a while and just thought, I saw
14 how business worked and how customer service worked. That's the way it's going to
15 happen, you're just going to be self-employed. That kind of shaped me, I think, from just
16 working experiences.

17 RV: Were you independent thinking as a child? Did you act independent?

18 DH: I think so. I think as an only child that probably helped some of that. I
19 always had a lot of friends and I always heard that, "Oh, you're an only child, you're
20 probably so spoiled." Well, we never had a lot of money. We had plenty, but I always
21 did okay by myself.

22 RV: Tell me about growing up. What kind of person were you? What do you
23 remember, your hobbies and kind of a daily life thing, outside of school?

24 DH: I think some outdoors, outdoorsy type things like a lot of kids growing up in
25 the Northwest. We had such a massive amount of things to do, as far as fishing. I used
26 to hunt and camped. Yeah, I just think a lot of—everything that had to pertain with
27 outdoors. I can't remember any real specifics. I didn't have any specific hobbies besides
28 what was going on at that time. We went through a phase in my junior high years when
29 slot cars and slot car tracks were a rage through the country. That was big. I guess I was
30 up in, through junior high, all through grade school and junior high, though, fairly active
31 in sports.

1 RV: Which sports did you play?

2 DH: I think mainly track, but through grade school, in fifth and sixth grade when
3 everybody did everything, you played every sport. That was just the way it was. Junior
4 high, I was in track through junior high. Once I hit high school, it was mainly, I think I
5 was destined to drive, changed cars about every three months and look for a girlfriend.

6 RV: Right. How would you describe yourself socially?

7 DH: I always thought I was kind of in the middle, as far as, in the social, when
8 you get through junior high and high school. Everybody wanted to be the most popular
9 kid in school and it probably would never happen, but I think I had, I had friends, the
10 very, very popular kids or I was always friends to the kids that weren't. So I always
11 considered myself right in the middle and was nice to everybody.

12 RV: Okay. You mentioned McDonald's. Did you work anywhere else?

13 DH: Yes, I worked at the, I spent quite a long time at the local gas station which
14 was kind of the hot spot for everybody to stop in before they took off on their weekend
15 nights. But even in my grades, or my younger years, as far as early junior high I would
16 think, we worked in bean fields, picked strawberries, spent a summer working in a hay
17 field for a farmer. So, I always did work. Summers we always worked to make money
18 for school clothes and whatever we needed.

19 RV: When you say we, you mean you and your friends?

20 DH: Buddies, yeah.

21 RV: Did your parents kind of insist on you working, encourage you to, or is this
22 something that you did?

23 DH: I think so. Oh yeah, that was a given. That's what you were going to do. I
24 think it helped kind of shape me. That's just the way it is. We'd look forward to that.
25 We kind of had fun in the younger days of being in the bean and berry field. I don't think
26 we thought we were having that much fun while we were there. But, I look back on it
27 now and once, I remember the, once the summers were over we would take what money
28 we had, which I don't think amounted to a lot, and get on a bus and take it over to Eugene
29 and buy our school clothes at Penney's that was over there.

30 RV: Tell me about your high school years. What do you remember most about
31 them?

1 DH: Well, high school I bounced back. I'd been almost two years at another high
2 school because my mother and step-dad had moved to central Oregon, which was a place
3 called Redmond, Oregon. That was a little traumatic, I think, because I started my
4 freshman year with all the people I'd grown up with, or I think maybe my soph—no my
5 freshman year and relocated to a what you'd call more of a cowboy town which was what
6 Redmond was. It didn't last forever but—and I did meet some friends over there, but I
7 can remember when I got there, I think I looked around and I was the only kid in the
8 school that wasn't wearing Wrangler jeans and pearl-button shirts and had cowboy boots,
9 because this little town was—they just were real different than the Springfield and
10 Eugene area that I was from. Didn't do bad there and then I came back to my original
11 friends in high school about in the middle of my junior year which was a real easy fit
12 because I'd grown up with everybody and just kind of got right back into it and graduated
13 from that school.

14 RV: Okay, tell me about your grades. You mentioned that a bit. What about
15 subjects that you were good in and subjects that you did not like?

16 DH: I don't think I was actually exceptional in any of them. I think I did, I had
17 the most trouble with any in biology. A lot of it, and I think my problem was now, and I
18 think I still might have it is, if I would look at those subjects and look at biology thinking
19 "I don't know why I've got to know how to name every part of a plant." There was just
20 no reason at all. Or even me, it was even algebra, which was a struggle because to me it
21 made no sense and why I would ever use it because I would never use it and never have.
22 I think, I guess as I remember and I said before, I think I went all through my senior year
23 of high school, and I know I never took one book home or did one bit of homework, but I
24 ended up with Cs and Bs. So, just, I think I had no goal as far as going to college and
25 that probably didn't help my motivation any at all.

26 RV: Right, right, okay. Was there any military experience in your family?

27 DH: Not very much. My dad hadn't been in the service. There was a window
28 there, I think, right after Korea, there was a few years in there where I know some of my
29 friend's dads hadn't been in either, they were just a little pocket, I forgot what the period
30 of time would've been. But I know I had a couple of uncles that were in Vietnam, when I
31 was in high school. I'm trying to think. If you go way back, I had some ancestors in the

1 Civil War. Then my step-dad had been in World War II. He was in the Navy. But other
2 than that, it wasn't a real strong military thing.

3 RV: Did you talk to your step-dad about his time in the war?

4 DH: Yeah, some. Yeah, he'd talk some about it.

5 RV: Was there any appeal to you at that point, to go into the military?

6 DH: Well, in 1969 there was two choices. You either got a college deferment
7 and went to college. Even at the time, I think there was still a deferment if you hurried
8 up and got married you didn't have to go into the service, or you went into the service. In
9 1969, Vietnam was really going. A lot of people were joining the National Guard and the
10 Army Reserve just so they wouldn't have to go. A lot of them were going to college. So,
11 for me, I didn't want to go to school. The draft was still real heavy. I just thought the
12 military probably makes the most sense and I didn't know any better. That was kind of
13 my choice—that's kind of how I ended up—I did join the service. In 1969 towards the
14 end of our school year, a friend of mine named Curtis Miller and I used to run around
15 together and drag the gut in Eugene and mess with cars and what not. I'd talk to my—
16 my step-dad's the one that talked about the Navy enough and he said, "If you got to go
17 anywhere, the Navy's always got a bed," and this and that. I wasn't real fond of boats
18 and that, but I thought "Well, okay." So, I think, that friend of mine, Curtis and I, one
19 evening thought "Well, if we're not going to school, we might as well join the service
20 and we can go together." So, that's kind of, we made the decision in summer of '69.

21 RV: What about before that, high school, growing up, did you see yourself in the
22 military at all?

23 DH: No, no. In fact, I never paid any attention, I don't think even in watching
24 much of the news because Vietnam was just everywhere on the news. It was so remote
25 and so far off and I hadn't known anybody, really paid any attention to anybody who had
26 ever been there, I think, early on in high school. It was all around us, but, again, in that
27 time, when somebody had been to Vietnam and came back, they'd never talk about it
28 anyway. You wouldn't know who had been there and who hadn't.

29 RV: What about within the family? Did you all talk politics? I wanted to ask you
30 about the news. Did you have an understanding, kind of, the life outside of, of

1 Springfield and what was happening in the world? Not necessarily Vietnam, but just in
2 general.

3 DH: Boy, I don't think so. I don't really remember talking politics at all. I know
4 that, yeah, I don't know. I don't remember talking about politics much at all with, I just
5 remember the only thing I can ever remember my step-dad always said was—he was a
6 Democrat and he said, “By God, the Republicans have never been for the working man.”
7 I mean I heard that just over and over and over, but, other than that I didn't pay any
8 attention to any of it. My dad didn't talk much about it either, so.

9 RV: What do you remember about America in the 1950s? I know you were
10 young, born in '51, but late '50s, early '60s, what do you remember about the United
11 States?

12 DH: Well, the '50s is the one big, memory I have is when we had the Cuban
13 Crisis that happened because I was pretty young. I don't remember what year, but I can
14 remember, because my parents were still together. I remember them, my dad bought a
15 bottle capper. I remember him bottling water and we had this great big pantry that they
16 had all this bottled water and canned food and all those things. Because I figured—
17 everybody thought we were going to start shooting missiles back and forth to Cuba. That
18 always sticks in my mind. We had this pantry all loaded up with food in case a war
19 started.

20 RV: What about presidents? Do you remember Eisenhower and Kennedy?

21 DH: I remember Kennedy because, like everybody else, I was in junior high and
22 I don't—might've been seventh grade, but I remember being in band class. I played the
23 trumpet. There came an announcement over the radio, or the intercom system in the
24 school and saying that everybody was to go home. I forgot if they announced he'd been
25 shot right then. I think they had. They pretty much shut the school down and we all just
26 kind of somberly, everybody walked home. Then we spent the rest of the day glued in
27 front of the television.

28 RV: Looking at that time period, that's '62, '63, Lyndon Johnson comes in office
29 in 1963 after the Kennedy assassination. Do you remember any thoughts about, I mean,
30 that transition, about Johnson himself? You're getting old enough where you can—

1 you're in high school, I guess, going into college. What was your awareness of the
2 presidency and what was happening in Southeast Asia?

3 DH: Yeah, it was sad to say, I don't think I really cared. Yeah, I think I was, at
4 that age, I would've been, what, sixteen, fifteen, sixteen. I don't think that was, that was,
5 probably didn't even cross my mind. I was on to other things with school and cars and
6 entertaining myself.

7 RV: When did you graduate high school? What year?

8 DH: 1969.

9 RV: Okay. So yeah, right after that, you were in.

10 DH: Right.

11 RV: Did you—I mean, did you not see the war on TV?

12 DH: Yeah, lots of, but it was just, it was almost to me, it was like watching a
13 movie. Yeah, it was on the news every night. But, it didn't, really—I wasn't really
14 afraid of it. Yeah, but I mean it was all over, but it didn't seem to have any affect on me.

15 RV: Did you think about the fact, "Well, if I don't go to college, then I am going
16 to have to deal with that?"

17 DH: Yeah, yeah and. Actually, I joined. So, I kind of knew that I was in limbo
18 there for a while, but I kind of always thought that by draft or by joining I was going to
19 end up in the service.

20 RV: What did your parents think?

21 DH: They were disappointed. I think my dad was probably the most
22 disappointed, just because of, given, they knew more about what was going on and
23 probably what a mess it was. When you've got one of your kids heading off to war, it's
24 probably nothing anybody wants to deal with either. But, I kind of made up my own
25 mind. They dealt with it.

26 RV: Were they upset, the fact that you, obviously going into the military,
27 possibly into the war, but that you didn't go to college?

28 DH: Yeah, my dad was most disappointed. He'd put some money away for me
29 to go, but I think I even told him it would have been a waste of money. I didn't want to
30 go school. I didn't have any—it just wasn't—I had no ambition at all, as far as furthering
31 my education at that time. So if it would've been a, if there wouldn't have been the draft,

1 I probably would have figured out some other kind of a job or vocation or whatever it
2 might be, but, again, you only had a couple of choices. That was college or service, at
3 that time.

4 RV: What do you remember about your friends and your discussions about that
5 subject, about the war and the draft and so on?

6 DH: Well, a lot of them wouldn't go. I would think more of them headed off to
7 college just to stay out of the service because I remember a few of them had inquired
8 about getting in the Reserves and things and that was almost impossible because there
9 was just a huge waiting list, trying to get in there just to stay out of Vietnam. A few, a
10 few joined and quite a few got drafted.

11 RV: What made you join?

12 DH: I think just to get out of town. I think it was—I didn't have any problems. I
13 just wasn't going anywhere.

14 RV: You got in in November of '69, is that correct?

15 DH: Yeah. Well, what happened was we, the friend of mine and I, Curt Miller,
16 we decided we were going to join. We thought, "Well, listen to what my step-dad had
17 said," as far as the Navy and how he had three meals a day and so on and so forth. Well,
18 Eugene is where all the recruiters were. There were these, there were four doors. I think
19 they had the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, and the Marines were all in a row in this
20 little strip center. So we went in to the—we walked in together to the Navy and sat down
21 and talked to the recruiter. He said there would be a—there was a ten-month waiting list,
22 just to get into the Navy. Again that was because there was so many people joining the
23 Navy just so they wouldn't have to actually be in the front lines, I think, in Vietnam. We
24 decided, "Nah, there's no way." We were ready to go, had made up our minds to go in
25 the service and leave. So the next door happened to be the Army and we were in there
26 and sat down with this, his name was Sergeant Stamper. He had this great big picture of
27 a battle tank sitting behind him and the sergeant stripes on him. Before we knew it we
28 were signed on the delayed entry program from then on out. Because it was one of those
29 things where we signed up for all these schools and all of this and then we had a ninety-
30 day delay. Supposedly your rank started from the time we signed. So I think it was like,
31 August. I think I went in in November of, first part of November of that year. That was

1 our ninety-day delay. So, that was kind of the shocker when we had joined. I think I
2 finally told my folks that I'm heading out. There hadn't been a whole lot of discussion
3 about it.

4 RV: So the recruiter did his job. He got you guys in.

5 DH: Oh, he did a great job. Yeah, yeah. It was one of those things where we had
6 signed up for—well, again, if I had been sitting down with one of my kids if I would've
7 had the chance, when we got in there, it was just the two of us. I think, I was still, I
8 wasn't quite eighteen yet, I was almost, but I was seventeen and I think my buddy Curt
9 was eighteen. Instead of, when you join, signing up for some kind of schools, as in, say
10 radar technician or whatever it might be that would give some kind of training, we were
11 just infatuated with being on this big giant tank, which was, had no clue it wasn't going
12 to do us any good down the road.

13 RV: Yeah, what did you do in the intervening time before you went in, in
14 November?

15 DH: Zero. I think we quit our jobs. I think that three months we mainly, they
16 had a strip in Eugene, Willamette Street we called "dragging the gut," pretty much every
17 night, just kind of cruise, listen to the radio and just kind of hung out, didn't really do
18 anything.

19 RV: Just kind of biding your time, waiting.

20 DH: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

21 RV: Well, tell me about basic training? Where did you go and what was it like?

22 DH: Well, basic training, because we signed up to go to armor school—went to
23 Ft.—well, which was then, because Ft. Lewis is real close here, but as we had signed up
24 to go to tank school, and they would sign up for leader ship school and a shake-and-bake
25 NCO (noncommissioned officer) school, we were sent directly to Ft. Knox, Kentucky. I
26 think that was the first time either of us had even been on a jet plane. One day, I do
27 remember when we, we came up and got our tickets and whatnot we needed to go to Ft.
28 Knox, we ended up on stand-by, but we were put into first class, which we thought was
29 kind of neat. So we sat up front, a couple of kids and had drinks and flew to Kentucky. I
30 just remember, I remember, that's probably the rude awakening came when, what did we
31 do? Once we got off that airplane and got to Ft. Knox the fun was over. You were

1 lonesome, you were afraid, homesick, wish you could take it back at that time, but that's
2 where we ended up.

3 RV: What was your day like at basic?

4 DH: Oh, like everybody else's, you know, I think we got up at five o'clock in the
5 morning to the drill sergeant screaming and hollering. Luckily we were both, or I was,
6 and so was Curt, but I was always fairly physically fit and athletic enough and, that I had
7 really no problem with the physical part of it, which was, that's mainly what it was. The
8 mental part, I think I was okay because I was able to deal with a lot of the stress that they
9 would, that they were putting on everybody.

10 RV: How were you able to deal with that?

11 DH: I think I just actually could, I didn't let things get to me really bad. Some of
12 the fellows in basic, I could just see they were so stressed out. We had a few people go
13 AWOL (absent without leave). They just couldn't take it anymore. We were kind of on
14 the edge in 1969, the end '69, they wouldn't really—the drill sergeants wouldn't beat
15 anybody up, but I can remember getting a lot of fingers and thumps in the chest and
16 smacking the helmet. So there wasn't a lot of physical abuse, but I think, it didn't take
17 long 'til I realized they were doing their job. I didn't like most of them, as far as the drill
18 sergeants, but I was able to get through it.

19 RV: How were you with weapons training and that type of thing, the real military
20 part of that?

21 DH: That was pretty easy. I think that came from just my background and my
22 parents. Growing up in this kind of town everybody had done a lot of deer hunting, bird
23 hunting, so I'd had access to shotguns and deer rifles. So that wasn't—a lot of the
24 fellows from the big cities had never even touched, held one of those things. The
25 military, as far the basic training and those kinds of weapons, though, that was pretty
26 easy.

27 RV: You said that once you got there and the thing started, you kind of wish you
28 had taken it back. Did that continue through or did you—?

29 DH: Oh, yeah, that lasted, that always lasts, that probably lasted until I got out,
30 but it's one of those things, when you get in there and it looks pretty glamorous when
31 you're looking at those posters. I can see the ads on the TV, even today when it looks

1 like how exciting things are, but when you get in there and realize—in fact, I can
2 remember laying there in my bunk at night in basic when it was as miserable as you can
3 be in Ft. Knox, Kentucky, in the winter-time and thinking that what are my friends back
4 home doing? They're either in their beds or they're down there working on their cars or
5 driving up and down Willamette Street or hanging out at the local hamburger joint.
6 There I am with a shaved head laying in a barracks with a bunch of other bald-headed
7 guys.

8 RV: Well, when did the mentality start to change? That, "Okay, I'm getting out
9 of basic and I'm going to do okay." Did that kind of continue?

10 DH: It never ever changed a whole lot. Even when—I went to leadership school.

11 RV: Right after basic or—?

12 DH: I think, well, I'm trying to remember which, if it was after AIT (advanced
13 individual training) or basic.

14 RV: Well, I'm looking at your questionnaire here. You did training and then
15 AIT, it looks like it came after basic and then leadership school.

16 DH: And then leadership, okay. Yeah, in AIT, actually, I went to a couple of
17 AITs. One of them was the armor school which we were trained on M-48 and M-60
18 tanks, which are the big ones, that I think they even used in World War II, I think the M-
19 48s. That was more interesting. It was a little easier to deal with as far as, it was laid
20 back. We stayed in some nicer dormitory type of rooms. It was mainly just training, the
21 harassment pretty much had stopped as far as basic goes.

22 RV: Where was this thing?

23 DH: Oh, all in Ft. Knox. Everything was in Fort Knox. We had a lot of weekend
24 passes or we could go into town, into Louisville. So, it was getting easier, but if
25 somebody would've said, "Do you want out?" I would've been out of there in a
26 heartbeat.

27 RV: How long did the armor school last?

28 DH: That one was eight weeks. I know leadership school I went to was a couple
29 of weeks. That was mainly more of a spit-and-polish thing, of how to be more of a squad
30 leader, be in charge of people. I don't think I got much out of that, I mean, it was a lot of
31 spit-and-polish. That was okay. I think once that was over they sent us to a, it was

1 basically the Sheridan tank school and that was a month. Those are the little tanks that
2 they do have in—well, they had a few tanks in Vietnam, but they had the Sheridans in
3 Vietnam. They're the ones that would actually float and they shot a little guided missile.
4 That was kind of interesting. But I spent all my training in Ft. Knox.

5 RV: Tell me about the tank training, starting with the initial stuff at armor school.

6 DH: Yeah, the tank training was interesting. It was more fun to drive them than
7 anything else. With the crews we had, we had the, what would be the loader and the
8 gunner and the tank commander and the driver. You were trained to do all of those
9 things and it was a lot of fun, I guess a lot of fun to shoot them, a lot of fun to drive them,
10 not much fun working on them, but that's pretty much all we did. They broke down
11 constantly.

12 RV: Were you good at it? Was it real difficult to learn?

13 DH: Surprisingly enough, you look at those tanks and anybody could do any of
14 the jobs on the things. I mean they were easy. I guess they have to be, but to drive one
15 it'd be—it was as simple as driving a car. As far as the cannon on the thing and the
16 machine guns, those were—we had pretty much the training through AIT, I mean, basic
17 and things, as far as weapons go, as far as cleaning and maintaining. It was fun, I was
18 average. I wasn't anything special on them. I just did my job.

19 RV: These were M-60, is that correct?

20 DH: Yeah, I think, we had some M-48s, M-60s. Then the last, that was the first
21 school. They were the big ones. The big ones, the steel ones, they were a diesel powered
22 type of thing. We learned how to change the tracks and maintenance and the radio
23 system and communications.

24 RV: You were good with cars, right, and the maintenance of cars? So did this
25 help you with tanks?

26 DH: Some, but we also had mechanics that if something was really wrong with
27 them, the mechanics were there that were trained to work on them. We were trained as a
28 crew.

29 RV: Tell me about the leadership you had there, starting with basic. What were
30 the drill sergeants like and then going into armor school, how would you characterize
31 them?

1 DH: Well, my basic training drill sergeants, there's one I liked and one I couldn't
2 stand and couldn't stand me. I can't remember their names. I've sure got enough
3 pictures of them, but the main drill sergeant we had, as I remember him, he was a of
4 course a career soldier, was probably maybe thirty years old, but a decent guy, but pretty
5 disciplinarian, had to be. But once in a while, if you could get him and just a couple of
6 people together, you could actually talk to him. He was about half-normal. The assistant
7 drill sergeant we had had been in Vietnam and had been a Ranger. He was just terrible. I
8 mean, he was the one that would scream and holler. If he thought he was doing us a
9 favor trying to get us ready to go over there he was wrong because all we could, did, was
10 pretty much despise him, so.

11 RV: What about teaching you the tank? How patient were they? What was that
12 like?

13 DH: They were patient because, the fellows that were teaching at AIT that were
14 doing the tanks, it would be like going to classrooms. We had our drill instructor type
15 people there that ran our company, our AIT unit, but you would mainly march off to a
16 classroom or down to the tank motor pool. You would have certain instructors that
17 would teach you about the cannons or the M-50 machine gun, or the battle tactics. So it
18 was mainly, it was lot of classroom and a lot of on hands training is what happened with
19 that.

20 RV: How much did you keep in touch with your family?

21 DH: Oh, a lot. I mean, you're just, you're so homesick you wrote everyday
22 whether you had anything to write about or not because you wrote as much as you could
23 so people would write you back. Then I think I would call like once a week.

24 RV: What about girlfriends?

25 DH: Yeah, I kind of had a girlfriend in high school that I would call and write to,
26 one of those things that didn't go much past that. On down the road, in fact, I actually,
27 I'm the one that wrote her a letter saying that when I came back from Vietnam it's pretty
28 much was over. I think I saw the writing on the wall as far as a lot of guys that were
29 married or had serious girlfriends when I was even in training, they were miserable.
30 Either miserable or worried about what their wife's up to or never, not going to see them

1 again for X amount of months or year or whatever it might be. So I think I was better off
2 not having a real serious relationship.

3 RV: Will you describe leadership school? You said it was a lot of spit-and-
4 polish.

5 DH: Yeah, I think it was a two-week school. I remember though—we had to
6 work, you always hear the boot-polishing stories and the starching your uniforms, my
7 God, I mean, that, that was just over the top, as far as doing that. That was, I think that
8 was a lot of classroom also. I can't remember a lot about it except we did have one
9 weekend where they took us in to Louisville to a, darn, like a USO (United Services
10 Organization) club of some kind, that kind of had a dance, but what it amounted to was
11 some of the local girls and some punch and cookies and stuff like that. It didn't amount
12 to much, it just made you feel—it made me feel even worse because it's not what we
13 would've been doing if we were home. We would've been at some kind of rock-and-roll
14 concert at the local armory and sneaking booze in from outside. So, it was a little tame
15 for most of the guys, but it was a way to get off the base for a week, for one evening.

16 RV: When you did Sheridan training, tell me the difference between the Sheridan
17 tank and these larger tanks and how much of an adjustment that was for you.

18 DH: Well, the Sheridan tank was a lot of fun because it was so small. I don't
19 remember how fast it would go, but it was fast. One part of our training, we would drive
20 it right down into a lake. It would float. You could drive it across the water. I believe it
21 had—we each got to shoot one missile out of it. What they were, I called them missiles,
22 but I, as I remember they had a guide wire on them. But as I recall they, when you shot
23 those, because you only got to do it once each, as long as you kept this little red dot in the
24 scope on the target, I mean, it couldn't get away. So, I thought that was kind of, that was
25 kind of neat. But they also, from what we learned were very vulnerable as far as land
26 mines and rocket-propelled grenades and things like that.

27 RV: Did you feel like your training was thorough enough before you went
28 overseas or was it lacking?

29 DH: I think it was probably, well, it was probably lacking because, well, for me
30 especially because I never even saw a tank when I got over there. But, I think from some
31 of the fellows I think that did take the training and were able to even be on one, I think

1 the adjustment probably had to be made because Vietnam wasn't like—I think we were
2 still being trained as we would've been in some kind of open warfare. I remember on
3 some of the battlefields we would get in these big online formations with these tanks to
4 go charging across these open fields like you see in the movie *Patton* and World War II,
5 that's not how it was when the guys got there.

6 RV: Did you go over right after the Sheridan school or did you—?

7 DH: Yeah, I had an issue where I'd signed up to go to NCO school or non-
8 commissioned officer school and we called it "shake-and-bake," where you would go in
9 for I believe it was four weeks or six weeks and you'd come out a buck sergeant or an E-
10 5 sergeant. I had ran into enough fellows—well, I was a little bit sick of going to school
11 again, but I had ran into enough of the fellows that had come back from Vietnam that I
12 realized that I was eighteen years old. There's no way am I going to go over to Vietnam
13 and they're going to put me in charge of some people. I didn't know what to expect once
14 I got there anyway. So it took a little string pulling, but I pretty much refused to go to
15 this next school and they did finally let me out of it, but I was on my way to Vietnam
16 shortly after that.

17 RV: When you got your orders, tell me about your reaction and what you did
18 before you went over.

19 DH: Yeah, when they put the orders up, everybody ran to look. As I remember
20 there was probably ninety percent of us it said "Vietnam" on it and I think most of the
21 other guys, the other ten percent maybe were going to Germany, maybe a couple other
22 ones were heading off to some other schools. It was no big surprise. I think I looked
23 forward to it because we got a month leave before we were to go over. So, I still hadn't
24 sunk in what was really going on in Vietnam but we headed—it was nice to go home for
25 a month. Yeah, it wasn't any real big shock.

26 RV: You seem like it was pretty casual, that you were expecting this that you
27 were going to, your fate was sealed almost, that this is where you were destined. Is that
28 fair to say?

29 DH: I guess so. I think it was destined once I had joined the service that I was
30 destined to go Vietnam. Everybody I pretty much knew was going. So, it wasn't like I
31 was shocked when I got the orders that I was going to go there. It was just a given that

1 was going to happen. So, yeah, it was—I mean, it seems maybe a little easier to talk
2 about now, but it's been a number of years.

3 RV: Yeah, sure. What about your parents and your stepfather?

4 DH: Oh, I think they were probably bummed out about it. I know my dad, I
5 don't think was very happy even that I joined the service. I think my mother was
6 worried, of course like anybody would be. They never said much, didn't make me feel
7 bad about it. We never really sit and talked about it, so.

8 RV: Before you went over, what did you know about the war? What did you
9 know about what the United States was doing in Southeast Asia and its goals, objectives,
10 things like that?

11 DH: Boy, Richard, I tell you, I can't remember a lot about, probably tried to
12 drill—the only thing they really ever, we ever heard was what we were supposed to do to
13 the enemy when we got there, but as far as the politics of that war and why we were there
14 to fight communism and the take over of that country, it's probably pretty one-sided, but
15 I never paid a whole lot of attention to it. I didn't really think it made a whole lot of
16 difference to me, the politics of what was going on.

17 RV: Did they teach you anything about Vietnamese culture, what the people were
18 like, what the land was like?

19 DH: No, I don't remember any of that at all. I know not during training, I don't
20 remember any. I know we got some kind of handbook when we got over there, but it
21 wasn't really much about being nice to anybody.

22 RV: Right. Can you elaborate on that?

23 DH: Well, as far as the warfare they train you in and the weapons and all it was
24 about was, I remember it was in the tank training and any of it, I mean, you didn't shoot
25 at targets with bull's eyes, they were always silhouettes. So every time you were in your
26 tank and you were to fire on say troops, it would be a group of silhouettes that—there
27 was a .30-caliber machine gun, I believe, on the ones, and that's what you'd use for
28 personnel. You'd just mow everything down in sight and then you'd shoot the cannon at
29 whatever kind of vehicle was sitting out there and pretty much just trained to kill and
30 destroy whatever was out there.

1 RV: Did you feel confident with that mission, kind of your ability to, to do that or
2 were you unsure?

3 DH: I was very unsure. I wouldn't know. I'm a pretty passive kind of guy. I
4 didn't know what would happen.

5 RV: How about the rest of the people that you were going over with? Did they
6 share those feelings?

7 DH: I think so, I think the majority of them—we were all young. I was probably
8 one of the youngest, but we were all young and a lot of them had been forced into it, a lot
9 of them had been drafted. A few of the fellows that were a little bit older that I knew
10 were having more of the problem, probably because they were more educated, a little bit
11 smarter about worldly ways and what was going on than we were. Because a few of
12 them that had gone to college for a little while and then dropped out and got their draft
13 notice, they had the toughest time with dealing with what the training was as far as the
14 brow-beating by the instructors and what we were going over to face so. Like me, I
15 didn't have a clue. I'd watch TV a few times and what you were told during the training,
16 but you didn't know what it was going to be like when you showed up.

17 RV: Looking back now, do you wish you had better prepared yourself or do a
18 little bit more?

19 DH: Yeah, maybe a little bit more, but I think if you would've known too much,
20 maybe you wouldn't have gone. I know a lot of guys who think if you'd realized the war
21 never wasn't ever going to go anywhere and how many people were going to be lost all
22 for nothing, I think a lot of people would've said "Forget it, we're not going."

23 RV: Okay. Well, tell me about getting over there and what that was like. How
24 did you get there?

25 DH: Yeah. Well, we were flying on commercial jets by the time I went. So we
26 got on a jet that actually had stewardesses on it. I believe we stopped in Hawaii. They
27 didn't let us out of this little airport area. They were afraid somebody would run off. So
28 we stopped in Hawaii, I think, to refuel and got off the plane for a little while. I think the
29 next stop, we stopped at Guam which was interesting. I got a couple pictures of being in
30 Guam, but all it was was just a flat, hot beach with a, I think a memorial there for the
31 Marines. They said it would be a long flight. Once we left Guam, we were, the

1 stewardesses changed a couple of times. They seemed to get older and now I, well, I
2 realized after that that I think they got some kind of hazardous duty pay the closer they
3 got or when they landed in Vietnam, because when they'd change planes they did, they
4 aged a little bit each time, the stewardesses did. When we got over Vietnam and they
5 announced we were going down, of course they came on with all of this if we take
6 incoming fire and this and that. We don't know anything and all we can visualize is that
7 we're going to land in some kind of a thing like is on the news where the bombs are
8 going off, rockets and machine guns and we land and everybody's afraid. When we get
9 off the plane, you think you're supposed to start running or they'll hand you an M-16 or
10 something. It was just hot, muggy, and stunk. There wasn't anything going on.

11 RV: What was the mood on the airplane, going over? What do you remember
12 about that?

13 DH: It wasn't that bad. I remember I sat with a couple of the fellows and they
14 had a cassette recorder, I think, with the new Led Zeppelin tape in the thing. We passed
15 that back and forth. A lot of guys read and we were just mainly bored. It was somber. I
16 mean there was some laughing and joking going on, but it wasn't, no, it wasn't that bad.

17 RV: Did you talk about what you all would be facing possibly?

18 DH: Well, a lot of us did because it depended on what your MOS (military
19 occupational specialty) was. Mine being a tanker, I think the guys I sat next to, I don't
20 know what they were in, some kind of supply or something. So we really didn't even
21 know what to expect.

22 RV: Yeah. This was in June 1970, is that right?

23 DH: Yes. Yeah.

24 RV: Your MOS was a tanker and did you have your unit of assignment?

25 DH: No, when you get, when we landed in, I believe it was Cam Rahn Bay.
26 Let's see, I always get those backwards, I think it was Cam Rahn Bay, but anyways,
27 when we landed there, you had the reception station. You wait for your orders and, so we
28 probably were there for three or four days. At the time you would have to make
29 formations and they would try to line up people to do different kinds of duties. So I think
30 I hid out most of the time because I wasn't going to go do KP (kitchen police) or any of
31 that. You just had these big massive warehouses where the bunks were and you'd show

1 up every day to see if you'd got your assignment. It basically was boring, hot and there
2 was really nothing going on there. When they'd, I finally did see my name on a set of
3 orders with another group of people, I looked up there and I thought, "Well, I'm going up
4 to the Americal Division in Chu Lai." The fellow next to me says, he says, "Well, there
5 are no tanks there." I said, "Well, there's got to be tanks there, because I've been to two
6 tank schools," and all of this. He said, "I don't think there's any—no tanks." So I
7 thought, "Well, that's great, but there's got to be because." Anyway, so, long story short,
8 when I did fly up there and got off the helipad, there in Chu Lai, the first sergeant was
9 sitting there in a Jeep and he was kind of a grouchy old guy. I said, "Hey, I'm a tanker."
10 He says, "You're not anymore," and I was in an infantry unit.

11 RV: What did you think about that?

12 DH: Well, I was pissed. I couldn't believe it. I even told him, I says, "I have no
13 idea. Infantry unit?" He says, "Well, everybody's basic MOS is"—and I said, "I
14 understand that, but it's not me. I'm a tanker. I mean, I joined the Army to be a tanker."
15 So, his name was Top Miller and he ended up being an okay guy. I never liked him
16 much when I was there, but I think he was a decent guy. I remember we got there, I think
17 there were three of us that he picked up and headed us back to the rear area because the
18 company was out in the field and pretty much got the supply clerk out there. They gave
19 us each a rucksack, an M-16, how much ammunition, I forgot how much they gave us
20 and a couple of smoke grenades, a couple of frags, enough C-rations for, I think, five
21 days, canteens, poncho, poncho liner, and that was it. I'm looking around thinking "I
22 can't believe it. I just can't believe what's happened here." So, that was my introduction
23 to that company I was with.

24 RV: Tell me what your, what your impressions were of Vietnam, the country.
25 You know when you got off in Cam Rahn Bay and as you make your way up to Chu Lai.

26 DH: Yeah, Cam Rahn Bay was, it was just flat, hot, smelled, things going on,
27 trucks. I mean, because the war had been going on quite a while. So it was built up. I
28 really didn't see anything. We flew in, probably, I think it was a C-130 that came up to
29 Chu Lai and landed. Again, you could see the hillsides because we were way up north.
30 We were not far from Da Nang. It was very mountainous except we were stationed on
31 the beach, which was just beautiful. The landscape, it was a pretty place, but at the time,

1 when I first got there, I wasn't too much, I wasn't worried about pretty or whatnot,
2 because it was, here I was going to be in an infantry unit and I just thought, "Man, I'm
3 never going to make it through this," so.

4 RV: So, you're there, you've been assigned your stop and you're wondering, you
5 know, "Why am I in the infantry." Could you get a good answer besides, "Well, that's
6 everybody's basic MOS?"

7 DH: No, I really couldn't get much of an answer, but what I think, that, what had
8 happened and we realized right after that was that the Americal Division had lost so
9 many people and were taking heavy casualties that they just couldn't supply them with
10 enough of the MOS which was the 11-Bravo which is an infantryman. So they were
11 taking tankers, which we were what you call an 11-Echo MOS and then 11-Deltas were I
12 think recon and the different ones. Anybody that had the 11 or a combat MOS, they were
13 taking and putting them in infantry units, but, as far as the first sergeant, he really didn't
14 have much to say. He was kind of short about it. We were all, as I remember, there
15 were, I think, three of us came in together, one was a good friend of mine that I had met
16 when I got in-country named Jesse Hill. I believe we were all tankers that showed up that
17 day. So not knowing really what to do—I had never had a rucksack on before.

18 RV: Really?

19 DH: It was really, yeah, it was unbelievable. In M-16 training, we had been
20 trained with M-14s most of the time which were the longer wood stock rifles. In fact, I
21 think they probably used them in Korea. But that's what we were trained on in basic and
22 we'd seen M-16s a couple of times in AIT because we were on tanks. Then we had a M-
23 16 in our hand, we didn't really know much about what—and hand grenades, didn't
24 know much about what we had.

25 RV: Wow. That seems like a tremendous disadvantage for you all.

26 DH: Well, it was. I think they needed bodies. It was just kind of a bum deal. It
27 was a waste of money, too, all the money that they'd spent on us. We were basic grunts.

28 RV: Well, let me ask you this. Tell me—well, before we get into what your
29 uniform is, I want to get a description kind of, of what you carried, were there others who
30 were pulled from this, the tank MOS and placed in the infantry unit?

31 DH: Yes.

1 RV: Or was it everybody?

2 DH: No, there was a lot of them. There were a lot of tankers and a lot of the
3 people who had been trained, I think they called it on recon, which is more of a
4 mechanized infantry, and some of the grunts. But there were, come to find out, there
5 were a lot of us that had been pulled that had tank MOSes that were in this unit.

6 RV: Why did they pull you and the others?

7 DH: They needed bodies.

8 RV: So it was random?

9 DH: It was a random thing. There weren't enough, I don't think, of what you
10 called 11-Bravo MOSes that were coming in-country. So they were taking whoever they
11 could. I don't remember what the real company strengths ought to be in platoons, but I
12 know we were always short. We just never had enough people, even once I got in there.

13 RV: I think a full platoon is, you know, 150, a fully loaded one.

14 DH: Yeah, and I don't think we were ever, ever close to that. So that's why I
15 think they were taking anybody they could get. Again, this was in 1970, getting towards
16 the end of things.

17 RV: Sure. Had anybody at this point told you, here's where we are in the war?

18 DH: No, no, not at all. We didn't have any idea what to do. In fact, as far as the
19 jungle warfare goes, we had, as I recall, we did have, when we got into country at kind of
20 the reception station, its really, kind of unclear where we were, but I remember going
21 through about a two-day, it might have been a one-day kind of crash course. They had us
22 crawling through make-believe mine fields and booby traps and things like that, but it
23 didn't last very long or I would have remembered more about it.

24 RV: Did you think that, or were you aware that that was the kind of war you'd be
25 dealing with and not a conventional type war?

26 DH: I'd never really given it a whole lot of thought because I always pictured
27 myself riding around on a tank.

28 RV: Right.

29 DH: Yeah, up and down the roads or whatever there might be. I didn't have any
30 idea that I'd be on the ground like that.

31 RV: Had you heard of My Lai at this point?

1 DH: Yeah, I'd heard of My Lai and which, we were close. We were in the same,
2 of course Americal, Lieutenant Calley was there. He was just, I don't think where that
3 happened, I don't think it was twenty miles from where we were and probably even
4 closer than that. But I had heard about it on the news. That had been a couple of years
5 prior.

6 RV: Right, I didn't know if there was any mention of that in training or once you
7 got there.

8 DH: No, there really, it was pretty—nobody talked a whole lot about anything as
9 far as training and as far as what to expect. I think the little crash course on being out in
10 the jungle was just about worthless. So, yeah, pretty much, when we get to that point, we
11 pretty much just got dumped out in there.

12 RV: Looking back, is that shocking? Is that—?

13 DH: Yeah, it was shocking at the time and still amazes me to this day.

14 RV: Okay, what was your uniform like? What did you carry with you in the
15 field?

16 DH: Well, when we first got there, what we were handed to us is we had the
17 jungle boots, we'd been given fatigue pants, fatigue shirt with a T-shirt and a steel pot
18 with the liner that went inside of that that was your helmet, besides the other gear. But
19 shortly after that when we got in the field, we realized what we really ought to be wearing
20 and adjusted accordingly once we got out there.

21 RV: What was that?

22 DH: Well, at that time, and a lot of units didn't let their people, and I've looked
23 at so many pictures since and seen what other people have worn, but our unit was kind of
24 a loose, I don't know if you'd call it a loose cannon or not, but it was—we pretty much,
25 once I was in there, we did what we wanted, dressed like we wanted, the steel pots, all
26 they were, they might have been a safety issue, I mean a safety type of thing and for your
27 protection, but to us they were nothing but another, you know, so much weight because
28 we were carrying so much on our backs anyway. By the time I got done, I wore a, I
29 bought some leopard-type fatigue pants. I wore a T-shirt. About half of the time I had a
30 Australia bush hat I wore, I wore—I don't want to say wore—that I wore. That was
31 it. I had no helmet. Everybody dressed kind of how they wanted to, which was, I think,

1 strange now. We were caught up in that. We didn't want to get our hair cut. We wanted
2 to dress like we wanted to dress, because we were coming out of the latter '60s from
3 being at home. I know the people prior to us had on—a lot of them had to wear flak
4 jackets. Well, most of the units they had to wear steel pots, but our CO (commanding
5 officer) didn't make us.

6 RV: Was that more of a discipline problem thing or did he just understand that
7 this is the way it is and that's okay?

8 DH: Well, I think he understood, because when I first came in-country the
9 lieutenant we had, I don't think even really wanted to be there, because we didn't have
10 enough officers. He should've been out of the field by then. He was a real decent guy
11 and kind of made to stay. But I think he understood that you had to kind of give a little
12 bit because we were all kind of in the same situation. Letting our dress code go a little bit
13 astray kept us a little bit happier or more congenial to each other. That was a better way
14 to be.

15 RV: Right. What else did you have with you?

16 DH: As far as carrying?

17 RV: Yes.

18 DH: Yeah, well—

19 RV: Well, I guess, let me ask you it this way. What were you assigned? What
20 was the standard issue equipment and what filled your rucksack et cetera? Then, what
21 did you guys actually, how did you modify it once you were out in the field?

22 DH: Well, what we were handed was, were old, I think we were handed some old
23 plastic canteens, not the collapsible ones when the first sergeant gave us our things, and
24 the old rucksacks, I think, were from the Korean war, the first ones we got. We were
25 given rucksacks, so many days of C-rations, the M-16 and I think a couple, what you call
26 bandoleros or I think we called them that.

27 RV: Bandoleers.

28 DH: Bandoleers of ammunition, two frags or hand grenades, a couple of smoke
29 flares. I think we got some iodine tablets for the water, a bottle of mosquito repellent,
30 and a poncho and a poncho liner. That was the initial thing that was handed to us before
31 they started heading us out to the field. But that was day one in the company when there

1 was three of us and we were just in the rear waiting to go out to hook up with the rest of
2 the people.

3 RV: Okay. How many of there were you that were going to go out and be
4 replacements?

5 DH: There was three. There was a friend of mine from Tennessee that I'd met
6 coming in. The third fellow, I don't remember his name, but there were three of us. We
7 were all just brand new.

8 RV: You were assigned to Charlie Company, 5th Battalion, 46th Infantry, 198th
9 Light Infantry Brigade, right?

10 DH: Yes.

11 RV: Were you told that at this point? This is who you're going to be?

12 DH: We were told that, as I—we were told that once we got up to the Americal
13 because when we—we got our orders to come up to the Americal Division in Chu Lai
14 after we'd gotten into country, I think once we got in there and spent that day or so
15 processing into the division is when we got our other set of orders saying we were to go
16 with this certain, this Charlie Company.

17 RV: Okay. So tell me about going out to the field.

18 DH: That was the good one, we were hauled out by the first sergeant again. One
19 of the Hueys was at the helipad which was close to the rear area. I think it was a little bit
20 of resupply on the helicopter, a mail bag. The three of us scrambled on. I had never been
21 on a helicopter like that before and sat there on the floor and Top Miller just kind of gave
22 us a wave, the helicopter took and off and there were a lot of, a couple of little villages
23 right outside the gates of the Chu Lai base. The pilots, they probably were twenty-five
24 years old, maybe, that were flying this thing and knew we were brand new and the door
25 gunners did. So I mean, they did their best to scare the heck out of us, they buzzed the
26 tree lines and stayed as low as they could and got a real kick out of that. We were just
27 hanging on. We didn't know you couldn't fall out of the thing as far as when they would
28 bank real sharp and that. They gave us quite a ride, but I think it was—we were afraid. I
29 mean, all of a sudden here there were three of us in these helicopters, didn't know
30 anybody, we didn't know where, what we were in for. All of a sudden were flying up
31 over these mountains, which is what surrounded Chu Lai. We came down into a valley

1 real fast and real low. We could see a smoke grenade going off down there and they got
2 real low and they started hollering, “Get off, get off.” A couple of guys came running out
3 from the brush and to meet us and we scrambled off there and scrambled back up into the
4 brush and kind of looked around. I thought, “I can’t believe it.” Here we are, the
5 helicopter was gone. It was hot, humid. I’m sitting there and I’m thinking, “I’ve got 340
6 or 50 days left of this,” or whatever it was going to be, by the time we processed in. It
7 was scary, because I looked around and the fellows were dressed how they wanted to be
8 dressed. Nobody had helmets on. They were in really a bad spot as far as just the
9 vegetation that was going on. I know they split us up. I went to, I believe it was 1st
10 Squad and the squad leader, this fellow’s name was James, which I’ve been in contact
11 with the last couple of years, but first thing he asked me how old I was and if my mother
12 knew where I was because I always looked young. I said, “Man, yeah, she knows where
13 I’m at, but I wish I was back there now.” It was bad.

14 RV: That was a joke he was saying.

15 DH: Yeah, yeah. Well, he couldn’t believe, he was shaking his head that here
16 this baby-faced, eighteen-year old is what they sent him. We all three, I think, looked
17 about the same that had just got out there. So that was—that’s where we spent the first
18 night.

19 RV: What was the vegetation like?

20 DH: That was real thick. That was jungle. Hour or so after that, I was scratching
21 my leg and realized and looked down and I had a couple of leeches on me, which I had
22 never seen a leech before. So one of the guys in the squad came over with his bug juice
23 and shot some on it. They showed me how to better tuck my pants into my boots and
24 strap them down and kind of ways to try to keep the leeches off, but it was pretty
25 impossible. Not much sleep that night. We were in an area where they had set up some
26 Claymore mines for protection and we just kind of sat tight for that evening. Then we
27 moved out the next day. But it was a little unnerving experience for the first night when
28 you’re eighteen.

29 RV: Yeah, what was it like that night? You’re in the jungle for the first time, in a
30 war.

1 DH: Yeah. Well, nobody, luckily there was no shooting or anything going on
2 that night, but it was so hot and so humid and so wet. Plus I had already had the leeches
3 on me already. You couldn't see anything. We were told we had to watch down this trail
4 for if anybody comes up the trail as far as VC (Viet Cong) or NVA (North Vietnamese
5 Army) that are wandering around at night. I couldn't figure out how you were going to
6 see them anyway. I had never ever set up a Claymore mine and I went out with one of
7 them and one of the fellows was trying to show me how you set up the Claymore mines.
8 I couldn't, I just could not believe anybody could survive any length of time at all under
9 those conditions.

10 RV: How did the guys take you in? Did they accept you or not?

11 DH: Always there's a couple of them that do and I saw that as time went on and I
12 became one of the old-timers in there. We had one of the fellows, they called him, his
13 name was Wimpy, I don't, I think his name was Winfred or whatever it might be but
14 Wimpy Boudreaux. He'd been there a while, but he was always one of the nicest guys to
15 the new guys. He kind of took me under his wing. I know our squad leader James,
16 which we kind of got to be closer together after I was there a little while, he was very
17 distant, very kind of a hard-core type person that—he was not a touchy-feely type of guy
18 at all. We had a few other ones in the squad. We had a fellow named Davenport, a big
19 ex-football player, college player that was there that was real decent to me. So, overall
20 most of them were there to give you a hand, try to help you through it.

21 RV: Did anyone give you a hard time immediately?

22 DH: Not immediately. I never saw anybody do that. Even with all the racial
23 problems that were in the rear at that time, and they were really bad as far as blacks and
24 whites go, but once everybody was in the field, color wasn't ever an issue.

25 RV: What was the racial makeup of the company?

26 DH: Oh, I'm trying to think. I believe that I was probably, I want to say twenty
27 percent black, I would guess, versus white. We had a few, couple of people from Puerto
28 Rico I think that were with us, but it was, it was probably twenty percent as far as Afro-
29 American.

30 RV: Tell me about the racial issues back in the rear. I wanted to ask you about
31 that anyway.

1 DH: Yeah, that was really bad. Growing up in Springfield, Oregon, I'd only
2 known one black family in my life. They were really just a different color. There was no
3 culture. Ours were all the same and they were just fine. We went to school together,
4 played together, did everything together. When I got into training, back in Ft. Knox, we
5 had a lot Detroit people, Indianapolis, a lot from East Coast black guys I met. I never had
6 a problem with them and I was always friends with them, but there was always a problem
7 even in training with the white guys from the South and the blacks. I never understood it
8 because it didn't bother me. But there was a problem there. When we got into country,
9 the same type of racial tension was going on. It never affected me and I think it must've
10 showed even in my mannerisms because I never ever had a problem with any of the black
11 guys when a lot of blacks and whites did. I was friends with everybody. I had as many
12 black friends as I did white friends. The one fellow that I came in-country with which
13 was on the helicopter which I still see and am in contact with, a real good friend is Jesse
14 Hill. He's a black friend of mine from Tennessee. But as we go on in this, there was
15 some real issues as time went on when I was there between the field and the rear areas as
16 far as blacks and whites go.

17 RV: What about your viewpoint? You said you really hadn't been exposed to
18 that. While you were there, did anything shift within you?

19 DH: No, no, not at all. I got a little disgusted at some of them because it started
20 and this is latter on in my time there, but it ended up being a "white man's war" they
21 claimed. This is after the fact. This is months after I'd gotten there. But it was a white
22 man's war and a lot of them would refuse to go out. When they would refuse to go out a
23 few of the white guys would say, "Well, if they aren't going out, we're not going to go
24 out," as far as back into the field. So, it was a lot of tension there between some of them.
25 Again, not me, there was a lot of fistfights and a lot of threats and things like that, as far
26 as in the rear goes. But I don't think it ever affected me and I still have my same amount
27 of black friends that I always did.

28 RV: Yeah, okay, and you said that once you're in the field that stuff didn't exist.

29 DH: Pretty much it was not even an issue. I had, always had the, I think
30 everybody pretty much left that alone. I don't remember really any problems in the field
31 between blacks and whites. There always was when we got back into the rear for a

1 couple of days, but I don't remember anything in the field, there ever being a problem
2 with the blacks and whites.

3 RV: Okay. Well, you described kind of the first few hours out there and that first
4 night. How did you see the morale of the guys?

5 DH: It didn't look good to me. I mean everybody bitched and moaned and
6 groaned. I can't remember a lot of what was said because I was still just, probably just
7 afraid, but I think I did enquire what we did. Basically all we did was, they said we
8 would pretty much patrol certain areas and search and destroy and try to cut off these VC
9 supply routes and set up ambushes at night. They kind of said that's what we were up to.
10 With any luck we'd get to go back to the rear in a number of days and spend a day or two
11 back there before we came back out. That's I guess what I learned right away.

12 RV: So they, this is what they said, "Here's what we do."

13 DH: Yeah, here's kind of what we do and it didn't make a whole lot of sense, but
14 I think that's how they lined it out. Basically the next morning, you'd just get up and
15 start following the guy in front of you.

16 RV: Did you feel prepared or were you—?

17 DH: Oh, I wasn't prepared at all.

18 RV: Were you even more nervous once you—?

19 DH: I think I was just, I was more nervous then, I was exhausted. I couldn't
20 believe, I forgot what the weight was. It could've been forty or fifty pounds, whatever
21 we had on our backs. Then we all shared carrying M-60 machine gun ammunition. It
22 was just, the weight and the heat and the terrain, it was just unbearable. You could even
23 walk through that type of thing carrying all that on your back, let alone ask you to do any
24 fighting at all.

25 RV: What about the M-16? I mean, were you trying to familiarize yourself with
26 that?

27 DH: I think. I knew enough about it, but I was one of those, I wasn't adamant
28 about trying to keep it clean like other people did. I think I did my best to keep it clean
29 and keep my gear kind of in order, but I didn't, I guess wasn't overly concerned about the
30 thing. But I was familiar enough to keep it in working order.

1 RV: Did they help you with that? You know, “Here’s how you need to treat it.
2 Here’s what you need to watch out for?”

3 DH: Yeah, we had some of that training, a little bit of that training, I think, in one
4 of the schools I’d gone to, but like I said, it was mostly the M-14 which we never saw.
5 So we had some of that and then I think that I ended up carrying the M-60 for a little
6 while, too, but that was once I’d been there a little bit. But, M-16, it was fine.

7 RV: Okay, the first day out, what did you do?

8 DH: Well, the next morning when we got up to move is the first time that I had
9 come under fire, which is, everybody has to do it once.

10 RV: Geez, right, the very first day you did?

11 DH: Yeah, well, the next morning, because I went in there late in the afternoon.
12 We were walking up on a side of a, kind of an open hillside in that single-file fashion and
13 they were trying to explain to us new guys about keep our intervals and every time you’d
14 see a twig or a stick or something out of place, they’d stop and you’d point and they’d
15 step over it. Then you’d turn around and do the same for the guy behind you and it was
16 just this slow, methodical movement. I don’t know what time in the morning it could’ve
17 been, but we were in this exposed area and we heard a—they were across a little valley. I
18 don’t know how far they would have been away from us, maybe seventy-five yards.
19 Some small arms fire opened up on us and not knowing what to do and with another new
20 guy I was right next to, once they started shooting, all the guys that had been there, they
21 took off up the hill and jumped behind bushes, trees, rocks, whatever they could find. I
22 remember the other fellow and myself just sat on the ground and just started spraying the
23 other hillside. You couldn’t see who was shooting at you half the time anyway. We just
24 sat there and just started spraying the hillside, thinking that’s what we were supposed to
25 do until I realized that the rest of them were screaming at us to get out of there and come
26 up the hill and get behind whatever they were behind. So, luckily nobody got hit that
27 day, but that was the first day. Then we stayed there and they called in a gunship and the
28 gunship came in and probably spent \$10,000 in ammunition blowing up this hillside that
29 there was nobody on anymore. Then we just walked off.

30 RV: How did it feel?

1 DH: Actually felt pretty good. That felt good because I knew I could do it. I
2 think up until that time I wasn't sure what would happen. Rarely do you ever see
3 anybody anyhow when those firefights start, it was just always mass confusion. I realize
4 all it was was just a bunch of chaotic screaming, hollering, shooting in whatever direction
5 it was. Nobody ever aimed in their life that I was around. It felt decent that I knew I
6 could respond when we had, when something like that would happen.

7 RV: Was it loud?

8 DH: Yeah, very, I think very loud, very chaotic. I don't think I paid much
9 attention to anything until we could, I could realize somebody was hollering at us to get
10 under cover. It was lucky those guys on the other sides were not any better shots than we
11 were.

12 RV: Had they briefed you on, "Here's who the enemy is and here's what the
13 make-up is, here's what they do?"

14 DH: No, I don't think I had ever done any of that until I got there and slowly I
15 figured out that we were up against the Viet Cong and also NVA regulars were in our
16 area, too.

17 RV: Well, that, I was wondering if the guys in the unit said, "Look, Dave, here's
18 what we're up against."

19 DH: Yeah, they did. I don't remember paying a lot of attention to what they
20 were saying, but I do remember that we would be into it, we were going to run into both
21 of them. Most of the time, I think, it was more like the VC, we would stumble upon or
22 there was a lot of snipers going on and them against us. They would kind of hit and run
23 all the time and I think that was more the VC that we'd run into.

24 RV: Okay. So the mission basically, sounds like it was search and destroy.

25 DH: Pretty much all the time.

26 RV: Okay. So after this first encounter, you guys walked off the hill and you just
27 continued doing the same thing?

28 DH: Same thing, yeah. We would set up—I don't remember that night. I'm sure
29 we, probably that night we did ambushes almost nightly where we would set up a
30 perimeter for usually the platoon and the company, they would all be close. We only had
31 two platoons there for a while because there were so few of us. We would send

1 ambushes out that night with the radios. I kind of learned what that was all about. I
2 don't remember if that was it, but most of the time with our squad leader and the other
3 ones, we were there just to survive and to get out of there. We didn't really want to find
4 anybody. So, we would go to the most safe and secure place we thought we could be and
5 set up the Claymores and just kind of huddle together and keep quiet all night long and
6 wait for daylight to be able to get back out of the thing.

7 RV: Was that the attitude of most of the men?

8 DH: Pretty much everybody. Even when we would, I remember a couple of the
9 times that we would, early on be in some of the fire support bases. They would send us
10 out in that same area to do ambushes. We were to be in one location yet we would just
11 walk down behind the hill where they couldn't see us anymore and set up in places that
12 weren't even, they didn't—which was kind of stupid at the time, but they expected us to
13 walk out in these real high-traffic areas where they thought we were going to be able to
14 ambush somebody. We would just get out there far enough where we could get out of
15 sight and set our own stuff up and lay low. I don't know if we ever got caught or not,
16 may have, but I don't think it mattered. At that point, even if we did get caught doing
17 something like that, nobody cared.

18 RV: What do you mean "get caught?"

19 DH: Well, get caught by the company commander or the platoon leaders because
20 if they said you go to these coordinates on the map and they think we're there, we
21 weren't really there part of the time. We were in another area completely. We weren't
22 even at that spot because they were trying to put us, some of the time, in some of the hot
23 spots that were probably dictated from battalion, even higher up, where they wanted the
24 ambushes to be placed. All we could think of, usually there was, I think we were five, I
25 think there were usually five of us in an ambush that, you know, forget it. That looks a
26 little bit dangerous so we're not going there. We'll just go down around the corner here
27 and set our stuff up as best we as we can to protect ourselves and then get through the
28 night and come back.

29 RV: How often did you all do that?

30 DH: I bet you we did that, well, percentage-wise I don't really know, because I
31 was never the, in charge of, I always let squad leader James take care of that. We

1 probably did that twenty percent of the time, not all the time, because not all of the times
2 would have been in real hot spots. But the whole issue there was just trying to get home.
3 We aren't trying to win anything.

4 RV: Right. Was that pretty common throughout the whole tour?

5 DH: I think so. Yeah, I think so. Most of the time with the guys I was with and
6 even the one, real decent lieutenant, in fact, he'll be at the reunion too, name's Bob
7 Amos, I carried the radio for him later on as an RTO (radio/telephone operator), he did
8 his job, but he wouldn't take any unnecessary chances with us. It just wasn't worth it.
9 We all knew that we weren't going to win this thing. We just needed to get everybody
10 home.

11 RV: So, that was the attitude. That this thing is pretty much over. We're not
12 going to. We're not going to win.

13 DH: It was with most all of us. Once in a while you'd get a gung-ho person show
14 up and a couple of times we got a couple of lifer-types that were there for their second
15 tour that were really into the ambushes or trying to seek out the enemy and engage them.
16 Most of the time if we knew the enemy was in one certain area, we would be going the
17 other way. There was no way we wanted to make any contact with them. I think they
18 probably felt the same way.

19 RV: Can you describe the enemy?

20 DH: The ones I saw, the first one I saw was a North Vietnamese as far as we—
21 early on again, probably only a day or two after that first fire, fire that we were under was
22 we'd stopped in the middle of the day. We kind of were in a long line and then in kind of
23 a horseshoe shape. We're taking a break. A fellow named Davenport was the big
24 football player. He was next to me and I saw him looked kind of shocked and he raised
25 up and aimed his M-16 and shot one shot. I thought, "Well, what was he doing?" Well, I
26 looked over and I saw a person kind of stumble and fall. He went running over there and
27 told me to stay where I was. What had happened was is when we'd walked in the semi-
28 circle and sat down quiet, this NVA officer had stood up and looked around, trying to
29 figure out where we were. We all sat down. Davenport had seen him and I couldn't
30 believe he could aim and shoot, but he did one shot and shot and killed this fellow. I had
31 never seen a dead person until then and I remember I didn't want to go over there. He

1 finally said, "Come on, you've got to go." We went over. He took me over there. The
2 fellow was dead and I don't remember where he'd shot him at, really, but he'd had a pith
3 helmet on. Davenport handed me the pith helmet and inside there, I'll never forget was a
4 picture of a young woman, a young Vietnamese woman on one side of it. It was, I
5 believe it was a drawn picture and on the other side was a drawn in ink picture of a duck.
6 I don't know what the symbolism of that, but he had a picture of probably his wife or
7 girlfriend on one side and a duck on the other side, but that probably hit home as hard as
8 anything, realizing that finding that this guy's not going home and that's his wife or
9 girlfriend. I don't know what the duck's all about. James, which was our hard-core
10 squad leader and I never brought this up to him, but it's no big secret, but he always was
11 pretty hostile against them. Well, this fellow was dead, and we'd lost people before I got
12 there, I guess, plenty to toe-poppers and land mines and things. I remember James was
13 standing there looking at this dead fellow. James put this M-16 up against his nose, and I
14 thought he was just going to poke him. This guy was dead, and pulled the trigger and
15 pretty much blew his face off.

16 RV: You saw this?

17 DH: Yeah. That was just, all of a sudden I'd seen in a couple of three days more
18 than I could have believed in a lifetime. That was kind of the ugly side of war. You've
19 got Davenport on one side that shoots one time and trying to get me, I guess, adjusted to
20 what's coming up. Then James which is so, I don't know, has got such hatred for them
21 that just blows the guy's face off when we're all standing around there. That was, yeah,
22 one of those things you don't forget.

23 RV: How did you feel at this point about what was happening to you?

24 DH: I don't know if I was numb or not. I guess I was, after a while you quit
25 being afraid—I mean you're always afraid of certain things, but it would be a hard one, I
26 guess. I guess I just, I think I was almost to the point where I thought "There's no way
27 I'm going to live through this. It just isn't going to happen." We hadn't started hitting
28 booby traps yet, but it just seemed the way that we had to live, I'd heard about how many
29 people had been, either their feet blown off, or killed in mines, it was usually mines or
30 booby traps is what hit us all around there and how many new guys were there, including
31 me and thought there's just no way someone can survive out here like this for twelve

1 months. I just was amazed because some of the guys had just only had a couple of
2 months left. It wasn't very many of them, I just can't believe they made it through it.
3 Physically they might have, but mentally a lot of them didn't.

4 RV: Yeah. What else about the enemy? What would you consider the enemy's
5 strengths?

6 DH: Most of them were so mobile. The ones that we ran into are mostly hit and
7 run, we would get sniped at and they would disappear. Their strengths were their booby
8 traps. We had an incident where we were operating in another AO (area of operations),
9 this thing was one of those catchy deals, but we had been, as I remember we had been
10 sniped at off and on the mor—either morning, I think it was the afternoon and heading up
11 the hill. It was our whole platoon. I think, actually both platoons because we were so
12 small. We'd been sniped at a few times going up to get to the top of this one hill to set up
13 a night defensive perimeter, I think is what we were after. Not knowing much about—I
14 knew they could set booby traps and we'd been told about toe-poppers and different
15 things, but this is one of those things that we got up, just about to the top of this hill.
16 They were bringing in a resupply helicopter to drop off, I remember, some chocolate
17 milk. One of the interpreters that we had with us which is like a Vietnamese scout, he
18 thought he saw something. He walked over and he hit a trip wire which was on one of
19 their fashioned, it was a daisy-chained booby trap from, I think, artillery round canisters.
20 I believe there were three of them. Later on I got a letter from a chaplain that had kind of
21 done some research on what happened, but long story short they were very talented
22 because this thing killed six of us and wounded twenty-seven all in one mine. I was one
23 of the fortunate few that it knocked me down and I didn't get a scratch. But it was, again,
24 we'd lost so many people and was just one of those things—I think they knew they
25 might've been running us up this hill this whole time when we got sniped at, but they had
26 the ability, I think, and patience to know that we were dumb enough to go up to the
27 highest point all the time to set up. So they'd had this waiting for us.

28 RV: How far into your tour was this?

29 DH: That happened, I got there in June, that happened in July. So I was a little
30 into a month, I think a little over a month. When they got done with that and there was a
31 whole story involved in this, that whole thing, what happened afterwards, but by the time

1 they cleared everybody out of there I was almost one of the old-timers. There was so
2 many of them gone, yeah. Because you figure we lost, we lost like thirty-three people to
3 that one incident. We lost some of the higher ups, the sergeants and the E-6s that we had
4 and the platoon leaders. It was a devastating thing to our company. In fact there was a, I
5 think I looked up, I ordered something from the Washington archives. I forgot where I
6 got that from, that kind of talked about it, but that was a pretty major loss for one booby
7 trap.

8 RV: Absolutely.

9 DH: Yeah.

10 RV: We'll talk about that a little bit more in detail when we get to that point.
11 What about weaknesses of your enemy?

12 DH: Well, they didn't have much firepower, which was a good point to us. As I
13 recall, too, a couple of times, we would run into a couple of VC. We came around the
14 corner one time with a couple of them. Usually they'd have like one weapon to two or
15 three of them. So they didn't really have much. So the weaknesses would be probably
16 the firepower and no back-up firepower. I mean, we had artillery and helicopters. We
17 had all kinds, and jets, and whatever we needed. They didn't have much. I think up
18 North, they might've had some artillery that they could use once in a while, but down our
19 way it was, they had what they could carry and that was all.

20 RV: Okay. Were you all going up mainly against the Viet Cong or was it a mix?

21 DH: It was a mix. I remember mostly Viet Cong. Once in a while we'd run into
22 some NVA but kind of quirky things like that Davenport story when he did shoot that one
23 that just screwed up and stumbled onto us, probably. But never ran into any massive—
24 luckily I was never involved in one of those big, major battles against the NVA. It was
25 always just small skirmishes all the time.

26 RV: What were the major tactics that were used, I guess, by the VC?

27 DH: Against us?

28 RV: Against you all, yes.

29 DH: Yeah. Well, their major tactic was just setting land mines always in front of
30 us. So every time we would get ready to go somewhere, I think they probably knew we
31 were going, but we would run into toe-poppers or those trip wires or saw a few punji pits,

1 but they were so obvious that nobody would ever fall into one of them, but it was mainly
2 land mines and booby traps. They would snipe at us, but honestly, the whole time I was
3 there, all the sniper fire we came under, I can remember a few bullets. I heard them
4 buzzing like bees over me, but I never saw anybody that got shot from them. I think they
5 were—I think they'd shoot so fast and be at a dead run, because they knew that once they
6 shot once, everybody in the world would unload on the direction they were in. So they
7 were out of there fairly fast.

8 RV: Do you want to talk about those booby traps? The different kinds and how
9 you avoided them, how you spotted them.

10 DH: Yeah, and that's something that's learned as you were there. I mentioned
11 earlier that walking down the trails, every time that something looked a little out of place,
12 like maybe a leaf that didn't look right or a stick that didn't look right or an old can, you
13 would step over it. The person walking point would always be trying to find those. Then
14 as each person progressed up the trail, he would stop, step over, turn around, stop, point
15 at it, the next person would do the same until we all got over it, but those were mainly
16 toe-poppers. That would be an old C-ration can full of explosives that would basically
17 just blow your foot off or both of them off. That's mainly, in our area, what we ran into.
18 Once in awhile, like I said, like the big ones, the big booby traps, but it was mainly toe-
19 poppers that they'd set for us.

20 RV: These were in like a can?

21 DH: They were set in like C-ration cans and filled with explosives and glass and
22 whatever metal scraps or anything they could put on them. It had some kind of a pressure
23 sensitive device and I think they might have used, too, the handles off our frags or hand
24 grenades as far as the pressure. You would step on them and they would go off and that
25 would be your foot.

26 RV: What was the closest one that went off to you?

27 DH: I had the fellow, I've had in front of me and behind me, I had a fellow that
28 stepped on one and it blew, I think it blew, yeah, just blew one of his feet off. It basically
29 threw dirt and things in my eyes. I couldn't see for a couple of seconds and then I
30 thought I'd stepped on it. When I finally could see right I'd looked and it was one of the
31 fellows laying there in front of me. The medic had already ran up there. I kind of helped

1 hold the fellow down. The medic was shooting some morphine into him, but it had
2 blown his foot off. He was going into shock, but it was just your typical toe-popper.
3 That was one of the instances when we—I'm sure he made it. I wish I could remember
4 his name. I can't, but we, Doc Boggs was the medic. I kind of held him down and we
5 got him fairly calm and kept wanting to look. I think he finally got a look and saw he'd
6 lost his foot and then that's really when I think shock started in, but the Medevac
7 helicopter, our problem with that one was when the Medevac got close and was coming
8 in the, there had been some, I think they must have been VC not far from us. They had
9 opened up on this helicopter and the helicopter wouldn't land. That was kind of tough.
10 So, the helicopter took off again and was just kind of hovering way up and we had to
11 send guys out to try to run the VC off just to get this guy hauled out of there. I had a
12 couple of those, but that was probably the closest to one as far as the toe-poppers that I
13 know of that somebody hit right next to me.

14 RV: How do you deal with that? Someone right next to you, someone you know,
15 someone you've been out there risking your life with who loses a foot right in front of
16 you.

17 DH: Yeah, that happened. That was common. Even one of our staff sergeants
18 that had come over there, his last name was Buckley, kind of went running up to an area
19 that I didn't think he should've been up front in, but he was kind of in charge. I think he
20 lost, no he only lost one of his two, not both of them, he lost one of his. The strange
21 thing, after that happens or like the big mine that we'll talk about is that when all of the
22 chaos and everything's over and you're sitting there that night you realize you're never
23 going to seem them again. It's just they were here, they're gone. Their life's changed.
24 It's a strange feeling when that happens and it happened so close to you. It could be you.
25 It's just a matter of time till it happens to you, but you kind of become complacent as far
26 as, not that you're not afraid and you're not cautious, but if you worried too much about
27 it you wouldn't take a step in any direction.

28 RV: Sure. Did that prevent you from getting close to people? Did you
29 deliberately try not to get close to people?

30 DH: No, no. I always—everybody had their certain friends. No, we all relied on
31 each other.

1 RV: Well, Dave, why don't we take a break for just a moment?

2 DH: Okay.

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Interview with David Hammond

Session [2] of [4]

Date: May 11, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
2 interview for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project with Mr. Dave Hammond.
3 Today is May 11th, 2006. It's almost 10:15AM Central Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock,
4 Texas, and Dave is in Beaverton, Oregon. Dave, let's pick up where we left off. That
5 was really your first patrol and getting out as an infantryman and experiencing that and
6 being an infantryman by surprise, not which you had signed up to do over there. I want
7 to ask you, before we get into specifics and before we get into specific patrols and
8 incidents that you remember, could you describe what a typical day was like for you?
9 You know, initially and if that continued, if it didn't, what changed?

10 David Hammond: Very early on in the first few days in the field there was just, I
11 was pretty much totally exhausted. Reason is is because of the weight of what we carried
12 and I know we talked about that earlier, but from the not being accustomed to the
13 humidity and to the weight and the terrain even being a fairly physically fit eighteen year
14 old it was, you would almost collapse many times during the day. So, most of our day
15 would consist of patrols. We would be moving from one point to another point. I think
16 they would call them search and clear, search and destroy missions. Once we would get
17 to these areas we would, it seemed like we would walk most all day. Then we would set
18 up at night on some kind of a night defensive perimeter, either on the top of a hill or
19 wherever it might be and get ready for the evening and then we would send ambush
20 groups out of either four or five people and be awake majority of the night and then in the
21 morning come back in at daylight and everybody would hook up and we would start
22 trudging off down the trail again to a new spot. It was a pretty monotonous type of a day.
23 Yeah, that's probably pretty much what it was, it wasn't any fun.

24 RV: What about meals, breakfast, lunch, dinner?

25 DH: Yeah. Everybody, we pretty much ate when we wanted to, what we had, C-
26 rations that we had were the typical olive drab green cans and the real dry crackers.
27 There were spaghetti and meatballs and pork slices and beans and weenies. We even had
28 breakfast C-rations which were pretty bad. They were some of those were scrambled egg

1 and ham, I remember, being in a can, along with those, in those C-rations, there would be
2 either a little pouch of hot chocolate, coffee pouch, salt and pepper, probably. I think
3 there was a little thing of toilet paper and maybe gum. The highlight was once in a while
4 they would bring out a resupply helicopter, they would bring us what we would call, we
5 called them lerps (LRRPs, [long range reconnaissance patrols], rations). I didn't know
6 what their name was, but it was the freeze-dried food where you would heat a canteen up
7 full of water, pour it in and you would have, it would be chicken and rice or another form
8 of spaghetti. So, it's a little better meal than that. Once in a while we went on resupply
9 they would drop a, we called these SP pack and again, I'm not sure what the SP was for,
10 but it was a giant plastic bag full of candy that didn't melt, chocolate that didn't melt.
11 That's kind of scary, and gum and shoelaces and toothpaste and toothbrushes and writing
12 tablets and pens and things. That was a highlight during the day. So, as far as food went
13 it wasn't any good, but we always seemed to have enough. I don't ever really remember
14 running out of food. Once in a while water got kind of scarce, but we seemed to always
15 have enough. Our appetites were probably not that big anyway.

16 RV: What did you like the best? What was your favorite meal?

17 DH: Yeah, I think mine would've been the, I think it was beans and weenies
18 came in one of those. Those were not bad. Then everybody's favorite was the pound
19 cake and the pears for dessert. So those were probably the favorite ones I had. Then we
20 had a way we would use these Sterno tabs and make a little stove to heat the things up.
21 So, it helped a little bit. We could also cook the hot chocolate up on them too. I think
22 that was, beans and weenies was probably my favorite.

23 RV: Which ones did you hate?

24 DH: God, well, the lima beans were really bad. Nobody wanted those. Nobody
25 wanted the lima beans. The pork slices I think were pretty bad. So, those you could
26 usually find somebody who had a bigger appetite that you could either give them to or
27 trade them for something.

28 RV: The water supply was relatively adequate?

29 DH: Well, the water supply we would take, we would fill up with water when we
30 would leave. I remember that most of us, because we were in the mountains and would
31 be gone for a couple of weeks, usually before we'd come back into the rear, but we

1 would get supplied, but usually it wasn't with water. We would carry two half-gallon
2 soft canteens and then I think it was a single quart canteen with us, which they seemed to,
3 you know all the weight adds up, and use those. Then we would take iodine tablets to
4 purify the water. So when we were at a stream or a river, wherever we could find it and
5 we could fill up and then treat the water which was always, it was a little bit gross to
6 begin with. Only one time do I remember, I did get sick. We had been without water for
7 a couple of days and came up on a bomb crater that was pretty funky, but I remember I
8 did fill a canteen up and I didn't wait for the iodine to dissolve. Then we were filling up
9 whenever we got to the bad water, we would get some packages from home that would
10 have instant Kool-Aid in them. So we would add the Kool-Aid in the water to knock the
11 taste down. Well, I guzzled the canteen and I don't remember if it was that afternoon or
12 the next day as we were on a patrol, I got light-headed and actually just pretty much
13 passed out. I was sick. We got closer to where they could take me back. They hauled
14 me back to the rear and I had gotten some bug from that water and spent a couple of days
15 back in the rear, sick. But other than that, that's the only time I really got sick from bad
16 water.

17 RV: So it tasted bad, despite the fact—

18 DH: Well, it was, a lot of it tasted bad because it was stagnant where it sat, like in
19 the bomb craters, but if you waited long enough for the iodine tablets to work, you
20 weren't supposed to get sick. My problem was on that one, it was my fault. I was just so
21 dog-gone thirsty that I just didn't wait. I just threw the Kool-Aid in there and the tablet
22 and waited a few seconds and drank it and that was kind of the end of it.

23 RV: Well, the supplies, did they come enough? Were you supplied adequately?

24 DH: I think so. We weren't that far away. We might have been working in the—
25 Chu Lai itself was where our rear area was, which was right on the coast line and we
26 worked mainly in the flat lands, right at the base of a mountain range or in the mountains
27 themselves. As far as the helicopter goes, to get there, it was probably only a matter of
28 fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, I think they could get to us fairly fast. So, I think we got
29 re-supplied fairly well until the winter time when the monsoons set in, once in a while it
30 took a while because they couldn't get in because of the fog and the rain. The visibility
31 was so bad they couldn't get to us. But overall I think we had, we had what we needed.

1 RV: Talk to me about sleep deprivation. You mentioned just the fact that you
2 would be up a lot. Was that a factor?

3 DH: It was and it was really tough. Its something you're not used to and when
4 you're exhausted and I can remember walking on patrols or moving during the day when
5 we'd have our rucksacks on and our weapons and things. We would stop for a five
6 minute break and basically you would just collapse where you were standing, lean back
7 against your rucksack and fall sound asleep. It was like that and easy to do at the time.
8 Once we got we got to where we were going you would be exhausted and it would start
9 to get dusk and the majority of the or not the majority but, I forgot how many would go
10 out at night, probably three or four ambush groups would go out at night. Again, you
11 would take turns staying up, usually two people awake all the time, if you could even
12 sleep anyway. You would do that all night long until daylight 'til you came back in and
13 then away we'd go again. So, we didn't sleep much.

14 RV: Did other people have a problem with it as well?

15 DH: Yeah. They all had problems. More than once, I can remember being on an
16 ambush that everybody would pass the watch from one person to another, I think we
17 were, would each take, I think an hour, and then pass the watch and wake the next guy up
18 and then he would do it. Well, more than not, you would get somebody in the group that
19 would be so tired they'd advance the time on the watch. So, instead of an hour, they
20 might do forty-five minutes. Well, two or three people advance that thing, the last guy
21 you handed the watch to, he was sitting there for two hours wondering what the problem
22 was. It wasn't getting daylight. Well, everybody had advanced the watch that we were
23 using at the time. So, that messed it up. A few times I can remember not even being
24 shook awake and handed the watch because the guy before me had fallen sound asleep
25 and we were all sound asleep and daylight would come. Thank God nothing ever
26 happened to us, which it had happened to other patrols before. So, luckily, the times that
27 I knew everybody was fallin' asleep, we never had any enemy activity anyway.

28 RV: Talk to me about at night, out there. How hard was it for you to adjust to
29 sleeping out in the jungle and having to deal with everything? We touched on this a bit,
30 but you know just, did you acclimate okay? How long did it take you?

1 DH: It took a while. The first, after that first night or so, it was just flat
2 miserable. You weren't on a flat surface. You weren't on a, anything that was soft to
3 speak of. It was pretty much always a problem as far as what, what you were laying on.
4 I think I got used to it after a while. We had, people bought hammocks. I bought a
5 hammock once I got into it, but the problem we had with the hammocks and I never had
6 figured it out until I was about done with my tour, but it rained so much. If you got
7 yourself in a place where you could put a hammock up, like in a very thick jungle or very
8 thick vegetation and you got yourself wedged in that thing, you couldn't turn over, you
9 had to kind of lay in one spot on your back. Then if it rained, all the rain ran down the
10 tree, or whatever you had it hooked to, ran down the strings and ran into the hammock
11 and you were soaked. It might've kept you off the ground a little bit, but that was also a
12 problem. I think the point is, Richard, you were just so exhausted you could pretty much
13 sleep anyplace.

14 RV: You talked about stopping at night, kind of digging in, could you describe
15 how you all would dig in and set up a defensive perimeter?

16 DH: Yes. That was always a bad one. I hated that. After all day long of doing
17 what we were doing was just on the move. Whether we had any enemy contact or not we
18 would get up to a defensive night defensive position. It was up to us to start digging a
19 trench or a foxhole of some kind for some kind of a defensive position. Well, the last
20 thing anybody wanted to do after we'd been up all night the night before and all day and
21 then start digging a hole to get in. Some of the guys would do it. I did it about half the
22 time. Once I got the, had been there a while, I just decided I just didn't need any part of
23 it and I didn't dig much. So, I let the rest of them dig if they felt more comfortable for it.
24 In fact, we had a—one instance we had some of the guys had dug, and if I hadn't dug
25 one, I wasn't going to get in one unless it got really bad, but we had some mortar rounds
26 go off that had come up the small hill we were at. The enemy had popped a few mortars
27 at us. You could hear them when they hit the tube. All I did, when that would happen, I
28 would throw my rucksack over my head and just kind of lay there in a little ball and wait
29 for it to be over. So, I wasn't much for digging a hole.

30 RV: That night, what were the, what was the protocol?

1 DH: It was the same type of thing as the ambush. We would, depending on what
2 position you were in, you would do it was either an hour or two hours shifts with one,
3 usually we had one person, I think, awake in those, around the perimeter. Once in a
4 while, we would have a star-light scope that you could see at night with, we would pass
5 around. You know the night, before dusk we would set out our Claymore mines and
6 everybody kind of figured out what their field of fire was. The sad thing is you couldn't
7 see anything at all. I mean it was, once it got dark, it was dark. It never happened to us,
8 we never got overran or attacked when I was out there set up on one of those, but it
9 would have been pretty bad because you can't see anything. So, but, again, it was just
10 boring trying to stay awake all night until the next morning.

11 RV: What did you hear at night? What was out there?

12 DH: Yeah, a lot of noise. We were in an area with a lot of monkeys. We had
13 monkeys you could hear making noise at night. I'm sure there were kind of, all kinds of
14 rodents, I don't know if they were rats or gophers or what that would make noise every
15 now and then at night, especially after we'd had some kind of contact in that day. We
16 would have it where we would, if the noise was wrong, someone would get spooked,
17 either throw a frag in the direction or open up with their M-16 into the dark. Well, then
18 everybody would wake up in a mad panic. Everybody would start blasting away at
19 anything, whatever direction they could point, there in the dark to the outer side of the
20 perimeter. Usually I think it was probably a monkey or a squirrel or a branch falling out
21 of a tree. I don't know if it was every anybody sneaking up on us or not. But it was just
22 kind of, we had an unlimited amount, I guess, of, when I was there, we never ever
23 worried about ever running out of anything as far as ammunition. You could shoot up all
24 you want and they would run you some more back out real soon the next day. So, spent a
25 lot of money on nothing.

26 RV: What kind of animals did you run into, out there during the day?

27 DH: Well, besides the monkeys, I saw a wild boar once, running up the side of a
28 hill. We had another wild one that hit on of our, I wasn't in the platoon that had it happen
29 to them, but they had had a boar come through one of their Claymore mines coming
30 down a trail. I can recall on one patrol we were walking down the middle of, kind of a
31 canal. We were so afraid of the booby traps they kept setting all around us that we were

1 in the water and walking single file down this canal. I saw the guys in front of me start
2 scrambling and running from side to side. Once I got out of the water and looked there
3 was a, I think it was an eel. Everybody thought it was a giant leech, but I know it was an
4 eel, came swimming down through the middle of us. So, a lot of gross things in the
5 water, but once he passed us, we all got back in and headed up. Saw a bat, couple of
6 times we saw bats and a few snakes. They talk about all these kind of scary snakes, but I
7 don't think I ever saw one that was poisonous.

8 RV: When you all were going through the terrain on these patrols, what kind of
9 terrain were you on? Did it vary? What did—?

10 DH: Ours varied. It was a beautiful place we were at, I mean, if you weren't in a
11 war. There was some villages outside of Chu Lai that were probably mostly VC, but
12 depending on who was visiting the village that day was whose side they were on, so you
13 didn't know. There were farmers. There was a lot of flat lands there and rice paddies.
14 Then there was the mountain range that went by us. If we weren't down in the flat lands,
15 we were up in the mountains. It was absolutely beautiful. There were waterfalls and
16 green valleys, very lush, but also, once you were up in the mountain areas, it was steep,
17 hard to get around. If we were having troubles with the booby traps and being sniped at
18 and things like that, well, we would try to just hack our way with machetes up through
19 the thickest vegetation we thought they wouldn't have been before, the VC, as far as
20 setting mines around us. There was a little tough terrain in part of it, but overall it was
21 probably no worse than anybody else had.

22 RV: Okay. I'd like to ask a little bit about the relationships within the unit. How
23 long did it take you to be accepted and how long did it take for you to make friends, or
24 did you try to make friends within the unit?

25 DH: I did. I think we touched on it a little bit when I first got to my squad. It
26 didn't take me long. You have the friends. You make the friends, especially in your
27 squad you're going to have. I think you had the respect for the fellows that had been
28 there longer. Some of them, if they had only been there a couple of months longer than
29 you had, you pretty much paid attention to what they said. I made friends with some of
30 the other—you didn't get to see some of the other people in the other platoons until we
31 went back into the rear for a couple of days every now and then. But I think we talked

1 about racial tensions and again, we talked about it, but I didn't have any problem with
2 that. I was never worried about, you always hear about these people not wanting to get
3 close to certain people because you're losing so many. I never even thought of that. I
4 just, I had a lot of friends.

5 RV: Was there any tension between, say, the enlisted, the draftees with the
6 officers?

7 DH: Not so much. I don't think that the—it wouldn't have mattered the draftees
8 or the RAs which are the Regular Army's that joined like myself. Some of the officers
9 were really tough to deal with, way too gung-ho for what we wanted. Again, in 1970 and
10 1971, we knew the war was winding down. We knew we were going to be out of there
11 real soon and we couldn't win it. So, unlike maybe the people that got there in the middle
12 '60s, where they thought there was actually going to be an end to it if they could win the
13 thing, we knew there was no end. So whenever we would get a new second lieutenant is
14 usually what we would end up with and we only got a few. They didn't know anything,
15 what they were doing. That was the toughest part, having them come in and being
16 straight out of school and trying to tell us how we should do it and what we should do.
17 They didn't last long. In fact we had a few of them that, we had one I know that did.
18 Since then I've talked—well, we had one incident where we had a new lieutenant show
19 up that nobody really cared for. He was afraid way more than we were for his safety.
20 We got into a little bit of a firefight. It didn't last very long and I can remember looking
21 over and I saw him kind of wallowing around on the ground holding his foot. He had
22 been shot in the top of the foot, which I thought was really strange, because where we
23 were all laying, first I thought he shot himself. I didn't say anything. We they dusted
24 him off and it didn't matter, good riddance because that kind of stuff had happened
25 before. Well, in the last few years, I've met a guy that I knew over there that's from the
26 Seattle area and finally got to the bottom of the story. This guy was one of the real old
27 timers and was a kind of a retired Hell's Angel, one of those fellows that joined the
28 service or went to prison when he was there, but a great guy, the guy you'd trust your life
29 with any day. Well, anyway, this second lieutenant had, I don't know what he had given
30 him, hired him, gave him a bottle of booze or something, but he'd hired the fellow to
31 shoot him in the foot the next time something happened. The guy admitted it finally, and

1 I always knew something was strange. So, those kind of things happened, but at least we
2 got rid of the guy. Of course, he probably got his Purple Heart and he's on his disability
3 right now.

4 RV: I was going to ask you how that made you all feel and what you think about
5 that today.

6 DH: Well, we all laughed at him. Well, a few of us went up and saw this friend
7 of ours. I had talked to him a couple of times over the years and he's close here, but I
8 finally asked him and some of that kind of stuff finally comes out that nobody would talk
9 about that happened. He finally admitted this time that he had done that because it had
10 been so many years ago. It basically, to us it was funny. It was something that, sure
11 nothing that upset any of us that were standing there getting the story straight. So, it was
12 just I think, those kind of, those kind of people, they didn't need to be there. They were
13 more of a hindrance. They were just kind of compromising our safety as far as if you've
14 got an inadequate officer with you. So, I'm glad he was gone.

15 RV: What was your relationship with the sergeants, and say the NCOs?

16 DH: Most of them were pretty good. Our first sergeant, name was Top Miller, he
17 wasn't in the field much. He kind of took care of what was in the rear and he was older.
18 I couldn't stand him then, but I think I looked back as I got older and realized he had to
19 do what he was doing as far as forcing the people that were faking being sick or just
20 wouldn't, I guess, toe the line. I mean, if everybody said they weren't going to go to the
21 field, it was up to him to get everybody out into the field and kind of keep things
22 together, but he was doing his job. The other sergeants that we had were just fine. They
23 were most of them, they were just enlisted guys that had been there long enough they had
24 made some kind of rank. So, they were just like anybody else. The only difference with
25 them is they had a little more time on us. When we went back into the rear to spend a
26 couple of days, they got to go to the NCO club and the rest of us didn't.

27 RV: What about any discussion of fragging?

28 DH: You always heard of that. That happened more to the people that were in
29 the rear a lot and even the time I was in the rear, I don't think I ever saw it happen. So,
30 you always heard of it happening, but in our unit, I never saw it happen as far as the
31 officers that we had, I don't think anybody really—well, the one's, I don't think we had

1 anybody hated, that we hated that much, but, also though, and I think we touched on it
2 earlier is what had changed was when I was there, it had gotten so bad in the rear area
3 that when we would come back in off of—the helicopters would bring us back in from
4 being out for a couple of weeks. They would get us on the, on some deuce-and-a-half
5 trucks and when we would get back to the rear area, before we could get off the truck, the
6 armorer and first sergeant were there. They would take all our weapons, all our frags,
7 anything that we had, I mean, you probably could have hid something, but we had no
8 weapons or anything in the rear as they did earlier on in the war. That's just because of
9 that, I think, the fragging and the problems that were happening.

10 RV: Tell me about back in the rear, at base camp and what that life was like.
11 What would you all do?

12 DH: Well, I loved that. That's the only thing that kind of kept me going through
13 most of it. Being on China Beach area—well, the whole thing was China Beach, but we
14 had these big long, what they'd call hooches, but they're basically just big plywood
15 buildings that would hold probably thirty or forty of us or I think there might have been
16 more in some of them. Some were smaller, some were larger, but ours in our area, we
17 were very fortunate because they were right on the beach. We had a shower room that
18 was real close there that was a bunch of barrels that they had water in that would just kind
19 of come out the bottoms of them from gravity feeds to take a shower. They had an
20 enlisted men's club right there, which was what we probably all just lived for the couple
21 of weeks we were out in the bush. They actually had a chow hall so we could go over
22 there and have kind of regular food while we were in the rear. Plus you got clean clothes
23 and pretty much no duty. Anybody that was in the field, when we came back in because
24 they had such a thing as perimeter guard as far the rear area which was a huge compound.
25 A lot of the fellows that were in for other, had other jobs that never got to the field, I
26 think had to do that, but we pretty much were left alone for a couple, three days at a time
27 when we'd come back in the rear.

28 RV: What about racial tensions back in the back?

29 DH: That was bad. Again, I never had any with the people that I really knew that
30 were in our company, but it was bad enough that if you were, at night, you wouldn't
31 leave your company area, say, if you had a friend that was a half a mile away or an eighth

1 of a mile in another company or whatever it might be, you wouldn't go by yourself,
2 which was, I can't believe how bad that is to even hear me say now because that was
3 terrible. It shouldn't have been that way. But it was, yeah, it was the blacks and the
4 whites. But again, in the latter '60s when all the things were happening back home, it
5 was carrying over. Then the frustration of the war was happening and it was supposedly
6 the white man's war. It wasn't good. We had one instance that I'd written a story about
7 earlier, but we had a—whenever we would come back into the rear area, they would, a lot
8 of times they would have what they'd call a floor show or a band for us. We would go to
9 the enlisted men's club. This one instance, we had an Australian band was there and a
10 couple of pretty Australian girls. They were playing the regular '60s rock and roll. Our
11 company was in there with our lieutenant and company commander and whoever was
12 there. Actually it was mixed, a few of the fellows, the black fellows in our company
13 were in there. Well, as I noticed that around this EM (enlisted men) club slowly but
14 surely black soldiers, you could tell they were rear echelon guys because they had such
15 clean, starchy-type fatigues and stuff on started mingling and they were standing all
16 around the back of this big building which was where this, kind of what we called a floor
17 show was going on. They started bad mouthing the band as far as what the music was.
18 There wasn't any soul and on and on. So we were trying to ignore it and everybody had
19 been drinking quite a bit. The next thing we know one of them had walked up and one of
20 the good fellow in my squad, one of the rear echelon black guys came walking up and
21 took a half-smoked cigarette and dropped it in Wimpy Boudreaux's beer can and it was
22 like slow motion. I can remember looking over there at this guy standing over him and
23 they had a couple of words. When he dropped that, he let go of that cigarette and it
24 headed for that beer can, the minute it hit that beer can, it's like a bomb went off in that
25 place. It's like chairs flew, tables flew, fists were flying. It was, kind of like you'd see
26 on TV. I mean everything was, it was just chaos there for about three or four minutes in
27 a barroom brawl. It was all just because it was the racial thing again, but here we were in
28 for a couple of days from the field. The fellows that started it were in the rear all the
29 time, but again, it was the majority of us were the white guys and they were out to prove
30 a point. Of course, again, they shut the EM club down and made us stay in our company
31 area and called us back out to the bush. So we got kind of penalized for it.

1 RV: How did that affect morale?

2 DH: It was bad. It got worse from there on out. We had a couple of guys go to
3 the hospital after that fight that were pretty important to us, good friends. I think it was
4 just another thing that made it worse as far as the—even the black fellows in our
5 company, a lot of them decided they weren't going to go out anymore. They were not
6 going to go out to the bush anymore. Then once they said they weren't going to go, some
7 of the white guys said they weren't going to go. The lieutenant I had that's, in fact I'm
8 going to see here next month, that I carried the radio for named Bob Amos, he was the
9 XO (executive officer) at the time. I talked to him later, and I didn't know what
10 happened, but he said it got to the point where he had to send three of them to Long Binh
11 Jail, which was the prison there in Vietnam, just because they kept refusing orders. He
12 said it got to the—and he's a great guy, the nicest guy in the world and would do
13 anything for anybody, but he said it got to the point where you can only give somebody
14 direct orders so many times. That was it. So, three of them I know of that were in our
15 group ended up in prison over there.

16 RV: Wow. So when you got back out to the field, did this stuff carry over or was
17 it left back in the rear?

18 DH: Most of it was left back in the rear. Some of the fellows they weren't a
19 problem at all, kind of like me, too. We had a few Southern, of the white guys that were
20 just as bad, but it really didn't carry over, but a lot of them weren't there. The real
21 troublemakers had already been hauled off to prison that we'd had in our group. We
22 even had one of the fellows, pretty good guy, one of the old timers, but he had, he was
23 kind of squirrely, but I'll never forget him. His name's Jay Montgomery and this is
24 something I could always tell because it wasn't that big of a deal, but he refused to go to
25 the field because a lot of the black guys didn't go. Well, one day we're out in the field
26 and we look up and here comes a resupply helicopter. He's a little short guy with red
27 curly hair and look up. He gets off the helicopter and they throw the supplies off and I'm
28 looking at him and he doesn't have anything. He's got his jungle hat on and his shirt and
29 his pants. I don't think he had, and I don't think anything else. Well, what had happened
30 was is the first sergeant, Top Miller, got so mad at him, he hauled him out to the
31 resupply, threw him on the helicopter and away they came and he came out with no

1 rucksack, no food, no weapon, no nothing and pretty much just wandered around with us
2 for another four or five days 'til we went back.

3 RV: Wow, that's tough.

4 DH: So that's still, we just—and we haven't seen—one of the guys saw him a
5 few years after we got back and I don't know where he's at now, but that's one of the
6 stories we tell yearly at our reunions that Jay Montgomery coming out there with nothing
7 but a pack of cigarettes in his pocket.

8 RV: Let me ask you, changing subjects, when you did engage the enemy, can you
9 describe who they were and what you ran into?

10 DH: We had, usually, rarely did I ever see them. We talked earlier about
11 Davenport in my squad that shot an NVA officer. That was the first, I think the first one
12 I saw. We also had another instance when we had somehow trapped, somehow trapped a
13 person in a little, I think it would be like a coconut grove. Everybody had surrounded
14 him and killed a couple of, I think it was one or two VC in there. That was kind of
15 unnerving. We had one instance, I remember I was walking second man from point
16 where we came around a corner and there were two, there were two VC and they had a
17 stretcher which was a pole and kind of a canvas sack with a third one in it. We saw them
18 and they saw us and they dropped him like a hot potato and took off running down the
19 hillside. This poor guy they dropped, we were just as shocked as they were to see them,
20 he'd apparently stepped on one of their own toe-popper land mines because he didn't
21 have a foot. I can remember him scrambling up through the brush as fast as he could go
22 without a foot. We finally caught up to him and that was, this one we actually sent him
23 back, but I can remember this is one of my memories, is that when we got there to him,
24 he'd flipped over on his back and he was praying. I don't know, because I remember he
25 was kind of chanting. I thought he thought we were going to kill him right then and he
26 had his arms stuck up in the air. We didn't. We picked him up and hauled him back to a
27 place. I think they sent a helicopter out to take him back to interrogate him. So, but as
28 far as NVA regulars, I never saw any. We'd run into these VC, like those instances and I
29 had some other instances where we would see the Viet Cong, but never, luckily I never
30 ran into any full-fledged NVA regiment where we engaged them.

31 RV: Tell me about the Viet Cong. What were their strengths and weaknesses?

1 DH: Well, theirs was they could, they were so mobile, they could move so fast.
2 They were experts, and for us, and setting land mines around us, most of the people said
3 if there was a land mine out there we were going to find it because we always were
4 stepping them. It was just a weekly thing. We would keep losing people to mines and
5 toe-poppers. I think that and they were so creative. They didn't have anything. Their
6 food was bad, their food was in short supply, medical was short supply. I think they may
7 have had more of a motive. Well, I'm sure they had more of a motivation to win than we
8 did. It's amazing that we could've lost the war from what we had, but, I think mobility,
9 and there was a dedication to what they were doing, unlike us.

10 RV: What kind of weapons did they use mostly? Were they booby traps?

11 DH: Well, booby traps and then what would, usually it would be, you could tell,
12 the AK-47 would be the Russian rifles that they had, but again, in the areas we were at,
13 there would only be, as I recall there might be two or three VC and only like one weapon
14 between them. They would be harassing us every now and then. They'd sneak up on us
15 and shoot a clip or two and then take off running. We'd never find those guys.

16 RV: Did you make any effort to chase them or go after them?

17 DH: Usually not, no. We usually never ever went down and tried to run anybody
18 down. We want to stay out of harm's way. So it was one of those things that if they took
19 off running in a certain direction, we were so afraid too, that we'd either be pulled into an
20 ambush, step on a booby trap. Yeah, we didn't go out of our way to make contact, I
21 guess.

22 RV: Right. Is that because you wanted—I guess you just said—to keep safe,
23 don't hurt yourself, but also because of your attitude towards the war?

24 DH: Attitude towards the war is what happened. If we made contact we could
25 call in, oh, the Cobra gunships or artillery we would call in a lot of times. They could
26 just bomb the heck out of a certain hillside or area, who knows if anybody was ever in
27 that area or not, but we had to guess they were there. But as far as us physically trying to
28 run people down that we thought, boy that was rare. I don't remember more than a
29 couple of times that we were ever used, or ever would do it as far as just, it was just too
30 risky. Our whole goal there was to come home at that time.

1 RV: Yeah. Well, can you describe some of the times you did run at the enemy?
2 You've already talked about this a bit, but just your experience with combat in general.
3 What can you say about it?

4 DH: Everybody has their own little, little snippet of what happens. We talked
5 about the one, I think my first day out. What you see and what the fellow five steps from
6 you sees are completely different things. I've run into that over the years. It's kind of
7 helped seeing all of my old friends again because we can put some of these stories
8 together on things we all went through. Most of it was chaotic. Most of the firefights I
9 was in were very short because it would be just—and short as in I don't know if they'd
10 even last minutes. Because seconds when bullets are flying is a long time. I know when
11 I was carrying the radio for Lieutenant Amos, some of the fellows didn't want to carry
12 the radio because of the weight. Some of them didn't want to carry it because you were,
13 a lot of times they would, if there were snipers out there they would choose, they would
14 figure out who the lieutenant was, was the leader, or the radio man, if they could get them
15 first. That would compromise the whole group or the whole patrol. One instance for sure
16 I can remember too, and we got off the helicopters and were heading down a trail
17 quickly, we got opened up on. I know they were after me, because I could hear when
18 they opened up, you'd hear a crack, crack, crack, and a split second later you'd hear a
19 zing, zing, zing. It'd be the bullets tumbling over you. I don't know, they probably
20 missed me by a couple of feet, but they were buzzing by my head and I know it's because
21 I had the radio. It was the antenna. Again, I dropped to the ground and threw my
22 rucksack on my head and just laid there and got through that one.

23 RV: How does it feel to be targeted?

24 DH: Well, that was the only time I had, I've got to admit, the only time I think
25 they really, I was really the one that they were trying to get. It feels fine now, but at the
26 time it was kind of unnerving. I think that, because I had a—one of the fellows that was
27 leaving country when I came in had been a RTO. His souvenir was he had a little screw-
28 in base of the antenna that had sat right by his ear that they had shot and shot the thing off
29 right next to his ear. He kept that little screw-in stud that went into the top of the radio
30 kind of as a memento about how close it came. It's a real different feeling, though, when
31 somebody's trying to kill you in that sense. But, lucky to say, that's the only time I ever

1 remember them really doing that. I think I was more afraid, I was more afraid of booby
2 traps any day than I would be getting shot.

3 RV: Yeah. What else about combat? Anything stand out as far as incidents that
4 occurred?

5 DH: Well, the biggest one that probably, I guess was the most traumatizing time I
6 had, we were on a patrol in a area that we weren't real familiar with. We had our
7 company commander, which I've seen since, who was a real good guy. His name's Bob
8 Franco. We were in a area that he wasn't real familiar with from what I learned later that
9 we'd been sniped at off and on and spent the afternoon trying to get to the top of this one
10 hill to set up a defensive perimeter for the night. It was a slow, strenuous type of a climb
11 up this and being shot at every now and then, luckily nobody was hit. Well, we started
12 getting up towards the top and fanning out around this thing. I can remember one of the,
13 hearing the radio go off that there was a resupply helicopter in the area. They had some
14 chocolate milk and they thought they'd drop it off. Again, this chocolate milk's the kind
15 of stuff that never spoiled, but still, it was better than nothing. So, we got to the top of
16 this thing and it was our whole, it was the—we only had two platoons I think at the time,
17 because there were so few of us, but most of us got to the top. One of our Kit Carson
18 Scouts, which would be a Viet Cong type that came over to our side and was actually
19 kind of our guide and interpreter and so on, had seen something in the brush at the top of
20 this hill. I didn't know, this I didn't know at the time. This is all I heard after that, but
21 anyway, he hit a, what it was was when he walked over to it, he hit a trip wire. This trip
22 wire, once this explosion went off, I didn't know it at the time, but I was knocked down
23 and most of the people were knocked down. There was dust all over. It was dead silent
24 for maybe a split few seconds because of what had happened. Then it's one of those
25 things you can't, can never forget, but the groaning and the screaming and the hollering
26 started. What had happened was, well, I sat up, I was okay. I just had been knocked
27 down, but what had happened was is they had set up what they called a daisy chain and
28 filled up three big canisters, I think from artillery rounds around this perimeter we were
29 standing on. They'd filled them full on glass and rocks and metal. These three canisters
30 that surrounded the top of this hill we were on all exploded at the same time where we all
31 were. Once the, I remember our squad leader James, I'd only been, this is, I'm kind of

1 backing, got to back up some. This was in the end of July. So I'd been in the field just
2 about a month at this one. I can remember James because we'd been harassed and shot at
3 all the way up, screaming at me. He threw the M-60 machine gun down and told me to
4 get it and fit into one of the trails because his first thought was is once these, they had
5 been harassing us and sniping at us, once we had been hurt as bad as we had, he thought
6 we may be attacked from then. So, most of the fellows were up scrambling helping the
7 dead and the wounded that had come about. I never knew how many there was. You
8 could see people around and bandages were going this way and that way. Pretty soon the
9 helicopters came in one after another after another, the Medevacs taking people away.
10 When finally everything cleared for the wounded, we'd kind of figured out we'd had, I
11 think we'd had six dead and twenty, I think twenty-seven wounded just off of that one
12 booby trap. So it was coming to be dusk. Over the years I've found out a little more
13 about this. Well, we were afraid to move. When you lose that many people on one mine,
14 some of the helicopters came in and started hauling off some of the people that weren't
15 wounded. So I know our company commander and some of the other people were hauled
16 off. As I recall, there were about eight or nine of us that were left up there. We were
17 waiting for another two helicopters to come back when we got a call on the radio that
18 they'd either pulled them to go somewhere else, they were going to leave us there that
19 night. That was probably the most unnerving thing because there we were, there were, I
20 think barely a squad of us left. The enemy knew that with all those Medevacs coming in
21 and out how many of us were hurt, how many were gone and probably how few were still
22 on the hill. We were told we've got to stay there. So, we sat, I can remember sitting
23 back to back. I don't think I moved more than about two feet the rest of that evening and
24 thinking that they were going to come any time. That evening, I can remember, at the
25 dark, when it was dark, way down at the bottom of the hillside we could see a couple of
26 little tiny fires. Well, a lot of times, the enemy, they would cook at night, eat at night.
27 They weren't real afraid of much. But we knew they were down there and we thought,
28 "Well, it's a matter of time until they're going to come up." Luckily, nothing, they didn't
29 come up, but we were afraid to go down. Well, we got a phone. We got a radio call the
30 next day. They wanted our group to move to another hill which is, I forgot how many
31 clicks it would be away, but they wanted us to take and hook up and move to another hill.

1 Well, we weren't going to go anywhere. Number one, we were afraid to move in case
2 there was more booby traps. We knew the enemy was down at the bottom of the hill and
3 probably knew how few of us there were. So we refused. We refused a direct order on
4 the radio. I can remember James, the squad leader, trying to get us together say, "Look,
5 here's where we got to stick together, because if we go down there, we're probably not
6 going to get through this." So we did and we got, probably another hour or two, out
7 comes a little loach (LOH, light observation helicopter) helicopter, one of the real small
8 ones and it had a colonel on it and I forgot who he was. He came out, walked around
9 there and told us everything was fine, ordered us to go down the hill and hook up with
10 this, it was called Bravo Company, was a ways away. Again, we all stuck together,
11 refused to go. We were threatened to go to prison, and on and on and on. We said,
12 "Well, we're not moving." So he got back in his helicopter and he left. I don't know if it
13 was an hour or so later, I look up and here comes a chaplain, gets off. He comes over and
14 tells us, "You guys are in big trouble. If you don't obey this order, you guys are, you're
15 all going to jail," and same thing. We all stuck together and said we're not leaving.
16 We're not moving off this hill for anybody. It's stupid. He left, to no avail and we're
17 still sticking together, not knowing if we're going to spend another night up there just the
18 so few of us when everybody's in the rear. Pretty soon they bring out a mine dog,
19 another helicopter shows up and it's got a guy with a German shepherd because we kept
20 telling them we're afraid of mines because of what happened to us. The mine dog and
21 the handler show up and wander around the hill and says he couldn't find any. Well, it
22 didn't matter to us because we didn't want to go down the hill. Half the point was mines.
23 The other half was we knew the enemy was down there and we weren't going down there
24 with eight of us or whatever it was, or nine. So he left and we thought, "Well, that'll be
25 the end of it. We're probably all going to jail or going at least into the rear and they're
26 going to have us up on some kind of charges." This had been going on all day and this is
27 the next day after we've lost all those people. There was just—we didn't quite know who
28 was dead and who was wounded. We just knew we'd lost so many. The next day, here
29 comes a couple of Huey helicopters and we thought, "Well, this is it." We're going back
30 and sure enough, we get on the helicopters and think we're heading back to Chu Lai and
31 they took them about three minutes in the air to fly us over to Bravo Company, drop us

1 off and leave us there where they wanted us to walk to. That's where we stayed. So,
2 nothing ever happened, no charges filed, nobody ever got in trouble. We made it. We
3 were safe, as far as safe, because there were so few of us, they took us to another
4 company, but something they should've done that night after we lost so many, or the next
5 day instead of trying to make us walk down through that again. So, a little bit of a bitter
6 taste. It's one of those deals that, we got a bunch of new guys after that. So, that's a
7 whole another story, but, that's the one big thing, I think, that we lost so many in such a
8 short amount of time.

9 RV: That had to be incredibly difficult on morale and continuing on. Was that
10 the case?

11 DH: That was. In fact, there's one of the fellows that I see at the reunions and
12 I'm going to see again next month was one of the few that was left up there with me. We
13 were so bitter because they had hauled most of the—of course, the dead and wounded
14 were gone, but the rest of the company, for a long time, I thought that we were the only
15 ones that had never gotten hurt. Then I realized after some of those reunions, I've talked
16 to the guys, that they had started to evacuate and were moving the other people and either
17 just ran out of time or ran out of birds for all of us. So, it was really upsetting to me that
18 they would leave us out there and I guess we were just numbers, but, still bitter about—
19 we were bitter about it then, is why we refused these direct orders, still kind of bitter
20 about it now. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know. That was one of the most traumatic,
21 yeah, I guess times I had. It wasn't long after that, that I had my one stand where I
22 decided that I'd seen so many of us die. Here it was, the end of July and I'd only been
23 out there for, I don't know, six weeks, not even six weeks. All of a sudden, I'm one of
24 the old timers, because we get all of these brand new guys come in to fill all these
25 positions or to replace all the bodies that are gone. All of a sudden, I'm one of the older
26 types around there. I decided, I'd had an uncle that had been in a similar situation where
27 he'd lost a bunch of people in a firefight. In fact, he won the Bronze Star for valor in it,
28 but he couldn't take it anymore and he wasn't going to die there. So he went back and
29 reenlisted to get a rear area job and just wasn't going to die there. So at that time, I'd
30 made a decision and I said—and I went to the company commander, I think it was the
31 lieutenant, Bob Amos, because he didn't happen to be there at that time, which he still

1 feels kind of bad about. I said, "I'm not going to die out here. I don't have to prove
2 anything. So I'm going to go back in the rear. I'm going to reenlist because I'm not
3 staying out here anymore." So, luckily I went back in on a helicopter with another fellow
4 that had been there the same amount of time I had. I didn't care who thought what. I just
5 had figured out that it wasn't worth dying in that country for that. When we got to the
6 reenlistment office, first thing the guy asked, what our MOSs were, which were tankers,
7 but really infantry. He said, "Sorry." The program they had, where if you reenlisted to
8 pick a job that you wanted, anybody who had a combat MOS could not reenlist again
9 because everybody that was—there were so many trying to do it to get out of the field
10 they needed people in the field. So, that afternoon, we're back on the same helicopter
11 and dumped back in the field. I'm thinking, "I'm never going to live through this," so.
12 But I did.

13 RV: Were you bitter?

14 DH: I think I was bitter. I think I was, I was, yeah I think I was bitter, but I think
15 I was more resigned that I was going to lose a foot or lose a leg or die, and really for
16 nothing. It was just—because at the point, it was just senseless. I used to, kind of
17 mentally, I would keep kind of a tally on the losses on their side and our side for our
18 group. If you counted wounded people, not necessarily that were died, as far as our
19 group goes, we always lost. We might've gotten a couple of them through ambushes or
20 Claymore mines, but always we lost people to booby traps, weekly. So if you were
21 taking a count on who was winning, we were losing as far as bodies and what happened
22 to us. But I got back out to the company. I think that's when I started carrying the radio
23 was after that. That's when I had the few more close calls carrying the radio, but it was, I
24 just adapted to what I needed to do just to get through it.

25 RV: Did you try to not, I guess, think about what had happened? Try to put that
26 out of your mind?

27 DH: The problem with what had happened was you didn't realize who was dead
28 and who had died. A couple of the fellows that weren't hurt too bad came back, but the
29 one, one real good friend I had, this was a black friend of mine, Jesse Hill from
30 Tennessee. I didn't know if he had died or not. A few of the other fellows I was friends
31 with, you didn't know if they died or not. Because what happened was they hauled them

1 all off to three different hospitals. There were so many. From there they took them to
2 Japan, the ones that were really bad. So, you never know who died or not. For the next, I
3 don't know, number of days or weeks, just the thought of not knowing who was dead
4 who was, all of them that were—there were so many that were gone you didn't know if
5 they had died or were wounded or what, that was the toughest part, I didn't know.
6 Luckily Jesse Hill, I was able to find a number of years ago. He had spent months and
7 months and months in Japan in the hospital, but we've been able to get together two or
8 three times. He's okay.

9 RV: So, why couldn't you all find out what had happened? Just because you were
10 back out, they were Medevac'ed out and that was it?

11 DH: Yeah. If you look at the way they kept records back then, because when
12 they took them all to the hospital, they took them to three different hospitals back there.
13 Then the real bad ones, they some how got them stabilized and they hauled them to
14 Japan. Well, there was really no way or nobody to ask if they were on they're way to
15 Japan, what happened to them. We were still in the field anyhow. There was really no
16 way to find it. Back in, I think 1995 I still didn't know what happened to a lot of them.
17 In 1995 I became aware there was an Americal Veterans Association through a friend of
18 my wife's that was in it. At the time, computers were coming on board, but there wasn't
19 a lot of this online, website type thing. They had a little magazine. I put a little blurb in
20 there and I said I was looking for a certain person in a certain incident that had happened
21 and I named off a couple of people and I also named off this big booby trap we hit where
22 we lost so many and never heard anything. Well, I got a package. In fact, I've got it on
23 my desk here, the letter, but I got a package and a letter. In it was a, like an eight-by-ten
24 glossy photograph and a two page letter from a chaplain. The chaplain was the chaplain
25 that they took, they brought out in the field a couple of days after this had happened, not
26 the one that tried to get us to go off the hill, but after this happened. He's also the
27 chaplain that had ran from hospital to hospital. He sent me a list, a hand-written list of
28 who he was able to see and what hospital they were at. He's the one that actually told me
29 what the booby traps were. In that eight-by-ten glossy, I'm looking, and there I am, I'm
30 sitting in the forefront of this thing kind of looking down as he's giving a service. That
31 was a real strange thing to see is, yourself, eighteen years old, two days after that had

1 happened, sitting there in the dirt on the top of this hill in Vietnam. Somebody actually
2 had that picture.

3 RV: What'd you look like?

4 DH: Oh, shaggy-head, baby-faced kid. I was always griping about getting
5 haircuts, but we were pretty somber. It was a very somber mood with that because he
6 was giving a service. I wasn't, never been overly religious at all, but it was a thing where
7 it was, a lot of—it was just a real downer. I mean the whole thing was a downer. We'd
8 lost them all and here we were supposed to kind of suck it up and keep going on.

9 RV: Do you think they should have put you guys on stand down and just—I
10 mean, this is horribly traumatic.

11 DH: Yeah, I don't think—they didn't, because what happened was when they, as
12 I remember when they flew the few of us they didn't take off that hill over to that other
13 company, they brought back the rest of the company that was left. Then that's when, I
14 think, we stayed on this other little defensive perimeter hill in another area. But I can
15 remember them flying in on the resupply birds all these new guys. We had new guy after
16 new guy after new guy. We'd just keep getting them and getting them and getting them
17 and splitting them up. I've got some real good friends that came in after that that I see
18 yearly and correspond with monthly that came in that were part of the replacements for
19 all of the people that we lost. But yeah, we didn't really get any kind of a break. I almost
20 think that maybe there would be a reason for that, because I've got to tell you, Richard, I
21 think that probably half the people, we wouldn't have gone back. When you lose, when
22 you go through something like that, I think if we would have got back in the rear, they
23 would have had more problems with us if they would've brought us back.

24 RV: So they would want to basically put you out there and let you all deal with it
25 on your own.

26 DH: That's pretty much I think what we did. I think we were so spooked there
27 for a few days we probably shot \$10,000 worth of ammunition up every couple of days,
28 just on shooting at sounds and stuff. Time seems to heal and as the days and the months
29 went on everything, we got back to the same old routine. But that was the biggest thing I
30 was ever involved in.

31 RV: How do you feel about it today?

1 DH: Well, it still makes me mad that they probably, if we wouldn't have stuck
2 together and refused that direct order and them coming out there and keep trying to get us
3 to go down that hill, I think we probably all would've gotten killed. I think that, yeah,
4 I'm almost sure that we would've, would've not been here today. That makes me mad.
5 With all of the helicopters they had there, they wasted time with those sending the
6 colonel out and the chaplain and the mine dog guy out, three different trips they came out
7 there trying to make us move off that hill instead of just sending the two helicopters like
8 they finally did later that day to shuttle us over. It took them four or five minutes to get
9 over to another hill. So, I was—it shouldn't have been. They weren't looking out for
10 there people as far as I'm concerned on that one.

11 RV: So you're mad at them for trying to get you out not mad at yourself and the
12 others for refusing the direct order.

13 DH: No, not at all, no, no, no. As far as refusing the direct order, that was
14 absolutely the right thing to do. There comes a point when you have to, what's right and
15 what's wrong, you see all these Audie Murphy movies when people are jumping up and
16 charging head on into a machine gun. Well, we weren't into that. So, the smart thing for
17 us to do was to either stay put because we knew what was going to happen if we went
18 down the hill and we were just going to let the dice, roll the dice if they were going to try
19 to do something to us legally. I don't think they even wanted to. I don't think they
20 wanted to mess with any of the legal stuff. I think they got frustrated with us by refusing
21 that order. But, I think to them, I think maybe they deep down knew it, that how could
22 you make eight or nine guys do that after they'd lost, you know, six dead and twenty-
23 seven wounded around them the night before? So, but no, no I don't feel bad at all. We
24 did the exactly, we did the right thing.

25 RV: It sounds like you did.

26 DH: Yeah.

27 RV: I would like, if you could, tell me about the mental state of being in a war
28 zone. You've talked about what you thought of the war at the time. You've talked about
29 these very serious combat incidents that you experienced, but in general, is there a kind
30 of an overriding fear or something hanging over your head every day? This is besides the
31 feeling that you weren't going to survive, but is there something that you all felt in

1 common with this environment? This is highly irregular, unusual, not what people
2 experience usually in their life. Here you are right in the middle of it. Can you comment
3 on that?

4 DH: Well, the only thing, I guess, I've always thought over the years is that being
5 so young, I think the average age of a soldier over there was probably nineteen or twenty.
6 I was eighteen. I think, to me that had a lot to do with us adapting. I mean, the morale
7 was down. I don't remember ever being, when a firefight would start or someone would
8 step on a mine, I can remember being very afraid, but morale-wise, I can remember even
9 some of the times having some very funny and fun experiences out in the field. I always
10 told people, most of the time we never talked about anything until about the last ten
11 years, till anybody'd ever even opened up about things that we did, but I always told
12 people we had a whole lot of good times and a few bad times over there. I don't know. I
13 think I was able to adapt with it. I think most of the guys were that were over there that I
14 knew, we just did what we had to do and just took it one day at a time until we could
15 come home. I don't really know what to say about it.

16 RV: Okay. You've described a lot of the tactics that you guys used. One of them
17 was the ambush and also trying to avoid an ambush. Can you tell me how you all would
18 set up an ambush?

19 DH: Most of ours, when we would go out for night ambushes, which I always
20 thought was just backwards of what we should do, but we would go out at dusk and we
21 were, we were obvious. So if the enemy ever wanted to watch us and watch where we
22 were going to go, it happened to some other squads I know where they did get overrun
23 and attacked at their ambush site. But it was easy to see us because we always made way
24 too much noise whether we tried to or not. We would go out four or five, as I recall, you
25 know, into the dusk, find where we were supposed to be, which was not always where we
26 would end up. We would pick a spot, usually around what we think, some heavily used
27 trail. We could set our Claymore mines out, which are the ones with the trips wires that
28 shoot the little steel pellets out that would cover a broad area, set one of those up on each
29 direction of the trail. Then we would kind of spread ourselves out a little bit in between
30 that area off to the side, off to one, all of us on one side of the trail and wait. Really, only
31 one time that I was involved in one is where we had anything very serious happen. We

1 had set up for the evening and had kind of all kind of hunkered down and all of a sudden
2 we heard some talking and some jabbering. Well, what it was was some Viet Cong were
3 walking down this trail right towards us. Well, your heart's about to pound out of your
4 chest at the time when that's going to happen. In a matter of just a few seconds, they
5 were up on us and they had hit the trip wires. So there's a big explosion and a little bit of
6 silence. Then there's all kind of hollering, jabbering and screaming going on with them.
7 Well, again, I think it was James, which was kind of always the solid head case, around
8 us, made sure, told us all to be quiet. You couldn't, and the reason was we couldn't see
9 anything. So they didn't know we were there, but we knew they were there. If we would
10 have started opening up in the dark, who knows if they would have seen the muzzle
11 flashes or whatever. Usually they would have what they call Chicom grenades that they
12 could throw, or whatever it might be. So, we sat tight, let the hollering and the screaming
13 go on for a little bit because we knew at least one of them was down. Pretty soon they
14 were gone and it was quiet. This was probably not long before dusk. We hadn't made a
15 move, hadn't made a noise. We decided we would just wait and get up in the morning,
16 not get up we were going to stay awake. So, it got to be daylight. When we walked over
17 to where the one had gone off, the two things that were laying off to the side of the trail
18 were a couple of feet cut off right about the ankles. What had happened was the first guy
19 in line, and there was no sandals or anything on them, half the time they were barefoot,
20 but whoever had set it, I don't know—it wasn't me, but whoever had set it set it kind of
21 low. When this Claymore went off, it sheared this VCs feet both off. So we had two
22 dirty feet laying off to the side of the trail. We followed the blood line for a while where
23 they'd carried him off. We never did find him, but when the rest of the, we'd called it in
24 and when the rest of the platoon came down, we had a fellow that was absolutely crazy
25 that probably shouldn't have been anywhere, even around. We called him Wild Man. He
26 was a real strange duck and had squirrely looking hair and had one tooth. It was just, he
27 was just bizarre. But everybody carried an instamatic camera with them at the time. I
28 can remember Wild Man, he walked over there and picked up those feet, one in each
29 hand by the big toe and stood there holding them out to each side of him with this big
30 one-tooth grin on his face. We must've taken fifty pictures of that screwball with these
31 two feet. I think he finally tossed them in the brush. We packed up our stuff and headed

1 out. But I'd kept that picture for a few years afterwards and I think when I dug, about ten
2 years after I'd—well, not that long, a few years after I'd gotten back, people, some
3 people keep some of that stuff. I went through some of those pictures I had and I tossed
4 them. To me that's, I have enough of a visual in my mind of Wild Man and those two
5 feet that I need. So I don't need the picture. That's one ambush where we did get
6 somebody, but again, we weren't, maybe in the earlier on in the war and maybe in
7 different wars, that would have happened and we would have charged and started
8 throwing grenades and doing whatever we needed to do, but we were there just to get out
9 of the place.

10 RV: Were their ambushes successful? How often did you all run into those?

11 DH: Well, luckily I never really got anything except being, they opened up on us,
12 as far as with small arms fire a lot. It didn't last very long, so. They would open up and
13 it would last for a number of seconds, probably, is all it was. We would return fire and it
14 was over fairly fast. We would call in some gunships to start shooting rockets where we
15 thought they might be. Their ambushes, luckily, I never ever was around anybody that,
16 except that one lieutenant that I know the other fellow shot in the foot, that ever, I saw
17 anybody ever get shot in one that I was involved with. Again, it was all land mines and
18 booby traps with us.

19 RV: Were you ever wounded?

20 DH: No, no, luckily I had a—I don't know why. I was one of those things on
21 that big booby trap where we lost so many. I had a fellow, you know, one in front of me
22 once and one behind me that stepped on a toe-popper and lost their feet. Just had a lot of
23 things happen there and I just, it just, nothing ever—I never got a—the only time I ever
24 got a scratch, I got a little scar and that was from after we'd hit the big booby trap, one of
25 those spooky nights when I thought I'd heard something like everybody else, it was my
26 turn for guard. It was probably a rodent, but I can remember rolling up—you hollered,
27 “frag,” out when you were going to throw a hand grenade or frag out into the, wherever it
28 was going to go. I don't know why, everybody was pretty much asleep or trying to. I
29 didn't throw it out far enough and when it did blow up, I did, I had a little shrapnel just
30 kind of set on my wrist, but, other than that, nah. Besides getting shot at, close to and
31 things like that, I was very fortunate. I was too, one of the lucky ones. I'm jumping

1 ahead, but most of the time, a lot of us, the longer you're in there, rear area jobs would
2 open up. If you could survive your first so many months, they would always take the old
3 timers, if you were making it. If any kind of job opened up in the rear area, you would go
4 back. So, I was lucky enough, the last few months I had, I got to go back in the rear and
5 handle the mail for the company.

6 RV: Back at Chu Lai?

7 DH: Yeah, yeah, which was a cushy thing. In fact, I told my, this lieutenant that
8 I think the world of, named Bob Amos, that I see a lot, he doesn't remember hardly any
9 of it. Of course, he had a lot of guys to take care of, but he was one of those that he
10 happened to be on R&R (rest and recuperation) visiting his wife in Hawaii when we hit
11 the biggest, the big booby trap. He was just coming back to the company when it
12 happened to us. He wasn't with us. I talked to him, oh, a few years back, he said he still
13 feels some guilt about not being there with us. We're glad he wasn't. I mean, I would
14 have hated something to happen to him, but after that happened I can remember one
15 instance, there was what we called a three day R&R come up. It was up in China Beach
16 in Da Nang. He chose me to go, probably because I, he probably figured I was shook up
17 enough and the youngest guy out there, but that was nice. So I got three days out of that.
18 He got to be the, what we called XO in the company because usually officers only spent
19 six months out in the field and then they could find them another job in the rear. That's
20 what they got to do. I can remember that he was back doing his XO duties and the mail
21 clerk who was also, had been an RTO, who was going to go home pretty soon, I can
22 remember him asking me if I knew how to type. Well, I really didn't. I took one course
23 in high school my sophomore year and I could type with two fingers, but I said, "Hell
24 yeah, I can type anything you want." I got to do the mail clerk job. So I was able my last
25 few months to stay in the rear and handle that mail, which, what I was kind of told him, I
26 said, whether he knows it or not, he could've saved my life, a couple of times of getting
27 you out of the field, who knows if the next day you were going to get it or not. I was
28 lucky enough to come back. Most of us, I can't recall, hardly, just a very few guys that
29 were with us ever spent their entire twelve months out there. I know one, only one that I
30 do know, we get together with did, but most of the people that I was with, if you could
31 make it through anywhere to six to eight to ten months, whatever it might be and you had

1 any kind of brains to you at all, to do any kind of thing, whether drive a truck or clerical
2 or, we had a couple of fellows go back into headquarters and run the radios and do things,
3 there was a way you could get yourself out of the field after. You couldn't do it when
4 you were new, but towards the end. Most of the fellows I know were able to come back
5 and get some kind of a rear job.

6 RV: That is a huge transition.

7 DH: Oh, huge. I mean, it was unbelievable. It was such a relief when that finally
8 would happen to you. I watched guys all around me do it. In fact, I had a fellow that was
9 one of the new guys after the mine, he wrote and told me he remembered the day that I
10 got mine, as far as the rear job. He remembered when I was leaving. I think if you
11 actually got a place to sleep, you're pretty much out of harms way. They would shoot,
12 once in a while they'd shoot rockets into our compound, but boy, after, if you'd ever been
13 out as a grunt, who cares. I mean they'd shoot rockets—we'd hear them coming in and
14 most of the guys that had been in the field wouldn't even move. You'd lay there in your
15 bed. Once you'd been out in the field, nothing was going to phase you. It was nice to
16 have a mess hall, nice to go to the EM clubs and NCO clubs or whatever you were at and
17 just kind of bide your time to get out of there.

18 RV: Before we move back to the rear, you did mention an R&R. Was that your
19 only one?

20 DH: I took two in Bangkok. Yeah, I just enjoyed those. I'd like to go back. It's
21 just a beautiful country and beautiful people. The food was good. The people were
22 friendly. Spent a lot of money and drank a lot, but it was a nice way to get away from it
23 all, but a very strange transition because you go from I can recall we would, when the
24 guys would go, wherever they had chose to go, be it Australia or Thailand or Hawaii, you
25 would usually get out of the field just the day before you left. So you would be on a
26 helicopter heading back into the rear area to change your clothes to be flown somewhere
27 to get on a jet. Within about twenty-four hours, you were standing in some fancy hotel
28 somewhere. I mean, what a transition. So, had a good time, but it was just a strange,
29 strange thing.

30 RV: Did you take anybody with you on your R&R?

1 DH: No, I always met a buddy to hang out with. I was always, enough to me—
2 well, I guess the second time I did. It was one of the fellows, last name was Spencer, I've
3 never been able to find him since, but he was from the same rear area as our company
4 was. We went together and spent the time together and shared—we had a driver that
5 would drive us all over the place. Went to some Thai boxing shows and went and saw
6 elephants, mainly ate a lot. We'd try to eat a lot. I remember one of the times in the
7 hotel we were at, there was huge crowd of Thai school girls were there and they were
8 there to see a rock and roll group called Marmalade. I forgot, called, "Reflections of My
9 Life." I won't ever forget that. It had a big '60s hit, but it's something I kind of
10 remember. The people were nice. Of course, we were spending a lot of money there,
11 too, so. But if I had to did it again, I would probably try, I never got to go to Australia. I
12 think I'd go to Australia just because the people there like us and I've never got to see
13 that part of the country.

14 RV: Right. Let me ask you about a couple things, additionally, out in the field.
15 You've mentioned this a bit, that's humor. What role did humor play for you all?

16 DH: Well, oh, we just had some that were—in fact, we were laughing at, I've
17 laughed at it since, but we had—some of the people were just characters that we had and
18 that I mentioned that Jay Montgomery, watching him step off of a helicopter with just a
19 pack of cigarettes in his pocket out in the field because the first sergeant threw him on the
20 bird he was so mad at him. To us that was some funny stuff. We had a case where we
21 had a big black fellow named Tate. I don't know where he came from, but he was right
22 out of the hills somewhere back in the South, but he was probably six-foot-two-or-three
23 and just so shook up about being there, it was kind of sad, but we were, another time we
24 were working close in to the villages outside of Chu Lai. A lot of times they would hook
25 us up, it would be our equivalent to the National Guard or Army Reserve unit, but they
26 would be South Vietnamese people and we would do a joint, kind of patrols and
27 ambushes and things with them. Well, their heart wasn't in it because I don't know if
28 they were VC the next day or not, but one of these nights we were out there and we were
29 set up in one little area and counterparts, which we called PFs I think, Popular Forces,
30 were in another one. Well, again the Vietnamese people all like to cook at night. Well,
31 poor Tate is so shook up all the time that he heard them start to jabber and start to talk

1 and he started throwing his hand grenades at them. They were screaming and hollering.
2 He threw, I think, three over there at these guys, because he thought that the VC were
3 coming at us. Well, it wasn't funny at the time, but the next day, and to this day it was
4 the funniest thing to see him hollering and screaming and throwing hand grenades at
5 these noises. Well, God, they were on our side the whole time. Thank God nobody got
6 hurt, but we always laugh at Tate. Never got to see him since, but those are things. We
7 had a case where we were walking through a canopy jungle one time, very, very small. I
8 think it was maybe just my squad. There was a friend of mine, now I see a lot named
9 Culligan was one of us. In fact, Tate was with us, and we started in this thing and all of a
10 sudden a bat appeared. This bat's flying back and forth and back and forth. Pretty soon
11 Tate runs out the back end of this canopy and he's not going back in because he's afraid
12 of this bat. Well, finally this bat makes one more run trying to figure out where he's at. I
13 baseball bat him with the back of my rifle and knock him down. So we all go and stare at
14 him a little while and kind of feel sorry for him and leave him alone, nobody steps on
15 him. We made sure he was going to be okay, but we all got around this teeny little bat
16 that kind of put the fear into us. Again, in that kind of environment, a bat, we were more
17 afraid of the bat than I think having some of the VC shoot at us at the time.

18 RV: In the rear, did you all—I mean, what was the humor like back in the rear?

19 DH: It was okay. We spent most of our time when we weren't working drinking.
20 You had the juicers and the dopers. I was more of a, I guess, a juicer, a drinker. Like
21 everybody else over there, we tried marijuana, but we spent most of our time in the EM
22 club and later on I became a buck sergeant or in NCO club and just kind of hung out in
23 the clubs listening to music and just kind of like you would sit around with a bunch of
24 friends in a tavern nowadays and talk about what we're going to do and what we did do.
25 I don't remember a whole lot of any special humor, any funny things that ever happened
26 back then.

27 RV: Back in the rear, what did you all do for entertainment? I mean, you
28 mentioned the drinking. What was that like as far as any kind of problems that you
29 witnessed?

30 DH: I don't really remember a lot problems. The main problem, we get back to
31 it, the main problem was we had racial problems, but as far as the drinking goes, a lot of

1 the problems with the drugs that I saw there, a lot of the guys got hooked on the drugs
2 were just an absolute, they were a mess. I guess it was so cheap. I think it was heroin is
3 what they had, because a lot of these guys, they would use Vicks inhalers and they were
4 always snorting this white powder, nothing I ever, I was smart enough never to do.
5 Maybe the alcohol carried on for a lot of guys and caused a problem for them later in life,
6 but it was pretty much a release for us. In fact, most of us, even when we were in the
7 field knew we were coming back in for a couple of days. All we thought about was just
8 heading to the clubs and start drinking beer. We would drink it as long as they could get
9 it out there until they threw us out of these old buildings is what they were. It was an
10 escape from where we were.

11 RV: Tell me about writing home and contact with home.

12 DH: I wrote a lot. Then I got to see a lot, as far as writing goes, because I was, of
13 course, there at the end was handling the mail, but I wrote a lot home, wrote to everybody
14 and anybody so you could always get mail, especially in the field. You always wanted to
15 get mail. I can remember my dad, he's gone now, but I got all kinds of letters from him,
16 that never ever said anything different because I understand now, there isn't really a
17 whole lot different to write about about everyday, but he pretty much wrote at least every
18 other day and didn't say much, but I was glad to get one. Got a lot from my mom. They
19 would probably just tell the same old mundane things that go on in everyday life, but it
20 was nice to hear. I had cousins we wrote back and forth. I had some girl type friends
21 from high school that I knew, would write and I'd write back and forth to. So, it was just
22 something. It was just kind of fun to get mail. I had one thing I did do that worked out
23 fine is that when we were in the field they had an organization called the Blue Star
24 Mothers of America. If they had a person on their address, they'd send coffee cans full
25 of cookies and fudge over. If that person's name wasn't on it, it would just go to whoever
26 and they would send them out to the field. Well, early on when I was there they sent one
27 of those coffee cans out there. The fellow was already gone, had an address on it. So I
28 took that coffee can label and I wrote a letter to them. Knowing that my name now was
29 going to be on those coffee cans, so, I think probably every other, every couple of weeks,
30 maybe, or maybe three weeks, I can't remember what it was, here would come a coffee
31 can wrapped in brown paper from the Blue Star Mothers of America with cookies and

1 stuff. They'd been on the boat a while because a lot of them got a little bit stale, but
2 everybody liked them and everybody ate them. I think it might've been ten years ago or
3 so when I first started kind of getting back into thinking about all this stuff. I stumbled
4 on a, I don't know if it was a website, I think it was a website, but I sent a letter off to the
5 Blue Star Mothers of America thanking them and telling them what experiences and how
6 much it meant to me to get those things and they sent me back one of their magazines
7 from their national reunion, they had put my letter in and stuff. I just wanted them to
8 know that what they, whether people said thank you all the time or not, how much it
9 meant. So I think it was very important to them they got my letter about how important it
10 was to me and all of our bunch for them sending those coffee cans of cookies over.

11 RV: Sure, absolutely. Were you able to keep up with what was happening back
12 in the United States?

13 DH: You know, I don't think I even cared. I think because I was never really
14 into politics, at that time, towards there, I was nineteen years old. I don't really think—I
15 didn't really care about anything except counting how many days I had left 'til I could get
16 out of there. So I don't think I paid much attention to any of it. About the only news we
17 got anyway, was, we got the *Stars and Stripes*, military magazine, or military newspaper.
18 So that's about all. Then the radio, you could get over there was Armed Forces Radio.
19 So I think it was probably pretty well cleaned up from how bad things really were.

20 RV: Yeah, what about the music? You just mentioned the radio.

21 DH: Oh, yeah, had a great time. In fact, I always carried a radio. I pretty much
22 still always have since then, I still do as far as a small transistor radio, but certain times of
23 the day, we didn't have Adrian Cronauer because he was already gone, but we had the
24 same DJs that played all the '60s music. In fact, were you at the Adrian Cronauer
25 reunion?

26 RV: Yes, I was.

27 DH: Okay, which was kind of neat. Yeah, but the music was important because,
28 to me, the music was important in my high school days and at that time. You hear music
29 from the latter '60s and say 1970, it was some pretty good stuff. A lot of the floor shows,
30 the bands that would show up, one of our all time favorites was The Animals, "We Got to
31 Get Out of This Place." I mean, that would always bring everybody to their feet. Then I

1 think it was The Temptations played, “My Girl.” That was another one that everybody
2 was kind of arm in arm and rocking back and forth and singing with the band. Music was
3 fun. When we could get a live floor show going, it was a lot of fun. The radio was good,
4 too.

5 RV: Did everybody listen or were there people who just simply kept to
6 themselves and did their own thing?

7 DH: I think everybody listened. I think if a radio was on, you’d sit around it. I
8 don’t really recall anybody—yeah, it was mainly, it was something, because you could
9 still have people send you over tapes. I think cassette tapes had just started to become
10 popular. We had had eight track tapes before that and I think cassette tapes were
11 happening. If somebody was lucky enough to have a little cassette recorder, and they
12 sounded terrible, but we were able to do that. Then I can remember certain times of the
13 day, they’d have certain radio shows on that would play certain ’60s music. I think they
14 probably played other things than that, but I only paid attention to the ’60s stuff.

15 RV: Was this back when you were the mail clerk or was this when you guys
16 would stand down and go back to—?

17 DH: That was both. Yeah, both, because we would always have some kind of
18 music going when we’d come back and stand down. That’d be going in the barracks or
19 the hooches that we were in. There was always music going in the EM club. It was so
20 noisy you probably couldn’t hear it and the floor shows, of course, they were all about
21 music. Then even when I got to be the mail clerk there back in the rear I always had a
22 radio hanging on the wall. That was always going at that time.

23 RV: Okay. Dave, why don’t we go ahead and stop for the day?

24 DH: Okay.

Interview with David Hammond

Session [3] of [4]

Date: May 15, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
2 interview with Mr. David Hammond. Today is May 15th, 2006. It is approximately
3 10:15AM Central Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, and Dave is again in
4 Beaverton, Oregon. Dave, let's pick up where we were last time. After this really bad
5 night and being turned down to transfer back to the rear, and being sent back out, all
6 these replacements coming in, I did want to ask you, two things. One, about what time is
7 this, month-wise in your tour?

8 David Hammond: Month-wise, when we hit that mine I believe it was July
9 twenty-eighth. I'd only been in-country since about the, I think I got actually in-country,
10 or to our company about the second week of June. So this would all be within the first
11 couple days of August, as far as after I had gone back with another fellow. Thought
12 about saving my life and getting out of the field, but that didn't work. So I was back out,
13 back out in it with the unit, well, same day, so that was about the first of August.

14 RV: Okay. How was it getting the replacements in over the next days?

15 DH: Very strange. In fact we were all, I think we were all in kind of, some kind
16 of a shock and so down as a unit because we had lost so many people that we dreaded—
17 usually when new people would come in, and I was actually still new, because I had only
18 been there about six weeks, but, usually when new people came in we would get one,
19 two, usually never three at a time, they would dribble in as people would leave the
20 company. This time we had an influx of probably twenty that came out and then kind of
21 spread out amongst the two platoons that we had. So as we sat on the one fire support
22 base, I guess you'd call it, the helicopters were coming in and dropping the new guys off.
23 It was just, not that I didn't like any of them, I think most of us felt we just didn't have to
24 deal with trying to show anybody what to do again. It took a little while to get to know
25 them all. Pretty soon they all blended in and I see a lot of them now that came out there
26 as replacements, I see them yearly at our reunions.

27 RV: Do you still see them at the reunions as kind of the new guys, the
28 replacements?

1 DH: No, not so much anymore.

2 RV: Okay.

3 DH: No, it didn't take them very long. But the one thing they don't have, there's
4 just a few us that went through that one experience that are still around, as far as losing
5 all our people and spending the night out there in that hill, is why they ended up in our,
6 the new guys ended up in our company anyway. So, they don't have that in common, but
7 they've got the whole rest of the tour in common with us.

8 RV: Right. Let me ask you just a couple of general questions about being out in
9 the field. What about friendly fire? How often was that a part of your tour?

10 DH: I only can remember one instance when it was, it happened to us and we
11 were on a daytime patrol. I think we were on a, there had been a big push, some kind of
12 battle, one of the other brigades had been in, I think. We were combat-assaulted, or
13 helicoptered into an area to sweep over an area to see if there was, because they had hit it
14 with artillery and everything else and see if we could find any bodies or any sign of the
15 enemy. I can remember it would be in fairly heavy canopied jungle area. We could hear
16 this gunships working out with their machine guns and things. It would get closer and
17 closer and closer. Pretty soon they were right on line coming right to us. I can
18 remember, I wasn't carrying the radio right then, but the lieutenant and the RTO were on
19 the radio and got a hold of somebody in a panic fast enough that they probably missed us
20 by a hundred yards, but that's pretty—a hundred yards isn't very much, I think, as far as
21 the helicopter goes when you're looking up. We never lost anybody. We had one real
22 bad incident that not many people talk about. It's nothing that we shouldn't, but a few of
23 us do, but we had a couple of the new guys that came out to the company everyone was
24 to set up on ambushes. I was on the next ambush over from where they were. Well,
25 before they went out everybody was going to outside the wire and that's really where you
26 would go as far as to relieve yourself and before we were going to go on these ambushes,
27 what happened is a Vietnamese interpreter along with this other fellow, his name was
28 Jerry, I think it was Frilling was his last name, went across the wire and did their thing.
29 Somebody, because it was getting dusk, was to walk back. They were to walk back in,
30 and one of the fellows, the new guys said, "Who goes there?" and the Vietnamese
31 interpreter which was with us all the time said something smart, or smart alecky, or

1 whatever. Well, it panicked the new guy and he opened up on them and he killed Jerry
2 Frilling which was one of his own squad members. So even to make it worse than that,
3 once that happened, that was terrible, but the monsoons were setting in. We had Jerry's
4 body laying under a poncho, I think for almost three days out there with us because we
5 couldn't get helicopters out to pick him up, to pick the body up. Well, in the mean time,
6 the poor fellow that shot him was there, and it was a real bad situation. I think once we
7 got the helicopter in there to take the body away and ship the other fellow off that had
8 accidentally killed him, I know he ended up, I think, at one of the hospitals, I think he
9 pretty much is traumatized the rest of his life over that. You can call that friendly fire. I
10 wasn't standing right there when it happened, but I was there when we were trying to
11 figure out how to get the body out of there, but that was, the two instances that I can
12 remember. Then the one was that and losing one of the fellows.

13 RV: How did this individual deal with killing one of the squad members?

14 DH: Oh, it was bad. I can remember, too, after we finally got all back to the rear
15 for a couple of days, everybody was pretty much drowning in their sorrow, as usual, over
16 at the EM club. I don't know what the fellow said. He was kind of keeping to himself,
17 but one of the other guys kind of—they had a few words, and one of the fellows punched
18 him a few times. It was a such a frustrating thing to lose someone, but I pretty much
19 think he—I know he probably needed mental help right after that. Probably the rest of
20 his life, he's been traumatized by it. I would hate—something you wouldn't know unless
21 you were in his shoes, I guess, but it had to be terrible.

22 RV: Does he come to the reunions?

23 DH: No, we've never seen him again. Once they shipped him off, they
24 shipped—he never came back to the field with us. He was gone right after that. I think
25 they just knew he just wasn't going to deal with it anymore. But, no, I've never even,
26 we've never heard hide nor hair from him and I don't think we ever would anyway.

27 RV: Do you think that you or others still hold some kind of a grudge or problem
28 with that? I mean obviously that's still a bad incident.

29 DH: Oh, it's terrible, yeah. I don't think so much, I know some of the fellows
30 that were in the squad with the two of them, because Jerry, the fellow that we lost, had
31 been around a while, the new guy had only been there for, I don't know what it was,

1 maybe a couple of weeks. I think the squad members, their immediate squad members
2 probably had some real problem with it. I didn't personally know him real, real well, just
3 because you're kind of, you're tightest with the four or five guys in your squad that
4 you're always with. But we did have three of the—the year before last, there were three
5 of our group that always go to the reunions, the did go to see this Jerry Frilling's mother.
6 They went to visit her and took her some pictures that we all had of him that she'd never
7 seen before. Come to find out, she had never ever gotten the whole story of what had
8 happened. They kind of thought they knew what had happened, but from what the
9 fellows told me, his mom was in her eighties, I think, when they saw her and I think his
10 sister was there. It was pretty emotional, but they were able to—I think they told her
11 pretty much what had happened. They wanted to know and they had a pretty good idea.
12 So, that put a little bit of closure, I think, on it for some of our group and I think it
13 probably helped their family some. There's been some instances, I think, when we've
14 tried to contact other people that we've lost. The parents don't want to hear about it. We
15 just let it go. This one, they did want to hear about it, so I think this worked out for the
16 better for all.

17 RV: Right. How do you deal with death in general? I mean, this is almost
18 hanging over your head everyday, but as you went forward in your tour after these pretty
19 traumatic things early on, how do you deal with that?

20 DH: I don't remember ever being, I think everybody dealt with it different. I
21 don't ever remember being overly, overly afraid all the time. Like I said in one of our
22 earlier conversations, that if I would've been so afraid about dying I would've been
23 digging the deepest foxholes every time we stopped for the night and all of that. I don't
24 think I did. I wasn't too lackadaisical about it. I was careful, but I just think it maybe
25 was happening around you so much that, not that dying was an everyday thing, but I
26 think that it was more the being, losing a foot or a leg or a limb, I think that probably
27 worried me more, but I don't think I was too much worried about the dying part.

28 RV: I remember you saying that you just wanted to survive, but you had
29 convinced yourself that you were going to die, probably.

30 DH: Did I sense?

1 RV: Did you sense that, listen, I, this has happened so early on, there's no way
2 I'm going to survive this entire tour?

3 DH: Early on when I, in fact, the first night I was out there in the field and I
4 counted up, I had three hundred and whatever odd days to go, I thought there's absolutely
5 no way you can live through something like this. Then after we'd lost so many people so
6 fast. We'd pretty much lost people to, not necessarily death, but to mines and booby
7 traps and things on a weekly basis, you just thought there's absolutely no way that you're
8 going to survive this thing. So basically what everybody did was, do your best to make it
9 everyday and don't take any unnecessary chances. Luckily most of the lieutenants we
10 had were pretty much in the same boat. They were twenty-three, twenty-four years old.
11 They weren't much older than the rest of us. So, we were all very careful. A lot of us,
12 you created ways to get out of the field, which was also going to mean you're going to
13 make it through your tour. Like I said earlier, most of the guys created a way or created a
14 job to get rotated back into the rear to do something else.

15 RV: Okay. When you went to, you just mentioned this, the digging a foxhole,
16 setting up a perimeter, digging in, was—well, I know you all were taught a standard way
17 to do that, but how close did you stick to something like this, this very kind of mundane
18 daily, or every other day thing?

19 DH: Yeah, well, mine was a little different. I had to be taught by the people that
20 were in the field because like I said before I was trained on tanks. I'd never had any idea.
21 If I would've gone to infantry school I would've known at least a little bit about what an
22 infantry platoon and squad does. I didn't have a clue. But as far as the going by what I
23 was told, it was pretty much a routine thing, but the routine was basically, at night, if you
24 were on an ambush, you set up Claymore mines. If you weren't and you were on a fire
25 support base, everybody got their fields of fire established. You're going to dig a foxhole
26 and we set out trip flares or Claymore mines. It was pretty much the same old thing night
27 after night, either if you were either on an ambush or on a night defensive perimeter,
28 pretty much the same stuff. You pretty much just looked forward to daylight. Once it
29 got to be daylight and the sun came out and you'd made it again through another night,
30 things got better in the daytime.

1 RV: Tell me about that, the difference between the nighttime and the daytime.
2 That's something that a lot of people talk about in Vietnam, that quote unquote, "Charlie
3 ruled the night," and you guys ruled the day. What about that?

4 DH: Yeah, I don't know if we ever really ruled the day. I think they probably
5 pretty much had us all figured out.

6 RV: Why do you say that?

7 DH: Well, because we were the probably the noisiest army that ever was. The
8 people, the Viet Cong that we would come up against, I would think there was the few
9 times we actually got to see them, there were no more than two or three or four of them at
10 one time. Like I said before, they might only have one weapon, two weapons, they didn't
11 have a lot as far as in areas I was at, but I would think that they would know any time we
12 were going one way or another, I think they were probably way ahead of it. The few
13 ambushes that we actually got somebody in, I think they just, it was just a fluke. Because
14 I think most of the time, even through the villages that we would go through, you know
15 darn well that after we got through them there was probably, most of them were VC
16 anyhow. They would know how many there were, which way we were going and what
17 we were up to. They could also watch the helicopters. They could watch the helicopters
18 bringing in resupply. I think they pretty much, they were pretty smart about it. I think
19 they knew a lot. But as far as ruling the night I think they were on the move. They did a
20 lot of their stuff at night. In the daytime they knew pretty much to lay low because that's
21 we would be out wandering around all day.

22 RV: Right. What about the firepower the United States could bring to bear?

23 DH: Yeah, that was something to see. That was a spectacular thing to watch
24 anyway. The first time I got to see napalm dropped it was almost like watching the
25 Fourth of July, major fire works. I'd never seen anything like that.

26 RV: Describe that. What did it look like?

27 DH: Pretty much, if you've ever watched any of the movies, *Apocalypse Now*
28 and *Platoon*, those are the two big ones. You would hear the jets screaming in and pretty
29 soon you'd hear a huge flash and then just kind of like a rolling cloud and then the big
30 thunder clap and pretty much just wipe out everything for I don't know how much, how
31 far that stuff would spread because we were always way away from it when it was going

1 on. But I don't know if they'd cover a mile or whatever it would do, but it was
2 something that there would be nothing living in its path when they would come in. The
3 other ones that I was amazed at was the—well, all of the Cobra gunships that would
4 come through there and shoot their rockets and their machine guns and things. Then I
5 forgot the name of the one that would shoot a round every inch and cover a football field
6 in a matter of seconds.

7 RV: The C-130?

8 DH: Yeah. I saw one of those a couple of times. They just kind of like make a
9 real loud belching sound and just annihilate everything in just a matter of seconds. I just
10 can't believe how much money we spent doing that. My God, have you just—yeah. I'm
11 sure it had some—well, it must not have had a whole lot of effect because they kept
12 coming. We had all kinds of firepower, but we still lost a ton of people. That's one of
13 those wars that I think, thought we should have had the thing handled right away, but I
14 don't think firepower had a whole lot to do with it.

15 RV: Yeah, okay. Did you all ever work with K-9 units?

16 DH: The only—yes, we did. In fact, a couple of times there was some K-9, I
17 remember—well, the one was we had a mine dog come out just to try to get us off the
18 one hill we talked about, but I've got some pictures. I don't remember it real specifically,
19 but I've got some pictures of the guys in our squad standing with the German shepherd.
20 I'm not quite sure where we were. Then also that good friend of mine that you know,
21 Steve Dant, he was wounded when a dog handler and a dog tripped a booby trap. I
22 wasn't around. I wasn't there when that happened to him. It was right before I got there.

23 RV: I remember that.

24 DH: Yeah, but no I don't remember specifically much about having any dogs
25 around.

26 RV: Okay. What about snipers?

27 DH: A lot of snipers. I don't think ours were usually one-shot snipers. I called
28 them snipers even if they would empty a magazine in your direction. That's probably the
29 most—yeah, I was, I would have to say, I was never in one of those, what you think of
30 these grandiose firefights that you would think last for hours or days or things that
31 happened to some people. Most of the time we would get half a dozen rounds sniped at

1 us and then I think they would take off on a dead run, but never—I would not think they
2 would be a sniper like we would think our snipers. Our snipers would be in three-man or
3 four-man teams and one-shot type of guys. I didn't run into any of that on their side.

4 RV: Okay. Could you tell me about your experiences with the Dustoff teams and
5 their effectiveness and what you saw?

6 DH: Yeah. They were good. Most of the time they got there very very fast. Of
7 course, the Dustoff that we couldn't get the one fellow that was killed by one of our own
8 on accident, because of the monsoons they couldn't get there, but the Dustoff—we had
9 one incident when we lost a fellow to a mine that we were trying to help that they had to
10 back off because they were taking fire coming in. I don't remember a lot of specifics
11 about them I just remember things were fast. It seems that, I guess our area, I don't know
12 how many miles it would've been from where the base was, but it seems like whenever
13 we would need anything like that and especially a Dustoff, it was only a matter of a
14 couple of minutes till you could hear the helicopter on its way as far as the rotors
15 slapping the wind and it was on its way. They got there fairly fast, but I think it was—
16 that probably saved a lot of lives, just speed. They were so quick.

17 RV: Did you ever hear about or witness anything to do with fragging?

18 DH: No, no. I know it no doubt happened, but I think I've gone over a little of
19 this before, but it was happening so much in the rear that they took all our weapons from
20 us and a lot of it, when we would come back to the rear because it was fairly secure there.
21 So all of the line units or the field units that would come back in, they would—I don't
22 think they quite patted you down, but it was close. So they took every weapon and every
23 hand grenade, everything that we had they took from you before you came back in to
24 your company area, that was all locked up in an armorer's building. I think that had to do
25 some with fragging, some with the racial tension that we had, but yeah, I was never
26 involved in any, or not that I, I never saw any.

27 RV: Right. I wonder if you could make some comments about, basically your
28 equipment, but more specifically the weapons that you carried. What was your favorite?
29 How did they function? Basically what did you carry with you?

30 DH: Well, when we first got there, an M-16, I'd only actually trained just a little
31 while with one, had maybe one class with it as, again, because I was not trained to be an

1 infantryman. I kept it fairly clean. The thing I like most about that it was so light, very
2 light. The other weapon that we passed around amongst each squad was an M-60
3 machine gun. I don't know why, but we always used to plague the new guy with
4 carrying it just because it weighed so much. Once in a while somebody would want to
5 volunteer to do it, but there was a lot of weight to carry that 60 machine gun because
6 when you carried that and couple of bandaleros of ammunition over your shoulders, that
7 was a lot of extra weight that you had. I never carried one. I got to shoot one. We had
8 the M-79 grenade launcher, which we called the bloop guns because of the noise it made
9 when it shot, it made a bloop. So it shot little grenades, a couple of the fellows were
10 really good with those. They wore a vest. It would be like a hunting vest, if you were
11 hunting pheasants or quail and had all their rounds in there. They would have shotgun
12 type shell rounds as far as bird shot you would think of and then also little grenades.
13 Once towards the end of my tour a few of the companies, I'd seen them, I don't
14 remember us having them, they just came out with the over-and-under. So it was
15 basically an M-16 with an M-79 grenade launcher all in the same weapon. I think they
16 have those as of today, they're probably using those.

17 RV: Yes, they do.

18 DH: That was something brand new that we saw, because the old bloop guns that
19 our guys carried were a wood stock. They just looked like somebody's old sawed-off
20 shotgun. That would be the weapons we had. We did have a mortar squad that they
21 attached to us that would travel with us. They would carry a mortar tube and a plate. I
22 don't know how many rounds they had, but that was some heavy stuff for them to be
23 packing.

24 RV: So you carried the M-16. Did you have a .45?

25 DH: No, I never carried a .45, carried the 16, did the 60 for a while, but mainly
26 the M-16 because then after I did that, I volunteered to carry the radio. To me carrying a
27 radio was, well, it was kind of a good and bad. To me it was being as close to the
28 lieutenant as you could be, you'd know what was going to go on all the time because he
29 was in charge of the platoon, but on the other hand like I mentioned before, you were one
30 of the primary targets if somebody was trying to get to the lieutenant or to the radio man.
31 But it was another, I think it weighed, I don't know, twenty, twenty-five pounds maybe.

1 It was heavy when you count the batteries with it. So whoever carried the radio carried
2 an M-16. That's what you carried. I don't remember anybody that we had had a .45
3 pistol at all. I don't remember those now. Again, I was trained with those because
4 tankers carry those, but I didn't see anybody that had one of those in our unit.

5 RV: What was the most feared weapon?

6 DH: From them, well, for us, because we didn't really come up against—we
7 would come up against the NVA once in a while, but no big massive battles. It was
8 mainly the VC, so whenever we'd run into something, the most feared for us it was the, I
9 would say it was the toe-poppers. Like when we lost all our people it was a daisy chain
10 set up that wiped us out. The toe-poppers was what everybody feared because we hit
11 them on a regular basis. I don't remember a toe-popper which is, well basically what it
12 means it blows one foot off or both your feet off. It never killed anybody that I can
13 remember that hit them, but it was such a demoralizing loss. Every time that would
14 happen, it was just, it was a traumatic thing. I know dying is, too, but when you
15 continually see people losing a foot or two, it starts taking its toll. Then you're just very
16 very leery of every move you make. That's why we were so careful, I guess when we
17 would walk and be on patrols. That's what was so bad in the evenings when we would
18 go out on ambushes, we'd try to go out at dusk. You couldn't see anything. So whether
19 you were going to step on one or not, you never knew. But to our group, I would have to
20 say that it was hitting the toe-poppers and any kind of booby trap that they had set for us.
21 That's mainly what we ran up against.

22 RV: I've heard that from other veterans, that the booby traps were the most
23 feared thing.

24 DH: Oh, yeah.

25 RV: Because of the randomness.

26 DH: Yeah. There was just so many of them. Yeah, it was just something you
27 couldn't tell. Then, even today I know I've inquired about, my oldest son has bought me
28 a trip to Vietnam which I was supposed to have gone on a while back, but I've just not
29 gotten to it, but I'm still going to go. When I first had inquired to go back to this area
30 that I would like to be, to go back to see, I know that we can't get in there, from what I
31 was told that a lot of these areas have so many mines and booby traps are still there

1 because most of the fellows setting the mines, the VC, they were probably killed right
2 afterwards. So nobody knows where this stuff is.

3 RV: Well, as far as the enemy and as far as weapons and then you moving to the
4 radio and kind of being a target, an easier target or more, I guess, prolific target on their
5 part, tell me about the intelligence you all had about the enemy, and then about
6 communication within your ranks and the rear and what you experienced there on the
7 radio.

8 DH: Well, the radio, to me, I was just kept abreast of everything. Most of my
9 contact would be when I wasn't on an ambush and I was back at the night defensive
10 perimeter, we could call a sit rep, or be a situation report, so that every ambush site would
11 have a radio and we would key the microphone in communications was supposed to be
12 done hourly. That would be a conformation that everything was okay, a situation report
13 would go into sit rep. You would key, key the mic I think a couple of times back and
14 forth. So no one wanted to—you couldn't talk. They had to be so quiet. Every now and
15 then, and I mentioned before, too, every now and then you couldn't get a hold of one of
16 the ambush sites. You hadn't heard anything happen as far as gunshots or explosions or
17 anything. Then, sure enough, somebody had fallen sound asleep but luckily nothing ever
18 happened to them when I was doing that. The other communication would come when,
19 usually the lieutenant was on the radio as far as any kind of coordinates that were given,
20 he was the one or the forward artillery observer that we would have with us. He had an
21 RTO also with him. They would get the coordinates. So, I think mine was, I just enjoyed
22 kind of being in the middle of it as far as communication amongst everybody. It was a
23 little bit more of a senior position. It's something that I think you would work yourself,
24 people worked themselves up to carry the radio, or I did, to carry the radio.

25 RV: Did you ever work with the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)?

26 DH: Worked with ARVNs quite a lot, worked with the RFs (Regional Forces)
27 and the PFs (Popular Forces) which would be the Popular Forces and Regular Forces,
28 they would be like our National Guard and Army Reserve. We did a lot with them,
29 outside the villages. ARVNs we didn't get along with too well. I'm not quite sure why.
30 I didn't have a lot to do with them, but they seemed a little bit cocky and arrogant. I
31 think we were kind of bent out of shape, because I don't think from the ones that we saw,

1 we felt we were doing everything anyway, as far as the battles and the patrols and the
2 trying to take care of the Viet Cong and the NVA. I think they were, they'd come to rely
3 on the Americans so much that they really were lackadaisical about everything. That
4 would be the same for the RFs and the PFs that we worked with. To them it was, they're
5 so used to—I think a lot of it was, they were so used to war after the French that, again
6 we had some instances when the, come one o'clock at night or whatever it might be,
7 they'd start lighting their little cooking fires like it really didn't matter. If I think back on
8 it, they probably knew who was where. A lot of them were probably working both sides
9 anyhow, so, if they'd have been really afraid about us being attacked by the Viet Cong or
10 the NVA, they wouldn't have been cooking and jabbering and doing their thing in the
11 middle of the night. But we didn't rely on them as far as any kind of support.

12 RV: Did you all have—well, I guess that answers that. You didn't have very
13 much confidence in their fighting ability or their ability to stick with you and protect your
14 flanks or rear.

15 DH: Oh, no, no. We never got in, not got into that. We did a lot of patrols with
16 them, but we never had any, any confidence in them. The people I think that we did get
17 closest to were the interpreters we had. We had a couple of kids. Well, we called one
18 Peanut and we called the other one Sammy. They were little, I believe they were
19 probably orphan kids, but they were interpreters for us. They could speak enough
20 English that we kind of adopted them and they would go out with us, patrol. They would
21 carry a rucksack. Once and a while they might even have a rifle, but we adopted them
22 and they would be the interpreters if we would happen to come upon some villagers and
23 things. Then we were also assigned on a regular basis, like a Kit Carson Scout, which
24 would have been a Chieu Hoi or they would come over to our side and then act as a guide
25 or a scout for us. A few of those, a couple of those I think were okay. Some of them we
26 were real leery of. We thought maybe they were still working the other side, but in fact
27 when we lost all the people in the one big mine, we lost one of the kids, I think it was
28 Peanut. He got killed in that and also our Kit Carson Scout that we had there, he died in
29 that explosion, too. They were very useful to us. Sad thing is I think the ones that we got
30 to know that worked with most of the companies, I would imagine that once we pulled

1 out as far as the war goes, they probably ended their life right then once they, the North
2 Vietnamese got in there and figured out who was the real collaborators with us.

3 RV: Right. Did you ever work with the leaders, officers of ARVN or any of the
4 other Vietnamese military forces?

5 DH: No, I never did. No.

6 RV: Okay. Well, switching gears, to more personal questions, were there
7 religious services in the field? I know you mentioned the chaplain coming out to the hill
8 that night, but were you all able to attend a quote unquote, “church service,” out in the
9 field or in the rear?

10 DH: In the rear, yeah, the one time that I mentioned when they came out, that
11 was just because of our losses, but as I recall, every time we came in for a stand down,
12 there was a service in the rear there. It didn’t matter what day it was because we were
13 just in there at different times. So, yeah, if someone felt or needed to go or was religious
14 that way, there was always that opportunity. They could partake.

15 RV: Okay, what about you? Did your spiritual feelings change?

16 DH: I never had, never have been. It’s one of those, I still, and my family, no
17 secret to my family, I still struggle with knowing if there really is, I guess a, really is a
18 God or really isn’t. There’s just so many unanswered questions. I’ve actually
19 approached—I’m a Catholic, and actually approached a priest and try to get answers out
20 of people on why so many things, you know bad things can happen. Yeah, I don’t know,
21 I just have a real problem with some of the answers everybody gives. To see the certain
22 things that go on in the world and that I saw which are fairly tame to some of the horrific
23 things that have happened in other parts of the world that I really have questions. To me
24 it never made me feel any better. I mean, you can go in there to church service and do
25 whatever you want and the next day we’re out in the fields and somebody gets his feet
26 blown off. I just didn’t have a lot of faith.

27 RV: Okay. How about the guys in your unit? What did you see?

28 DH: As far as religion?

29 RV: As far as religion, spiritual preferences?

30 DH: Some of them, yeah. There was a few of them, in fact that good friend of
31 mine Jesse Hill, I mean he still is. He had the faith over there and he was also wounded

1 very bad in the big mine and spent months and months in the hos—the Japan—over in
2 Japan in the hospital, but he had it then and has it now. It was a real mixed bag. I think it
3 was because of the draft, you got a real mixed bunch of fellows in there as far as all kinds
4 of backgrounds. A lot of people I think wore, they wore those, what is it, rosary things
5 around their neck. That was more of a fashion statement, though. Yeah, there was some
6 religious, some not and some of them that I didn't think were so religious seem to be
7 now.

8 RV: Oh, yeah?

9 DH: There's some of that we together with that I know weren't that way are very
10 religious that I see at the reunions now, which is fine. They're doing fine. I think they
11 needed that and it makes them feel better, so more power to them.

12 RV: Was that a function of their war experience do you think?

13 DH: I think it had something to do with it. I know one of my good friends, I think
14 he came back, got into a motorcycle gang, had all kinds of troubles in his earlier life. I
15 think a lot of it had to do with Vietnam. I think he's one of those that he'd gone so far
16 one way as far as the wrong way with his, probably the drinking and the drugs and the
17 motorcycle gang and all of this that all of a sudden he—well, he's what you'd be calling
18 born again, or maybe born for the first time a Christian fellow but just a great, great guy
19 and got a great wife. I correspond with him all the time and see him yearly. Our group is
20 like most people now, I think back then nobody hugged, but all we do is hug each other
21 any more. I mean nobody's real, too worried about that, we just, a lot of hugging.

22 RV: Why?

23 DH: I don't know. It feels good. Handshake is fine if you just kind of know
24 somebody a little bit, but what we've been through, it just seems appropriate. I mean, it's
25 just hugs all the way around. A lot of us, I would think that we probably wouldn't even
26 be friends or like each other, but we have such a common past, that we're very, very,
27 very close. One of the early, I don't know if I've ever mentioned, but one of the first
28 reunions that I'd gone to once the thing was, I think there was five of us that showed up,
29 had never seen each other, this is the first time we'd ever seen each other and we said no
30 wives at all because we didn't know how we were going to act. It just was too strange. It
31 had been so many years. We had a great time, but why I was thinking of the hugging was

1 that when it came time for the reunion to be over, this would've been in '96, I think there
2 was one guy that had to leave a little early, but the four of us, we stood in the airport and
3 just balled like babies for fifteen minutes. It was very emotional. There'd been a lot of
4 emotions held in for so many years that they just came pouring out. They still do. We
5 still all get pretty much teary-eyed around each other, so.

6 RV: So that's stayed pretty consistent.

7 DH: Yeah, yeah, just a special bunch. It's just nice to know that you've got some
8 people you've got something in common with. I wrote a story on survivor skills that I
9 had published a while back that mentions how, mentioned how some people would try to
10 ask you about the war because they thought it was the right thing to do, but you didn't
11 feel like telling them about it because they couldn't understand or comprehend or
12 anything. They didn't have any idea what you were talking about so you didn't say
13 anything. Unlike if you were to talk to a fellow veteran that had been there, you could
14 ramble on for however long you needed to because he'd understood what you were
15 talking about.

16 RV: Right.

17 DH: A little different subject, but also you can tell who the fakers are and who
18 aren't because after about thirty seconds of listening to somebody talk, you know if they
19 were really there or if they were just a wanna-be and that happens every now and then.

20 RV: How can you tell?

21 DH: Well, most of it is is I had one happen to me not long ago. A fellow saw my
22 license plate and said oh yeah, he was here and here. Anytime somebody starts bragging
23 up things that they did or that they saw, you have to question it anyway, because the guys
24 that really saw it, they don't talk much about it. Somebody will ask you how it was and
25 did you see much action. Most people just say, "Yeah, enough," or "It wasn't any fun."
26 You just leave it at that, but he went on and on about things and places he'd been. I
27 forgot how we came upon it, but later on in the conversation I said, "Well, where'd grow
28 up for high school?" Well, come to find out he would've had to been fifteen years old to
29 be there. So, there was just one instance. I had another fellow stop me down here on the
30 street in Portland one time. I don't know why because I didn't have, I didn't look like, I
31 didn't have on a veteran hat or anything, but asked me if I was a vet. We talked for a

1 couple of minutes, but he mentioned a couple of places that he'd been. I could tell he'd
2 never, he'd just heard people talk about it. So, there's a book I know that came out, that
3 friend of mine Steve Dant has one sitting on his desk and I forgot what the name of it is,
4 but it goes over all these imposters that are out there. A lot of them have gotten huge
5 military benefits from that.

6 RV: It's called *Stolen Valor*.

7 DH: That's what it is, yeah, yeah. Steve has that and I was going to get it from
8 him the next time I see him. It's just easy to tell, by what they want to share with you, by
9 not even knowing you and some of the things they say, it's real easy to see through
10 people.

11 RV: Yeah. I want to talk about the relationship you all had there in Vietnam
12 within the unit and what you've said about your post-Vietnam years, I've witnessed so
13 much and heard about so much, within the unit and then also back in the rear, can you
14 talk about, say, race relations and race issues. You've already mentioned this a bit, but I
15 wonder if you could kind of go into that and what you saw and your feelings about it,
16 then and now.

17 DH: Yeah. Well, it was sad. I had one good friend of mine at the time, in fact
18 we came in about the same time, his name was James Rose, or it is James Rose. We've
19 e-mailed a couple of times, we've never gotten together, but a black fellow. What was
20 different about James was is that he also didn't really have any kind of a racial problem.
21 At the time, he could go either way, but he did hang out with some guys that seemed to
22 not like the white folks much at all. So, I kind of kept my distance there, not afraid, it
23 just was uncomfortable. You can tell if somebody doesn't want to be around or like you
24 or not. But on the other hand, my good friend Jesse Hill, we're best friends. We did
25 everything together, including, we see each other now at some of the reunions that he
26 comes to. Overall they kept to themselves, the white guys kept to themselves. I
27 personally never ever had, besides the one big barroom brawl that we were all in, I never
28 had a problem or ever was, I guess, either attacked or had a problem with any of them. I
29 don't think I carried myself that way. Some of the Southern guys that had as much of a
30 chip on their shoulder as the black guys did have a chip on their shoulders, they always

1 seemed to have problems, but they probably would've had problems if they were back in
2 the States anyway.

3 RV: Right. Did anyone try to quell that or inflame it?

4 DH: I don't think so. There wasn't really any way to stop it. Things were out of
5 hand back in the States. The war was going the wrong way. They claimed it was the
6 white man's war. Then they claimed there were the percentage of blacks and whites were
7 not right as far as here, but I never really saw that. I always thought there was—we had
8 some black fellows with us, but overall it was mostly middle class white. Growing up
9 where I did, I just never was exposed to it. I don't know. It was a real bad thing because
10 it shouldn't have been that way, but it is and it probably still is to some degree today.

11 RV: Did you ever witness any homosexual activity?

12 DH: No, no, I can't—the only time I ever ever saw anything and it wasn't a—this
13 would've been actually in basic training. I think we had a gay guy that got drafted. He'd
14 been picked on enough in there, he'd only been in there maybe with us about two or three
15 weeks and pretty soon he was gone. I think they probably just discharged him and sent
16 him out. But as far as anybody gay I could ever, I never saw anything like that. No, that
17 was kind of the last thing on your mind. When you're in the middle of the war, I don't
18 know if any, I was even, maybe somebody was, but nobody was, didn't stand out.

19 RV: Okay. Did you all keep any pets?

20 DH: We had one fellow when he got into the rear had a monkey, didn't see the
21 monkey very much. We couldn't really have any pets because we were out in the field
22 all the time. You couldn't really have a dog or anything. Once in a while I'd see
23 somebody'd have a scroungy dog that they had, but they were the people who had
24 already been back in the rear. But no, when you're on the move, we couldn't haul any
25 pets with us.

26 RV: Right. What about wild animals? What did you run into?

27 DH: Mostly monkeys in the trees were always bad for making noise all night. A
28 wild boar here or there we'd see and one of them I think hit a Claymore mine once.
29 Snakes, but none of the scary—they tell you all these horror stories like of the two-step
30 snake and things, the first step he bites you and the second step you're dead. I think those
31 are wives tales. I never saw one. Big thing we had, leeches were probably the worst.

1 That's not really wildlife or anything, but that's one of the worst things that we had was
2 that there were leeches.

3 RV: Was that a daily occurrence?

4 DH: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, depending on the area how bad they were, but
5 leeches were all over. Mosquitoes, you know, were bad, flies, but everybody carried a
6 bottle of bug juice with them. It was pretty much miserable, but it was miserable anyway
7 as far as hot and sweaty and dirty and squirting bug juice all over yourself, but you dealt
8 with it.

9 RV: Was that a problem, being hot and dirty all the time?

10 DH: You got used to it, but I can't believe now that we would go a couple of
11 weeks sometimes without a shower or anything because when you're out there and it's—I
12 got there in the dead of summer, but when you're out there, you're either digging holes or
13 you're walking through rice type paddies or streams or just whatever it is. The
14 humidity's so high and the temperatures up there and you're sweating and dirty and
15 grimy. You're that way for a couple of, sometimes a couple of weeks, ten days maybe.
16 But I think we all probably pretty much smelled the same, so you didn't notice.

17 RV: Is there any truth to being able to smell the enemy? I've heard of rumors.

18 DH: I've heard that, too. The only thing I think you could, I don't know what
19 you'd smell, but I heard that, too. Maybe if their thinking you're smelling fish sauce or
20 something like that, but I think the number of times that I actually saw the enemy, when
21 they would, they would've been dead or wounded anyway. Your adrenaline's going so
22 fast I'm not, you're not smelling. But once in a while we would come through a, I called
23 it a weigh station we came up on once that was like a big holding area that had big bags
24 of rice and all kinds of things there. I think they'd been there a few days prior. I don't
25 remember smelling anything, but also when you're wandering around there, the last thing
26 I'm worried about smelling because I'm worried about they've got booby traps set all
27 through this place that we're looking at. So, I don't ever remember smelling them.

28 RV: Okay. Could you comment on the issue of bravery? This always comes up
29 when you're talking about war and heroes and how people act under fire. What did you
30 witness?

1 DH: Oh, boy, bravery, I would think the bravery, from what I saw the most of is
2 when someone would get wounded whether it be the big booby trap that hurt us so bad or
3 when one of our group would step on a mine, then pretty much caution was tossed aside.
4 The medics you would have would be sprinting up a trail, not worrying about hitting
5 another mine or toe-popper or whoever was around would be—the only thing you
6 thought about was taking care of the one person or whoever it was was wounded and
7 saving their life. They weren't thinking about anything else. Bravery as far as in battles
8 go, I never was involved in any giant battles. They were just snipers and ten second
9 skirmish type things. Most, like I say, most of mine were mines. I didn't have any,
10 didn't ever saw any Audie Murphy type guys.

11 RV: Okay. I've also talked to many veterans who say, "You know, I did witness
12 some pretty incredible acts, but we didn't really see it that way. We don't really see it
13 that way now either." Is that how you all felt?

14 DH: Oh, you mean that they said they didn't see incredible acts or that they did?

15 RV: No, that they did and they didn't see it as such a—

16 DH: Oh, at the time?

17 RV: Yeah, or now, they just say that this was something that was, we were just
18 doing what we do.

19 DH: I think that's probably right. I think that most of the times that people would
20 take on either—well, we had one instance I guess where we had surrounded a couple of
21 guys in a thicket. We were in a horseshoe and everybody kind of shot the thing up. I
22 don't remember anybody—I mean I was a little bit concerned about one of our own guys
23 shooting me, because we were in kind of a semi-circle shooting in the same hole, but
24 nobody seemed to be overly afraid. They were just, the mission was to kill these two that
25 we had ran into the middle of this little thicket which was successful in doing, but I,
26 again, I know I had an uncle that I mentioned got the Bronze Star for valor over there.
27 From what I read and he won't talk about it much, but he hauled a bunch of people out
28 under enemy fire and saved a bunch of the wounded people in one big battle he had. To
29 him, it's not a big deal. He just as soon not even talk about it, and it was probably pretty
30 heroic for him, too.

31 RV: Did you get awarded anything like that?

1 DH: No, not as far. I got the same old stuff. I was what you call just your
2 average grunt. We got the CIB (combat infantryman's badge) and the Army
3 Commendation Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal and yeah, nothing spectacular.
4 One of our good group, real good friends, Jerry Nichols is his name. He got the Silver
5 Star. He won't, he'll never say it, but I do, every time we're at one of the reunions and
6 anybody wants to bring something up, I pretty much point out that he got the Silver Star.
7 It was for saving—he was on a—I think it was a Dustoff that was trying to take some
8 people out. They ended up shooting the pilot and the thing crashed with him in it. I think
9 Jerry had made it through that, but had been shot in the stomach, but also had managed to
10 get a hold of a weapon and return fire. I think he was trying to protect the other chopper
11 pilot. I never heard all the details except from some of the other guys. That was right
12 before I got there, but that's probably—that kind of valor, that he acts like it wasn't a big
13 deal, but he was pretty special now that I think about it, but I didn't happen to be there,
14 but I just after the fact and I know he's got the medal. I've actually got a picture I found
15 earlier. This one, kind of, we call it the blue book, it's like a yearbook that I have that's
16 got him being awarded the Silver Star.

17 RV: Okay. How was the leadership in Vietnam?

18 DH: Oh, well, I thought ours was fine, but I only saw—you only see what you
19 have. The lieutenants we had except for the one that had one of our fellows shoot him in
20 the foot we talked about earlier, most of the lieutenants were okay. In fact, the three or
21 four that I've been able to get a hold of and some of them they come to reunions and
22 things, they're just great guys. Once you got much higher than that I think a lot of us had
23 problems. It wouldn't have been that their leadership was so bad. I think it was coming
24 out of the '60s and like myself being eighteen years old and being in a place I didn't want
25 to be and having them, I mainly was exposed to them once we got back more in the rear
26 and things. I had the one instance where we'd just come back in and we're heading to the
27 EM club. We'd been cleaned up and we'd been out for a couple of weeks, but Major
28 Davenport, that is his name, whether he's still alive or not, I don't know, but he nabbed
29 me and told me to get a haircut. I didn't think it was that bad, so I thought, "Oh, man."
30 So I head back and they had a barber there at the battalion that actually, I'd come in-
31 country with and when we were standing there to get orders, they asked if anybody had a

1 special skill or a job. He said he'd just been barber school. Well, talk about lucking out
2 he ended up being the battalion barber his whole tour.

3 RV: Oh, wow.

4 DH: So anyway, I go back to get my first haircut from him. I think his last name
5 was Anderson, but to get a haircut and we talk awhile and I'm heading, I just—it would
6 be a thing that it was stupid to want to have your hair fairly long over there. It made no
7 difference, but I don't know what it was, but everybody had their hair back long in the
8 States so. Got a little bit taken off, I'm heading back down this dirt road, heading to the
9 EM club and sure enough, here comes Major Davenport again. He tightens me up there
10 on the spot, tells me to go back. I go back, get another one, a little bit here and there and
11 believe it or not, I'm almost within fifty feet of the EM club and he comes around the
12 corner again. This time he puts me in the back of his Jeep, drives me back to the barber
13 and then I get a real haircut. So I got three hair cuts within about an hour. That one I did,
14 that story came out in *Vietnam Magazine* a couple months ago.

15 RV: Oh, yeah?

16 DH: Yeah, so it's one of those funny ones. It was written up as funny and it
17 wasn't funny then, but it kind of is now, but to me I didn't know what the big concern
18 was. They left us alone as far as our dress code went out there at that time, our unit.
19 They left us completely alone, but to be back in the rear and be there for just a couple of
20 days, for me, to have to get these tight haircuts, I'm sure he was doing his job, but I
21 didn't see any sense in it.

22 RV: How did you all wear your hair in the field, mostly?

23 DH: Yeah, mostly it was, most of the people didn't to the white walls or tight on
24 the sides. You kept it as long as you could. Mine was probably a little longer than
25 average, still is. It's just how I kind of liked it. We had one of the fellows, he kind of—
26 we called him—his name is John Bales, he had a hawkmow, we'd call it, not a Mohawk.
27 so he'd let it grow a little bit and then run the clippers right down the middle of it and
28 shave the center of his head. I don't know if that was to look scary or what. Just normal
29 haircuts. You couldn't get them very long anyhow.

30 RV: Tell me about humor and how that played a role on your tour.

1 DH: We had a lot of good times. I've always said that. When people would ask
2 years ago, I'd say "Ah, a lot of good times and a few bad times." People try to focus on
3 the bad times, but we can laugh. We laugh at things at the reunions that were scary at the
4 time. I know I talked about a couple of them, we had with the big fellow Tate throwing
5 the hand grenades at the Popular Force guys at night. I mean, he could've killed a bunch
6 of them, but now we laugh about it. We had the case I talked about with everybody
7 jumping out of the canal because there was an eel swimming down the middle of it yet
8 we weren't afraid of the VC or anybody shooting us when they got down the side of the
9 bank, right then. We just didn't want the eels to touch us. There was a lot of that and we
10 did a lot of cutting up, I think in the rear. I've got some pictures of everybody posing with
11 some guy's big Bowie knife on the China Beach there, we've all got swimming suits on.
12 I don't know what we were doing, but a lot of grab ass was going on, but it was a way to
13 unwind. I don't remember really many, any practical jokes or anything happening then.
14 Most of the time when we were in the rear, we were either writing letters, waiting for the
15 EM club to open or we were lucky enough that our rear area hooch was sitting right on
16 the beach. Didn't appreciate it as much as we should have, but it was there.

17 RV: Okay. You've described the weather and everything there. I'd like for you
18 to kind of talk about the country, the physical layout of the country. What did you see
19 and how do you see it now?

20 DH: Well, I know there's a four- or five-star resort just about five miles from
21 where our rear area was. It's down around the My Lai area. I saw that on the internet the
22 other day. Probably the most beautiful country I think anybody can see, especially where
23 we were. It was, climate-wise it was a little rough, but you've got the China Sea there.
24 You've got the most beautiful beaches. Then the flat lands were there and then it would
25 go up into the mountains. I think if you were to go back today, we'd probably appreciate
26 it a lot more. At the time, of course, I grew up in the mountains and with a beach. It
27 wasn't anything new for me to see, but now that I think of the waterfalls and the things
28 up in the mountains we had, plus the beautiful beaches, it was destined to be a resort area.

29 RV: What about the terrain when you're out in the field?

30 DH: Terrain was, if we were down in the flat lands, that was pretty much, that
31 was the best, we thought, because you could see forever. We were always closer to the

1 villages so we knew that during the day we would probably be approached by the, what
2 we called the soda girls that would be bringing out trinkets and pop and things and beer
3 you could buy from them. It was a way to break up the day. So, it was easy walking.
4 Ambushes were easy because we mainly just were all in a certain area on flat lands
5 around rice paddy dykes. The mountains were probably the worst just because of the
6 terrain and the weight that we carried from up and down the hills. Also a lot of the
7 vegetation in the valleys between the mountains, I think the leeches would be the worst in
8 those places. It was a little tougher getting your resupply in. A lot of the things in the
9 mountains we had, if we were too afraid of the booby traps and the mines, we always
10 carried a machete and that was very slow going. We would just hack and chop and take
11 turns trying to move up hills or through different areas. That would just be a couple feet
12 at a time. So that was the most miserable was the mountains, most pretty, but miserable.

13 RV: Right. It's nice from a distance but not walking around in it.

14 DH: Yeah, not to walk through and when you're carrying your livelihood on your
15 back.

16 RV: Right. What about the Vietnamese civilians and did you guys ever
17 participate in any kind of civic action?

18 DH: I liked them, most of them. I think it kind of went both ways. Some of the
19 fellows were pretty hostile. We had an instance where we were walking out and I don't
20 think we were in what we'd called a quite a free-fire zone, which is just outside of Chu
21 Lai in the flatlands. We came upon a couple of wood cutters that one of the fellows, I
22 think, wasn't getting the right answers and knocked him upside the head with the bloop
23 gun and put a gash in his cheek. Well, the fellow he hit he probably shouldn't have. I
24 don't know if they were in the right or wrong spot, but they were probably only forty
25 years old but they looked eighty. I think it takes its toll on them when they were living
26 there. Well, it wasn't long after that we get a radio message that a colonel's on his way
27 out. I forgot who it was. So we looked, because the civilian had run back and had told
28 somebody which had called them and, I remember the fellow's name was Donny Johnson
29 that hit him. They sent out this colonel on this little loach and came out and they took
30 Johnson aside. They didn't haul him back in there and I think they might have let him
31 go, but it could have been pretty serious. I think they didn't want us harassing the

1 civilians very bad. The only other ones that I ever ran into were I got to know some of
2 the workers that would work back in the rear area as far as the—oh, you'd have the girls
3 that worked in the EM clubs and they would help them with the kitchen help and things
4 like that. They pretty much were, I thought real decent people.

5 RV: Okay. Today looking back at them, do you still feel the same way?

6 DH: Oh, yeah. They didn't want any part of that, either. The majority of them,
7 they—I think that's why we're so well received to go back and visit. I know some of the
8 guys I talked to say they don't want any part of ever going back. I would be real
9 interested to see, to look up some of the people that I got to know. Most of them I did get
10 to know were some of the girls that were there that would work in the EM clubs and
11 things also we'd called them hooch maids. They would also clean around the area. I
12 never had any, any kind of fling with any of them, but they were just, me being eighteen
13 and nineteen and they were probably a couple of years younger. They were there doing
14 their job, but I hesitate because I would like to go see them and I think they would like to
15 see me, but I would think that if I—I don't know how it would be taken as far as their
16 families would go, families and spouses and things. If you were to go back and try to
17 look them up and then either rekindle some memories or what people might not know
18 that they were actually working inside the base and stuff in their teenage years, I don't
19 know how that would come across. I would have to test the water when I got there and
20 see. But it would be interesting to see what happened to them. I'm just afraid some of
21 them probably the repercussions of fraternizing with us as far as just working with us,
22 probably, they came down hard on them once we were out of there, I would guess.

23 RV: Yeah.

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Interview with David Hammond

Session [4] of [4]

Date: May 31, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone continuing my oral history
2 interview with Dave Hammond. This is done for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History
3 Project. Today is May 31st, 2006. Dave's in Beaverton, Oregon, and I'm in Lubbock,
4 Texas. Dave, why don't we continue with where we were? You had come back to Ft.
5 Lewis and where did you go? What did you do once you came home and kind of got
6 back into life Stateside?

7 David Hammond: The home was I had a thirty-day leave. I was one of the
8 Regular Army people, so I had time after Vietnam. When I came home and pretty much
9 slept a lot, ate a lot. I think the last time we talked, we talked about the things that were
10 real different for me. It was sidewalks and door knobs and glass on windows. So once I
11 got accustomed to all of that and I'd had orders to go to Ft. Carson, Colorado, to be a drill
12 sergeant. While I was home in Springfield, Oregon, I got orders again to change that to
13 report to Ft. Lewis. So they were winding the war down. They didn't need drill
14 sergeants. Again, I was sent to Ft. Lewis to be a tank commander from then on.

15 RV: So you're really transferring back to what you were supposed to be doing in
16 the beginning.

17 DH: Right. I had all the training and went back and was assigned a tank.
18 Actually it was pretty, real decent duty. You wouldn't think so at the time, though a little
19 bit of the issue I had was I was nineteen years old, still. I'd been to Vietnam and back. I
20 came back a buck sergeant.

21 RV: That's incredible, Dave. At age nineteen you've been through a war
22 experience.

23 DH: Yeah, and I think I did okay. I mean not as far as, I don't mean okay as far
24 as being some kind of big hero or a soldier, I think I just did my job, but I think I was
25 very fortunate that I think mentally could adjust. I think not getting ahead of it, but I
26 think I did okay in life. I think even from then, I had some bumps along the way, but I
27 look back on it now and most of the fellows in my unit that I see a lot, they're, most of
28 them two, three, four, five years older than I am. I think the one reason I ended up over

1 and back so fast is because I did join right out of high school on what we call the delayed
2 entry program. My birthday fell in August. So it was just kind of one of those things. I
3 did, when I got to Ft. Lewis and was assigned a tank, I was one of the few people that had
4 been to Vietnam because most of the guys coming back either extended or were out of
5 the service because they were two year draftees or you could volunteer to get drafted for
6 two years. So, I was one of the few and the duty was decent, but one thing, not just
7 because I was an NCO was some of the enlisted fellows, there was always a little bit of a
8 rub, I guess, with some of them, but after I'd been there a couple of months, I had one of
9 them approach me and tell me that nobody would, everybody was very standoffish to
10 begin with. What had happened was they thought I was, what they called a nark or an
11 informer of some kind because nobody could figure out how young I was. I had the rank
12 and all of a sudden I showed up and was a tank commander and still in the service and
13 very young, looked very young. Once I got to know them and they realized I wasn't a
14 plant in there, because the drugs were pretty hot and heavy in Ft. Lewis at the time. So I
15 did fine. But I had mine own room. There was a mess hall down below. I had a fairly
16 new car parked out front and it was basically a 7:00 to 4:30, Monday through Friday job.
17 It was okay.

18 RV: Tell me about the—you mentioned the drug problem, can you describe it?

19 DH: That was always a problem. It was really bad in Vietnam, but we got here
20 and I think one of the first days or two when I was sent to the motor pool, I remember,
21 my tank number was thirteen, but I couldn't find my crew. I was walking around the
22 motor pool and realized all the hatches were closed on this tank. Well, after I started
23 banging on the tank and the door opened up, they were all down there smoking dope.
24 Yeah, and I think that's where we got off on the real wrong foot. I was to be in charge. I
25 didn't report them or write them up, but I had some words. But that's what was going on.
26 It was a lot of, of course, again being 1971, we were still on the tail end of what was
27 going on in the '60s as far as the culture was going on, the United States. So, I think the
28 hippie movement was still there.

29 RV: Yeah. Was there a discipline problem overall that you noticed in the Army?

30 DH: It got, it was a little bit better, I think, in the States. In Vietnam people tried
31 to leave each other alone as much as they could, just to get through it over there. I think

1 that they did tighten it up some in, here back in the States. So I think that there was a less
2 tolerance as far as, if people would've gone AWOL or disobeyed orders, I think there
3 would've been some problems. I don't really remember very many of them. Well, in
4 fact, I don't remember any real problems anybody got in much more trouble than just
5 kind of getting chewed out.

6 RV: Yeah. At age nineteen, how comfortable did you feel being a commander,
7 being a leader?

8 DH: Not very. That was always one of the things. I was fine having my own
9 tank and having a crew of three. There was a training center in Yakima, Washington,
10 which is about a three-hour drive from Ft. Lewis, Washington. That's where we would
11 go for field exercises once a year. I always wanted to be an instructor there. I got to
12 know the fellows that were instructors. It was only about a dozen of them. That
13 would've been great duty. One quick story is we had kind of backfired, but I got to know
14 the instructors. I thought what a great life that would be. Well, they wrote up this
15 glowing letter and sent it back to my unit in Ft. Lewis about I was just what they were
16 looking for and on and on and on and a lot of grandiose things. Well, once the people
17 read it in my unit, there was no way they were going to let go of me. So I was pretty
18 much stuck where I was for the rest of the time, which wasn't bad. I think that's
19 probably what I would've liked to done, is been an instructor somewhere, not necessarily
20 ride around on a tank.

21 RV: What had changed in the training that you were overseeing versus the
22 training that you went through previous?

23 DH: Well, the training that we had on, as far as on the tanks and the weapons,
24 that was pretty basic. Again, once I got to Vietnam, I never saw a tank and came back, it
25 really was pretty easy to pick up. I think I might've mentioned before that anybody that's
26 got any kind of brains at all could operate any one of the systems on the tanks, they're
27 real easy. Basically, it was a lot of maintenance. Those things were breaking down
28 constantly. It was mainly keep your tank maintained and motor pooled and then we
29 would go, kind of play some kind of war once in a while out in the outskirts of the Ft.
30 Lewis area, which would always kind of amaze me because they were still using the

1 battle tactics that you would probably see when you watch the movie *Patton*, which is
2 probably never going to happen again.

3 RV: Right. That's something I wanted to follow up with is how much of a role
4 did you see the Army placing on tanks in warfare?

5 DH: Well, of course, I didn't see any, but when I went through training, one of
6 the things that happened was, the movie *Patton* with George C. Scott, it had come out.
7 So we as tankers and going to training watched *Patton* movie at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, and
8 saw what they did in World War II. But again, we didn't have any idea. Most of us
9 didn't really know what to expect in Vietnam anyhow. So the few fellows that did see, I
10 think the smaller tanks, they were in just the bigger, the Saigon areas and the Da Nang
11 areas. I don't think there was, they sure wouldn't have been in the mountains where I
12 ended up.

13 RV: Well, so you guys watched *Patton*. What was that like? What kind of effect
14 did that have on you all?

15 DH: Well, pretty patriotic. Whether you were a draftee or Regular Army, when
16 you saw George C. Scott standing there in front of that great big flag, it was a patriotic
17 thing to see. We felt pretty important to have teenagers and people in their early twenties
18 on these, I don't know how, what those things, tanks were worth, but felt very, pretty
19 important to be able to be turned loose on that kind of equipment. I guess felt some kind
20 of, I guess, I don't know if you'd call it power or not, but they were an awesome type of
21 machine to be on.

22 RV: Did any of the guys that you were working with in training, did they ask you
23 about Vietnam and about the war?

24 DH: Not many of them. Again, I've said before that unless somebody was
25 actually there, most of us didn't talk about it at all, in fact, I had, the one friend I did have
26 was an E-6 staff sergeant, had the room next to mine. He hadn't been there, either. So I
27 don't recall anybody in that tank unit I was in that had been to Vietnam. So, I think our
28 company commander, I know he had. He was the warrant officer, but we never talked
29 about it. But again, unless someone had actually been there, there was a period from
30 when the guys would get out to probably just a few years back where nobody would talk,

1 didn't want to talk about it anyhow because people wouldn't understand what you were
2 talking about.

3 RV: Didn't you find that kind of strange?

4 DH: Yeah, I always thought it was real strange. I thought it was—the one thing I
5 got real tired of and I wrote a story on it, too, that was—I got real tired of, and I still do,
6 of people making excuses why they weren't there. Most of them will, when they see my
7 bumper sticker or my hat sitting on my dashboard or the question will come up and
8 they'll say, "Oh, you were there." I will acknowledge it, but the next sentence, almost
9 every time is, "Well, my lottery was this or my lottery was that, my lottery number." It
10 was an excuse that how they didn't happen to go there or how they had a college
11 deferment or there's many things. But to me and most of them are waiting for a, "Well,
12 you didn't miss much," or, "You're lucky you didn't have to go," and I get real tired of
13 that. So, I don't even acknowledge them anymore.

14 RV: Yeah. Is the time when you are able to discuss things really at the reunions
15 versus, say, with your family or close friends?

16 DH: Close friends I can some. My family's heard most of it. The reunions, oh,
17 that's always a good time because we were actually together, but even when I run into
18 vets no matter where I'm at and you can tell. There's a common denominator there that
19 you can throw a few things out and understand what each other's talking about. That's
20 easier.

21 RV: Let me ask you a couple questions about the climate of the United States
22 when you came back in the early '70s. This is a period of when we were, the United
23 States was in a period of transitioning the war over to the South Vietnamese called
24 Vietnamization. Did you think that there was a chance that this kind of thing would
25 work? Turning the war to the South Vietnamese for them to handle?

26 DH: Boy, again, as young as I was, I didn't pay a lot of attention to it, but I had a
27 gut feeling it was never going to happen, just because—it didn't surprise me at all when
28 watching the news when you'd see the South Vietnamese caving in like they did. They
29 couldn't hold their own unless we were with them anyway over there. So, I would
30 imagine with the corrupt government they had, yeah, there was just no way they were

1 going to make it without us. We would've been there, we would be there today if it was
2 to stay North and South Vietnam. But it doesn't surprise me that they didn't last.

3 RV: Is that you're opinion of that basically, is that today or were you thinking
4 about that?

5 DH: No that was then. I knew what had happened. It didn't surprise me. The
6 sad thing is is that—again with the war we're in now, but we lost so many people and
7 we're right back to square one again. That's the downfall. As in, say, World War II
8 when we actually won the war and things got better for the world, unlike Vietnam, we
9 lost our fifty-eight thousand of our people and how many hundreds of thousands of the
10 Vietnamese people lost. They went right back to what they were doing before we even
11 got there. So, I mean that's just a waste.

12 RV: What did you think of the anti-war movement?

13 DH: I didn't like it, and I still don't. A lot of them acted like it wasn't an insult
14 to us, but it really was because we knew what was going on when we were over there.
15 We were over there and guys were dying and we were having a tough time of it. To see
16 the protestors, it just always rubbed me the wrong way because they were hurting the
17 families just as much as they were the soldiers. That's a way you would see that. Right
18 or wrong, to me, if they would have kept it to themselves it would've been better.

19 RV: Did you feel like they were exercising freedom of speech or was it more—?

20 DH: Yeah, they have freedom of speech, but I don't care, I didn't care to hear
21 about it. I don't know if everything you read is true, but as far as what some of the
22 protestors, the Jane Fondas and stuff out, that actually supposedly made it worse for the
23 POWs (prisoners of war). I just didn't like it. The war protesting that was going on, the
24 burning of the flags and the tearing stuff up. That to me it, I don't even know how to put
25 it into words, but yeah, I don't have much—in fact I don't have any kind of respect for
26 any of them that did that and even the ones that went to Canada. Whether the war is right
27 or wrong, it was like it, and maybe it's selfish, but sometimes I felt like getting back to
28 the people making an excuse why they didn't have to go that are our age, that are my age.
29 I guess it's never been fair, the draft or whatever it's been. But I felt if one goes
30 everybody goes. There shouldn't be a selective where certain people don't have to do

1 things and some of the privileged few I guess didn't have to go, but, yeah. It wasn't a fair
2 thing as far as who did go and who didn't go.

3 RV: What about the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the VVAW?

4 DH: Yeah, I don't know what to think of those guys. I didn't pay much attention
5 to them, too, as far as the Kerrys and stuff when they were early on. I don't think I paid
6 any attention to them at all. They've got a right to do what they, do what they want to do
7 and I have more respect for them because they were actually there. So, to me they've got
8 a legit firsthand knowledge of what happened and maybe how wrong it was, unlike the
9 people that ran off to Canada and got amnes—what do you call it?

10 RV: Amnesty?

11 DH: Yeah, amnesty. Yeah, I have more respect for them. So, again, everybody
12 can think what they want, I just don't care to hear it.

13 RV: Okay. What did you think about My Lai because as a member of the
14 Americal division that, My Lai is part of the history of your division? Of course, you had
15 nothing to do with that and so few people had something to do with that, but I heard that
16 on the news last night, just comparing things happening in Iraq right now with the
17 Marine—

18 DH: I heard that.

19 RV: Yeah, I mean they brought up My Lai again. I mean they said this incident
20 in Iraq is kind of like the modern-day My Lai. I just wanted to ask you what you
21 thoughts were on that and what you remember at the time being said about it.

22 DH: Yeah. It was always a stigma that was had with the Americal. It always
23 will be. I even had somebody stop me a year or so ago and I had a sticker on my bumper
24 and I was walking into a, I think it was a bookstore or office store. A guy said, "Well,
25 wasn't that one of Lt. Calley's areas?" I said, "Well, we were close," but it will always
26 be remembered that way. If I would've been in that group, I know I wouldn't have been
27 a part of the shooting of the women, children, and innocent people. There's a certain
28 point where you might be enraged over what had happened to some of your fellow
29 soldiers, but there's also there's kind of a sense, there's some kind of common sense and
30 decency out there. What amazes me is the courage that the helicopter pilot, or was it two
31 helicopter pilots and a couple of door gunners maybe, they're the fellows that brought, I

1 thought the helicopter down in between Calley's bunch and some of the civilians that
2 they hadn't killed yet. There was a standoff with weapons drawn between the two of
3 them, I think.

4 RV: Correct, yes.

5 DH: That's pretty heroic. Yeah, those guys, there should've been some medals
6 awarded to them for that. But as far as what happened and to getting caught up in
7 revenge, I think it probably happened more than we all know, maybe not on that large of
8 a scale, but that just puts us right back into the barbaric things that we're always
9 supposedly against as Americans. So, it sure wasn't right.

10 RV: What about Kent State?

11 DH: Yeah, Kent State. That's too bad. I actually feel sorry for the National
12 Guard people in that one. From what I—the main thing I can remember though is
13 looking, I think it was *Life* magazine, but I can understand what would happen when
14 you've got a bunch of National Guard, most of them I think were in their latter teens I
15 would guess, a lot of them, and probably ill-trained and then surrounded with rock-
16 throwing and flame or Molotov cocktail type throwing or whatever they had. Then the
17 chaos was to start and as I remember, they ran them up a hill. I think they were probably
18 pretty much panicked. If they were trying to protect themselves, I guess that's one thing.
19 It was a bad situation all the way around, but again if the students wouldn't have been
20 either chasing them or throwing their rocks and their bottles and everything at them, it
21 probably wouldn't have happened. But of course, the other side's going to say, you don't
22 want the military showing up to stop their war protest either. There's always two sides to
23 those stories, but I do feel sorry for the fellows that were in uniform there.

24 RV: Did you keep up with the war when you came home and what was
25 happening?

26 DH: Just a little bit on the news. Like I said before, I knew, when things started
27 caving in, it didn't surprise me. At the time most of us, you know, middle '70s, we're
28 just trying to forget about it. We didn't have any—yeah. In fact, I had a box out in the
29 garage that I had a copy of what we called the yearbook that. I think some Filipino
30 photographers came over and spent a couple of days with us. It has pictures of all of us
31 in it. Every now and then I'd go out there in the garage and drink a few beers and look

1 through my box of stuff. So I always kept—the memory was there, I think. I didn't
2 dwell on it as far as news and things. I just kind of kept it in mind and I think that's why
3 I had an easy time when I did locate a bunch of the group I was with. I remembered, I
4 think, a lot more of them than they probably remembered some of us because I was
5 looking at their picture at least once a month in this book I had. So, that did help.

6 RV: What did you feel in April of 1975 when you saw South Vietnam collapsing
7 and the helicopters being pushed off the aircraft carriers and that whole thing playing out
8 on TV?

9 DH: Yeah, I think I was just amazed they got out of there. Again and I felt some
10 grief for the South Vietnamese that were left behind. I kind of still do. There's some of
11 the people I got to know there that, who knows what happened to them once we left. As
12 far as, I know there was, the reeducation camps and things you hear of. But anybody that
13 worked with us or collaborated with the Americans, I'm sure they had a rough time of it
14 once we were gone, which is too bad. When you take and turn and leave people like that,
15 that was bad. It'd be like the Montagnards we talked about, those poor people I know
16 were persecuted and probably many of them killed once we were gone just because they
17 fought with us.

18 RV: Well, looking after 1975 and the dominance of Vietnam now and that area
19 over Laos and Cambodia and having our ally Thailand there, people mention the domino
20 effect, the domino theory way back in the 1950s and early '60s as one of the reasons why
21 we went to war because all the countries would fall and go to communism, but that didn't
22 happen. What are your thoughts on that? I mean looking back at it now is one of the big
23 reasons why the president gave us, the public, saying "Listen, this is why we need to go."

24 DH: Yeah.

25 RV: Looking also, just what do you think of what happened. Was this a piece of
26 Cold War? Because the countries did not go communist, what role does that play?

27 DH: I know. I hadn't thought of that in a long time, but the domino theory,
28 because we all knew that back then, that's what we were always told. Every time one
29 other country becomes communist it's just a matter of time. We have to stop them where
30 they're at. But I think what I feel now is as time goes on it shows you that communism
31 isn't going to hardly make—I mean China's hanging in there, they're doing okay, but

1 other than that, I mean, what's happened to Russia, Cuba. That's a disaster as far as their
2 economies go. So, I guess now with all these years to look back, communism isn't really
3 much of a threat. I think the dictatorship maybe is kind of more of a threat in some of
4 these countries, but the domino theory, I never thought about it, but you're right, it
5 doesn't mean much now. I don't even think anybody thinks about it.

6 RV: Yeah. One of the things that Richard Nixon and Kissinger said after the
7 Paris peace talks wrapped up is that America had withdrawn and achieved peace with
8 honor. Can you make some comments on that?

9 DH: Yeah. I don't think there was any peace with honor. That was no peace.
10 Well, and I got to hand it to him. He got us out of there. I think that was more of a cut
11 our losses and leave, the way that it was going. They weren't going to let anybody win
12 the war. Whether we could have ever won it anyhow I kind of doubt it. It really, what
13 they call peace, it wasn't peace for the people we left behind. So, I think it was just an
14 easy, it was one way we could get out.

15 RV: What are your thoughts on the media coverage of the war?

16 DH: I think it was good, unlike, I heard a thing on the news, I think this morning
17 or last night that with what's happened in Iraq, people, you can't see any of the war. That
18 war there has taken such a different turn that the news media can't hardly venture out of
19 the secured areas. In Vietnam we did have some control. I know they lost a lot of the
20 media people, but like they say, that was the first war that was in everybody's living
21 rooms, which I think probably helped fuel the fire for the protestors and things like that
22 and maybe a better understanding for everybody what was really going on over there. I
23 think, I never really saw any of the media people. I don't ever remember any of them
24 ever being with us, but I think they probably did a good job because there sure are a lot of
25 footage and books and photos. I think back now, they had pretty much, I don't think they
26 were restricted much in Vietnam. I think they pretty much had their, anywhere they
27 wanted to go. They did okay.

28 RV: Okay. This idea of fighting one year in a war and then coming home versus
29 what the American experience was in World War I and World War II and Korea where
30 you served kind of the duration, did you think that the one-year rotation policy was a
31 good idea or a bad idea?

1 DH: If we would've had a goal, and I think maybe early on in the middle '60s
2 when the war started up, I think the fellows that went over there and I think if there was a
3 goal that we could win—if any of us knew that we're here, we've got unlimited support
4 and once we win this war, it's over, everybody goes home, I think it would've been a
5 different mindset, but what we knew was is we had one year to serve over there and then
6 we were coming home. So as we talked before and me being there so late on in the
7 conflict that winning wasn't even a question in my mind. There was nothing to win. It
8 was just, to win was get out of there all in one piece and come home and everybody I
9 knew was that way, but I think most of us, if there would've been a goal out there that
10 we've got to win this thing and it can be done so we can all come home, it would've
11 changed the mindset of most everybody. I think we would've been way more aggressive
12 than we were.

13 RV: What about the body count policy? This wasn't really in effect when you
14 were there, but it was there. Basically this was one of Westmoreland's plans. The more
15 we kill of them, the more likely we're going to—they're not going to be able to meet that
16 force. They have a limited number of people to throw at this thing. The more we hit
17 them, the better off we'll be and the war will end sooner. What did you think about that?

18 DH: Well, they sure had enough bodies kept coming down there, though. So I
19 don't know. Later on, when I was there, it probably made sense, but my God, I don't
20 know how many hundreds of thousands you'd have to wipe out. What is the count of
21 how many we estimated of them died, the North Vietnamese died?

22 RV: Well, the conservative estimate is total Vietnamese, South and North is
23 around a million.

24 DH: Wow.

25 RV: The high estimates I've seen, you know, two, three, to four million. So, it's
26 probably, I mean, we really don't know. Hanoi has not let those records out or really
27 hasn't given exact body counts, but it's near a million I would guess, total people.

28 DH: Well, it just shows you the unlimited supply because even as late as we there
29 and with all of the fire power we had, our whole job was trying to stop the supply routes
30 and the infiltration into the cities and the towns and the villages we were around. So, I
31 never ever thought of ever being a shortage of body. Body counts, the only thing I can

1 ever remember, I kind of kept a mental tally, I touched on before that, for every mission
2 we were on, which usually lasted a couple of weeks, ten days, whatever it was, we always
3 lost. It wouldn't have been for, actually people dying, but as far as if you wanted to add
4 up the wounded, their side versus ours, we always lost. We always lost a couple of guys
5 to mines or something. Once in a while we might end up killing one of them. So, I think
6 in the long run I know, we came out on the short end of the stick.

7 RV: Tell me what your thoughts are on the over all policy of the United States.
8 You've kind of touched on that during the last few answers, but looking overall, what did
9 we do right and what did we do wrong? I know that's a big question.

10 DH: Yeah, big question, but I'm not so sure we should've even been there to
11 begin with, because I don't know enough about it. I know you, I'm sure you know all
12 there is that, from your research, but—

13 RV: No, I don't. I don't know if we will ever have all of the answers, but I—

14 DH: Yeah, it's one of those things that it's, how does the United States
15 selectively choose these certain countries to move into. We've got other horrendous
16 things happening in Africa and things that are just mind-boggling that we're not involved
17 with, probably because somebody's smart enough to know we can't help them really
18 much. But the policy, I don't know, that's for the politicians. I don't really know. I just,
19 I look back on it now and think we probably should've never gone, but at the time I
20 thought we were still kind of in the end of the John Wayne thing where flag-wavers and
21 if Uncle Sam says he needs us, well, by God let's go. That's what we're supposed to do.
22 Looking back on it, again, as I said before, it was pretty much a waste of—if you talk
23 about a million Vietnamese and sixty thousand, and that's just the ones that died of us. I
24 mean, how many lives were shattered from being wounded and things? It was probably a
25 mistake.

26 RV: What about PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and you don't have to
27 answer that if you don't want to, but I—?

28 DH: Oh, I will. I'm mixed on it. I think I probably have some—in fact, I know I
29 have some of the symptoms, I would think. But I sucked it up when I got back. It's my
30 favorite line that didn't happen until ten years ago, but in *The Shawshank Redemption*,
31 the guy says, "Get busy living or get busy dying." It's one of those things that we all

1 were effected, some more than others. I always did say, though, that the people that were
2 over there, there was some of them that shouldn't have been there. They were mentally
3 unstable anyhow when they got to Vietnam. It was just worse to have them there. The
4 PTSD, it covers such a broad scope, you could pretty much make up anything you want
5 they can say you've got PTSD. To me it's how you deal with it. I'm a little upset about
6 all the claims that are paid to some of the people that absolutely don't need them.

7 RV: Like what?

8 DH: Well, I know some of the vets in our, you know, our group, they're driving
9 \$100,000 motor homes with fancy Jeeps and motorcycles strapped in trailers on the back
10 of them. They're supposedly a hundred percent disabled. Well, I wouldn't mind having
11 \$100,000 motor home and a Harley on the back and drawing a check, but I don't need it.
12 I've done okay. Most of those people don't need it and there's a lot of people, vets, and I
13 know some of them, that are getting the same ten percent that they were awarded when
14 they got wounded pretty bad back when they were in Vietnam and they've decided to get
15 on with their life and make a living and do what they want, but it's just, to me, it's not
16 fair. The person that wants to go push that system and knows how to work the system,
17 and there's many books out there on how to get these claims. A lot of them are
18 unjustified and I think there's a lot of guys out there, that I've even tried to get some of
19 them to go get a higher, a higher level just because I think they've got either PTSD or
20 their wounds were bad enough. I don't know. I guess I'm mixed on it. I think some of
21 it's just kind of fake. Well—

22 RV: You mentioned—go ahead.

23 DH: No, I was just going say I just don't think they're all for real. I think it's a
24 lot of the way for these guys to get a second retirement check.

25 RV: Okay, that's interesting. I've heard that before from veterans. Some are
26 very adamantly opposed to such things and that this PTSD is really just not real. I mean,
27 obviously except if there's a physical wound.

28 DH: Sure.

29 RV: But the whole mental aspect of it is up in the air, I know with a lot of folks.

30 DH: Well, the PTSD, the 9/11 people have it. I mean, you can have it from
31 anything, car crash, all kinds of things you can come up with some kind of PTSD. So,

1 yeah. I guess it's just each to their own, as far as what's real and what's not. I just don't
2 like people taking advantage of the system.

3 RV: Sure. Well, you mentioned that you suffer some of the symptoms or you've
4 recognized some of this?

5 DH: Well, I've had, it's a sleeping disorder which I didn't realize how strange it
6 was. Well, I guess I always knew it was kind of strange, but I got it, I started it, I know
7 right soon after I got back from Vietnam. This may sound weird, and my whole family, I
8 mean everybody I know knows it because they think I'm kind of an oddball for doing it,
9 but every night, I've got a hand-held radio with an earphone and I have to have that
10 earphone in my ear with some kind of talk. It's not music. It's got to be a voice, whether
11 it's, usually it's NPR (National Public Radio) news or talk. I have to have this
12 background music. It goes all night long and I sleep in and out of it, a lot of times it
13 wraps around in dreams, but it's a way to—and I don't know what I'm trying to block out
14 from thinking about, but I have to have it. So it's either I've got a separate set of
15 batteries I carry with me when I travel. I've got an extra earphone. It's just kind of, it's
16 just different. Once and a while I have not had, and I've done okay, but I still, every
17 night I've got this earphone in my ear and it's a—I don't what you even call it—huh. I
18 don't know, Richard, I don't know what to call it, except everybody thinks I'm an
19 oddball when they say something about it, but it's a way for me, I guess, to not think
20 about certain things. I don't know what I'm not trying to think about because I'm not
21 really, I mean everything that ever happened to me, especially in Vietnam, I've talked
22 about. So I'm not quite sure what that's about. But I think a sleeping disorder is one of
23 them, you have a problem with. I think people, over time, I don't think I'm an alcoholic.
24 I do like to drink. I'm a beer drinker along with most everybody else I know, my
25 buddies. But really not, I don't think, to excess. I was never into drugs trying to cope
26 with anything. I've been very successful in my life. The only the real weird thing I have
27 is that radio in my ear every night. Oh, God, in fact my wife, it drives her nuts because
28 every now and then I'll, I'm trying to remember the last thing that happened, anyway,
29 somebody will die or a celebrity gets divorced or something. God, I'll reach over there
30 and say, "Guess what? Paul McCartney just got divorced," or something like that and

1 this is two o'clock in the morning. So, I'm pretty much up on the news before most
2 people get up.

3 RV: I feel for her. (Both laughing)

4 DH: Well, the worst part is when I roll over and the thing pulls and falls off and
5 hits the hardwood floor and makes a big bang and the batteries got flying. That really
6 ticks her off.

7 RV: Well, that's interesting. I guess maybe that's just the comfort thing,
8 something you got used to.

9 DH: I don't know, yeah. I did run into, damn, who was that? Another vet here
10 not long ago, but he said he had done that for a few years. He doesn't do it anymore, but
11 when that was brought up, it didn't really surprise him. He said he'd done the same thing
12 for a while. So, maybe I'm not the only one. Well, I doubt I am.

13 RV: What do feel about your service today, Dave? How do you see it, looking
14 back?

15 DH: Oh, I say it's probably one of the better, the best things that ever happened
16 to me. I think, I look at that because, number one, I came back in one piece, very
17 fortunate. I mean if I would've been sitting here sitting here talking to you without any,
18 legs or an arm or whatever it might be, it would be a whole different story or if I was
19 dying of cancer from Agent Orange, it would be a different story. But the friendship and
20 the memories and the adventure part of this thing, there's nothing like it. I had one of the
21 fellows, named Mike Culligan, the first guy that got back a hold of me, we were in the
22 same squad together over there. He still to this day said he had, he was, he had all kinds
23 of troubles in high school and was going the wrong way. He said the Army saved his
24 life. He made it through, too. He did okay. I'm going to see him again here this June. I
25 look back on it and everybody asked and I'll say, "Hey, we had a whole lot of good times
26 and a few bad times," and to me, that was what Vietnam was like. It was just a few bad
27 times. At the time I didn't think it was all that good a time, but I wouldn't trade the
28 friends I have now and the memories. It was that short snippet of time, I was over, only
29 over there for eleven months and some odd days or whatever it might've been, but that
30 was a real shape on somebody's life, as far as, even what I'm doing now, if it wouldn't
31 have been for my stint there, I wouldn't be so active in the reunion activities we have and

1 all kinds of veteran stuff. I used to go up here, we've got a—maybe you can see it when
2 you come out, but we've got a living memorial here in Portland that is just beautiful, I
3 was active in getting going twenty some years ago. It used to be, and I haven't done it in
4 a few years, I would take the American flag, go up there and just kind of hang out at the
5 ceremonies and run into some vets and stuff and try to get, let them know there was
6 organizations out there, as far as American goes. I'm proud of what I did.

7 RV: Is there anything that you would change about it?

8 DH: Well, I keep saying it's easy to say now, but I probably would've, if I had
9 any smarts at all I would've stayed in the service. Again, I've done just fine as far as
10 family and livelihood and everything else, but I think that me coming back at such a
11 young age and wanting to get out and going back to work pumping gas at the same gas
12 station I was in when I left, I didn't really get anywhere. I did go to college for a couple
13 of years on the GI Bill once I did come back, community college, but I was working
14 during the day, too. I kind of look at some of the fellows that did stay and at the time I
15 could have retired or gotten out of there when I was thirty-eight years old and then done
16 whatever I would've wanted to do. But again, I don't have any problems. I'm very
17 fortunate where I'm at in my life.

18 RV: Do you think that Vietnam is still with the country today?

19 DH: You mean with America?

20 RV: Yes.

21 DH: Oh, yeah, I think in a big way. I think it's starting, with everything that's
22 going on in Iraq and Iran and Afghanistan that's happening now, I think it's I guess more
23 prevalent in those of us that are affiliated with it or have been there or people like you
24 that are taking an interest in it because we've got so much other things going on in the
25 world. But there's a certain age group of us that I think it was, and I'm finding more and
26 more of them that are coming out. Yeah, I think it's there but I think we're kind of taking
27 a back seat to, and we should, to the vets that are coming home from these current
28 conflicts. But I look at us, it used to be I would look at these World War II fellows sitting
29 at these reunions at the VFWs (Veterans of Foreign Wars) and man, I'm telling you, I
30 look around our reunions and think, "My God, what happened?" because now we're
31 getting to be—I'll be fifty-five here this summer, but a lot of these guys, they're in their

1 early sixties. To me, I remember World War II guys are supposed to be in their sixties.
2 Well, now they're in their eighties. So things are changing.

3 RV: Yeah. Tell me about your feelings on the movies that have come out on
4 Vietnam. Do you even watch them and if you have, which ones have struck you either
5 good or bad?

6 DH: Yeah. Oh, I like them. Of course, my favorite's *Platoon*.

7 RV: Okay. Why?

8 DH: Well, that one to me was, and I've had other guys, friends of mine say that
9 they couldn't stand the thing and to me I thought that was the most real, as far as what I
10 encountered, in *Platoon* when Charlie Sheen goes over there, it reminded me somewhat
11 of myself, young guy, pretty naïve, but you had your, in part of that you had what we
12 called are the juicers and the dopers. You had the guys doing the drugs or the guys doing
13 the drinking. There was racial issues that were brought out in that. I'm not so sure about
14 the one conflict between the two squad leaders where Tom Berenger killed Willem
15 Dafoe. I'm not so sure about that. But, I think that was probably true because, what was
16 the director's name of that?

17 RV: Oliver Stone.

18 DH: Yeah, because he was there. I think when he tied the music together and
19 things that he'd seen, you could tell he'd been there. Unlike *Apocalypse Now* which I
20 thought was an entertaining movie and I like Martin Sheen real well in it, but the stuff
21 with Marlon Brando, it was just way too weird. That stuff never happened. Some of
22 them, oh, I even kind of like some of the Forrest Gump footage that they did, a little bit of
23 that was kind of real, as far as what little on Vietnam they did show of him. But some of
24 these, like *Coming Home*, there was a few of those that showed that the problems that the
25 families had when they came home. I guess they're all okay but first of all, *Platoon*
26 would be my favorite.

27 RV: Okay. Did you see *We Were Soldiers*?

28 DH: Yeah, it was okay. I don't know why, the movie just didn't do it for me. I
29 like Mel Gibson. He's great. I think maybe I probably ought to read the book. I might
30 like that better, but yeah I did see *We Were Soldiers*, but it just seemed to get real
31 repetitious to me. It wasn't one of my favorites.

1 RV: Okay. What about books on Vietnam? Do you read about it?

2 DH: Not so much. The only things that I've really read in the past is I would
3 read—well, the one thing that I still have somewhere that I read two or three times was
4 the Medal of Honor book that goes over all of the citations given to all of the Medal of
5 Honor winners. To me that was very interesting. I read that, but as far as books written
6 by vets I've read parts of a few of them. The only one that I really, really enjoyed was
7 Tim O'Brien's *Things We Carried*. That's a great book. Again, though, he was a grunt.
8 In fact he was with the Americal I think it was either in Delta Company or something real
9 close to right where I was within about a year, I think. We were just close together there,
10 but you can tell the way he wrote it, what he wrote about, he was really there. He wasn't
11 grandstanding on anything and he told the truth. He, like many of us, he ended up with a
12 rear job driving a Jeep or something towards the end. So, and he's a great writer.

13 RV: So you're not adverse to actually continuing to put yourself back into that
14 scenario, looking at Vietnam and the war, versus some veterans really just don't want to
15 see the movies, don't want to read the books, don't really want to talk about it. You seem
16 to be very open with it.

17 DH: Oh, yeah. I like it. There was nothing that's—yeah, you have to—it doesn't
18 help, I guess, keeping it all inside of you. It was too bad. One of the fellows that was
19 wounded from one of the, well, small booby traps that we hit, he only lives about an hour
20 from me here, nah, almost two. I talked to his wife twice over the years, talking about a
21 lot of years and had sent him a couple of notes. One here not long ago about the reunion
22 and a lot of the fellows get together, would like to see him. I guess he doesn't want any
23 part of us, so I'm just going to kind of back off and leave him alone, but we've been in
24 contact with a few of the fellows that, I mean, we were really close with over there. They
25 don't want any part of it. So, I guess it's just one of those things that we can ask once or
26 twice. If they don't want to partake it's too bad. I think they're really missing
27 something. I think if they would actually get together, a lot of them would probably
28 never miss one of these. Then on the other hand we've had some where we've gotten
29 together with some of our people who showed up once. It was great times, but we'll
30 probably never see them again. So, I guess everybody deals with it differently.

31 RV: Sure. Would you want to go back to Vietnam?

1 DH: Yeah, in fact my oldest son got me a trip a few years back, paid for type trip.
2 Then all kind of circumstances kept happening and we never got to go. So I've still got
3 plans to go. I have got my itinerary all laid out, where I was going to go. I don't want to
4 go do the tourist thing. I mainly want to go right back to the Chu Lai area, which you
5 can't get in, but they've got a—I want to just go kind of be where I was. I don't to go to
6 Saigon and Da Nang. I want to go to that Chu Lai area. They built a resort there now,
7 but I don't call it closure. I would like to go back and find the—and I don't think we can.
8 I've looked at our maps trying to go back to where we lost so many people on that hill on
9 that big mine we hit. There's just a couple of certain areas I would like to, I'd just like to
10 go stand there again and just kind of see what it felt like. Also, I would like to see some
11 of the people I got to know a little bit that there were, Anh Tam was the little town or the
12 town that was outside of the base. I got to know a few of the people that lived there and
13 like to see if they did do okay or didn't do okay once we left. But yeah. It's a beautiful
14 country. Just that airplane ride over there is just murder, though, as far as how long it
15 takes. That's what I dread.

16 RV: Yes. What do you think about the Vietnamese people today, both in
17 Vietnam and then the ones that you've seen here in the United States?

18 DH: Well, the ones in Vietnam, what I really like is that they are very receptive.
19 They're happy to see us and I know they like our money, but if anybody was going to
20 have any hostility towards anyone, they ought to hate us. I think maybe they're like us or
21 most of us that maybe they figured the politicians are the ones that got us into that thing
22 and they don't really hold a grudge against us soldiers that are going back, because from
23 all of the fellows that I know, and Dave Taylor's one of them, that when they go back
24 they have a great time. They're treated nice. The people are very receptive to have us
25 visiting. Of course they need it, they need it, too, as far as their economy goes, but they
26 seem okay. I met a few Vietnamese people here that are very hard working, very honest
27 people and I'm glad for them. I'm glad they're doing okay because they had a rough,
28 rough life over there.

29 RV: What about the Vietnamese here in the United States?

30 DH: I've met a few of them here, seems like I keep meeting their kids because I
31 don't know where the parents are, but most of them that I know are very successful, well-

1 educated, a lot of them self-employed. I think they're doing fine. I'm glad they've got
2 the opportunity to be here.

3 RV: Let me ask you about the myths and the stereotypes of the Vietnam veteran.
4 You've heard this, I'm sure, many, many times, that the Vietnam veteran is this kind of
5 drugged out hippie, long hair, unemployed or just something like that. Can you comment
6 on how this thing started and your opinion about it today?

7 DH: Yeah. It's too bad because we were treated—I wasn't, but a lot of the
8 fellows that came back that I see now, they have a real animosity against the VFW and
9 the American Legion. For some of them in these smaller towns, they pretty much were
10 unwelcome. I think a lot of them tried to come back and needed to have a group to be
11 with just because of what they went through. When they got to these organizations, the
12 World War II guys and I think some of the Korean War, I think it was mainly the World
13 War II guys, thought, they gave us that. "You guys are the dope smoking, long haired,
14 scraggly looking bunch," and they didn't want any part of the Vietnam vets in their
15 organizations. First reunion I went to was in Reno in 1996 for the Americal. A fellow
16 from this, from Beaverton here, actually didn't live very far from me, I didn't know it.
17 His name was, Command Sergeant Major Meade, James Meade. He'd gone over early
18 on, he'd been in World War II as a youngster. Then he took over, might've been the 5th
19 of the 46th when they went over to Vietnam, but anyway, the whole banquet room was
20 full of World War II people. There were two tables. I think there was maybe eight seats
21 at each table, were for us Vietnam vets. He got up there and when he started in on them,
22 he said, "Look around you." He said, "The reason there is none of these people, Vietnam
23 vets," and he pointed over there at us, he says, "It's because how you've treated them
24 over the years." He went on for about twenty minutes chewing out the World War II
25 guys. It didn't make any friends except for us, we were just elated, but he had pretty
26 much made it clear that the reason these organizations out there don't have us is because
27 how we've been treated by them for all these years. In fact, one of the fellows I think has
28 got that thing on tape. He's passed away since then, doing that. But they never ever
29 acted like we were in a war. So that was a big thing. We lost, they won. Then we didn't
30 look like they should. Same old thing when you've got your dad, they're always getting
31 their hair cut, short butch hair cuts. Our hair's growing and people are wearing

1 moustaches and beards and clothes look different. So, it's a generation thing, too, I think
2 happened there.

3 RV: Yeah. David, if you walked into a classroom today and you were addressing
4 high school students or college students about the war, what would you want to tell them?

5 DH: Well, I did that once. I came back, in fact, when I was home on leave I got a
6 phone call from a social studies teacher I had in high school. His name was King, last
7 name was King. He asked me if I would like to come back and spend the day talking to
8 his, I think that's the class he had, and tell them really what was going to go on there at
9 the war. So I enjoyed it. I went back and spent a day. It was just kind of an open forum.
10 They would ask questions. Some of them were interested. Some weren't, but it gave me
11 a chance to kind of tell them what it was like because I'm two or three weeks being back
12 and all they'd seen was on TV. So I did do that. A lot of the guys I know used to partake
13 in these things at the schools here up in the last few years they would do it, where they
14 would visit the schools here and, from all the wars and answer questions. I think I would
15 probably tell them just about what we've talked about is that that was a time in our lives
16 when we were young and mentally could get through most anything. It might've been a
17 wrong war, but it was something that most of us felt that we were supposed to do, right or
18 wrong. Again, I always look at the positive side. I've got the best friends I could ever
19 have from being there. So to me it was an experience that I wouldn't try to shut any of
20 the memories out I have.

21 RV: Now, you've done some writing. You've mentioned this throughout the
22 interview. Tell me how that started and what you've written about.

23 DH: Well, a number of years ago, maybe five or six or probably even more than
24 that, it was a little article come up in the paper, a woman veteran was going to start a
25 writing war stories class in kind of a suburb of Portland here. I'd always thought about
26 trying to get a few things down on paper. I went to that, her name was Kim Cook. In
27 fact, she's going to be speaking and having a class at the reunion. She just had a book
28 published here a couple months ago. I went to the publishing party, but to me I thought it
29 was important to get things down. A lot of it for family, not so much you're ever going
30 to make a fortune writing a book, because we all know that ain't gonna happen, but to get
31 to that class, in fact I went to, she did it for three years and I went to every one. In fact,

1 I'm kind of one of the main people, I think in her book that she wrote because I was there
2 from beginning to end. But she helped us get things down. Grammar wasn't, didn't play
3 any part of it, structure wasn't any part of it, it was mainly get it down and get it in
4 history for your families. From then on I realized and I have, I've had, oh, three or four
5 stories published in magazines. I think if I can ever get them together, I might put a little
6 book together just to leave for my family, but I've enjoyed it. I write stories. Well, I
7 write like I talk. So I mean, if you get me on a good story, it just comes down on paper
8 just like I'm going to tell somebody about what had happened. To me, I don't know if
9 it's a healing thing or not, but I enjoy having them down. Sometimes I'll pick them up
10 and read one of them and think, "Damn, that wasn't half bad at all. So I did okay." I've
11 never had a real writing class. My English isn't, it was terrible in high school, but I can
12 write like I talk so it does okay.

13 RV: Okay. Tell me about your family members, your sons, your wife, how have
14 they dealt with your Vietnam experience?

15 DH: Oh, my wife's very supportive. She's five years younger. She remembers a
16 couple of people I think in high school, maybe older brothers or things that might've
17 gone to Vietnam. Really I didn't really become real active in this whole thing until
18 middle '90s. So it's been one of those things. But she's one of the wives that is so social
19 and helpful. She's a big part of the reunions and we haven't missed one since '96.
20 There's this group of the wives that kind of get together. The wives probably hold our
21 group together as much as the guys, just because we all get along. Yeah, she's done well.
22 She goes with me to some of the dedications that we've done. My boys, I think, are
23 proud. Most of them, I think two of them have been to The Wall with me and that was
24 special. They've been up to the Vietnam Memorial that we have here. I think they're
25 proud of their dad. I think it's not everybody's served in a war, not that it's glamorous,
26 but not everybody's got a dad that actually did something like that and that's got that kind
27 of history. They've said, even in school, I remember years ago they would say they
28 wanted to know whose dad was in Vietnam. Not all of them were, there was just a few.
29 So, it makes me proud.

30 RV: Tell me about your visits to The Wall. What has that been like for you?

1 DH: Well, the first one, I went with my wife. It was special. It was the two of
2 us. We spent quite a bit of time there. I don't remember a lot about it, but it was special.
3 The second time is when we were there with one of the reunions in D.C. which would've
4 been about three or four years ago. We had, I think, our biggest turnout of our, what we
5 call our Charlie Company, 5th of the 46th bunch. So I had my, Bob Amos was my
6 lieutenant I carried the radio for that I think pretty much got me through over there and
7 Bob Franco, he was our company commander and then plus all my buddies and friends
8 from squad and platoon and everything. We were all there. We all went there. I
9 designed our special Charlie Company hat a number of years ago, but there was probably
10 twenty, it might've been twenty of us, I think, that we went as a group. That was really
11 special. We took some extra hats. We put them down under the fellows that we had lost
12 over there. We had, I think we may have five on The Wall over there from that time
13 frame that we were in there, maybe more than that, I can't remember. We took the hats
14 there. In fact, the Parks Service people that were there saw us. Sorry, Richard, I've just
15 got to regroup a little bit.

16 RV: That's fine. Do you want stop the recording?

17 DH: No, no, I'm fine. It was such a moving thing that the Parks Service people
18 blocked off both sides of The Wall. I'll be okay in just a second.

19 RV: Okay, that's fine. Take your time.

20 DH: Oh, but anyway, they made it special for us. They blocked off both sides,
21 stopped the people, let us have our own space. They actually got some ladders out, took
22 some pictures of us all in a group there. It was emotional. One of the few times I've just
23 broken down and that was one of them. I tell you, standing in front of that wall with
24 my—oh, yeah, every now and then it happens. It happened there at The Wall. So it was
25 special. The only other time I think that happened was kind of neat, I think I told you,
26 was at the airport in Reno when the four or five of us that got together for the first time,
27 because we had, no emotions would come out. We sat there and bawled like babies for
28 twenty minutes in the airport. So, but it was, grown men can cry. But The Wall, The
29 Wall, that was a good time. I don't think I can ever have another one like that because I
30 don't think we'll get our whole group together, but I think why it was so emotional was
31 having the people most important to me that I served with there, all together at the same

1 time was really neat. Then, of course, I've got my wife and kids with me, too. All the
2 families, we were just, there was one huge family, which was very special.

3 RV: Some people have thought that The Wall is not an appropriate memorial for
4 you all. That it's too, it's kind of depressing. It's black granite. What do you say to
5 that?

6 DH: Yeah. I didn't know, either. I remember the problems that they were
7 having when they were going to, people were complaining about it. Now I think that
8 everybody that thought it wasn't appropriate, I think has probably changed their mind
9 because I think it's probably the most moving. It says it all. It should be somber. There
10 was nothing really happy about it. It should be somber and it should be a respectful type
11 of a thing. It's overwhelming to see all of those names on there. It really hits you with
12 how many that we did lose. So I think it's fine. I tell you, I do love the three soldiers
13 standing there, too, though. Those guys, in fact, I've got one of those, my wife got me a
14 small bronze replica of the three guys I have sitting on top of my desk. I think those are
15 great because those—and I don't know who did that, I'm sorry to say, but the way that
16 they've got them dressed, I mean, again, if you were a grunt, that's exactly what we
17 looked like. So, I think they did a great job.

18 RV: So they got it right?

19 DH: Yeah, they really got it right. Yeah, they don't have the spit and polished
20 and things. To be a, and I think I've said it before, but to be a grunt, that's probably the
21 most proud thing anybody can have is, wear that CIB. I know the fighter pilots and the
22 helicopter pilots, they can all be proud, but to be the, I don't know what you call them, I
23 always call it, we were kind of the bottom of the food chain. We were the guys that were
24 in the middle of it that nobody wanted to do what we did. So it's a proud thing.

25 RV: There's a lot of welcoming home stuff going on today in the last few years
26 for the veterans coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq. They're hailed as heroes.
27 They're obviously getting their due. How do you feel as a Vietnam veteran about seeing
28 this 180-degree difference between how you guys were quote unquote, "welcomed
29 home," and what's happening now?

30 DH: Yeah. Well, it doesn't bother me now because I'm happy for them because I
31 would be the, in fact, I ran into a fellow here at a local restaurant not long ago that had

1 seen my bumper sticker and came over and shook my hand. He had just gotten back
2 from Iraq. I said, no, and I said I ended up, I bought his lunch and stuff before we left. I
3 mean it was a mutual respect. Again, just to have somebody like that recognize us and
4 changing the subject a touch, but we've at some of these reunions, our group would go
5 out on like a Thursday night as a group to a restaurant. A lot of times we would be, I
6 mean, very noticed. We've always got people coming up to us saying, "Hey, my dad was
7 there. We're proud of you guys." It makes us feel good because we're finally, people do
8 thank us. I've been thanked a few times over the years, different places, but we're all still
9 bitter about what happened to us when we came back and I don't think it's something
10 that's ever going to change. I think a lot of that might have to do with the war protesters
11 which I don't have much feelings for, but we did our best to kind of hide because, and I
12 never got spit on or anything like that. We never had any problems, but it was so
13 unpopular. I don't know, it was just kind of unfair what we had been through. I think
14 now, today, a lot people do understand that. I know I went to a Paul Revere and the
15 Raiders signing here in Portland a few years back. He's a big Vietnam vet supporter and
16 had a young woman come up and say thank you for just being there. That's important.
17 But I'm so happy that the current soldiers are getting some kind of respect when they
18 come back.

19 RV: Do you think that's a reflection on what you guys didn't get?

20 DH: Yeah, I do. I think it's quite a bit on what we didn't get. I think the people
21 understand that the soldiers themselves aren't the ones that are making the decisions.
22 We're not the ones that have made this an unpopular war. That's why both sides keep
23 talking about we support our troops. Well, we all support our troops. So it's, unlike us,
24 we were looked down upon. There was a stigma attached to us when there's not to the
25 soldiers that are coming back now.

26 RV: Yeah. Well, we're nearing the end of this interview. I wanted to ask you, is
27 there anything you that you want to discuss or talk about that we have not touched upon?

28 DH: Well, I don't think so. I mean, something may come up, but I don't think
29 so.

30 RV: Okay. How has it been doing this oral history interview for you?

1 DH: Oh, I've enjoyed it. Yeah, I think it's important. It's kind of like for me
2 most things I've talked about as far as the experiences in Vietnam, I think that's all pretty
3 clear, to relive some of the times, visiting The Wall and just how important that was. But
4 I think just to make sure that it be known that there's such a common bond and a
5 camaraderie among most of us that is special that most people will never ever know, that
6 we have. Maybe it is because how we were treated and how unpopular the war was that
7 we're kind of survivors from it and we're a special bunch.

8 RV: Well, speaking from experience and being around you all, and being around
9 a lot of Vietnam veterans, I would absolutely agree with that. Okay, well, Dave, on that
10 note we will go ahead and end your oral history. I want to thank you very, very much for
11 your time.

12 DH: Well, thank you, Richard, I enjoyed it.

13 RV: Okay, very good.

14