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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with William Drewry  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
April 22, 2006  
Transcribed by Cecily Darwin**

1           Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner. I'm conducting an interview with Mr. Will  
2           Drewry on the twenty-second of April at approximately 12:55 in the afternoon. We are at  
3           the Omni Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, at the 71<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter Company Reunion.  
4           Sir, first I would like to thank you for consenting to this interview. If you would, please  
5           tell me where you were born and where you grew up and a little bit of background  
6           information about yourself.

7           WD: Legal name William Edward Drewry III.

8           SM: Thank you.

9           WD: Born in Suffolk, Virginia, in 1950. My parents lived on a little farm the first  
10          six years of my life and we moved to Wakefield, Virginia, and then we moved to  
11          Portsmouth, Virginia, where I stayed until I was eighteen. I was a little slow in school. At  
12          eighteen years old I decided to get the heck out and join the Army. I took basic and AIT  
13          (advanced infantry training) at Ft. Polk, Louisiana. Then they shipped me out to Vietnam.

14          SM: What year was that?

15          WD: That was 1968. I joined in June of '68. I was in Vietnam by December of  
16          '68. I was sent to Echo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry. I was in a mortar unit combat  
17          support company. We worked with LZ Dragon, Charlie Brown, and Liz. Then I got tired  
18          of that. It's very boring being on one little hill, you know. You didn't get to see anybody  
19          new. It was like being island happy. So I decided I'm going to become a door gunner. In  
20          May of that year I became a door gunner and went to the 71<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter  
21          Company.

1           SM: Let me take a step back real quick and ask you a couple of questions about  
2 growing up in Virginia. First, what was it like there growing—this was farm life  
3 basically—

4           WD: Not really.

5           SM: What was it like?

6           WD: I mean, we had 120-acre farm. My father was a carpenter and my mother  
7 was a homemaker and we just rented the land out. People would come out and they  
8 would take care of that and sometimes we'd have chickens or whatever my mother  
9 wanted to have, but I don't remember that much about it. It was very boring, island  
10 happy, again, because you didn't see anybody. I didn't really like it that much, but now I  
11 live there and I enjoy it. I like peace and quiet.

12          SM: Oh, okay. Well, what drew you to the Army as you were making your  
13 decision to leave school as opposed to other services?

14          WD: The Navy was closed.

15          SM: Okay, the Navy recruiting office was closed.

16          WD: Closed that day, yeah. My brother-in-law to be, no, he was my brother-in-  
17 law by then. He was a corpsman and I was always fascinated with guns and stuff. So he  
18 talked me into joining the Navy as a gunners mate. I, of course, went down to talk to  
19 them and they were closed. Some sailor came by and looked at me in the door and yelled,  
20 "Don't do it! Don't do it!" So I went to the Army. I only weighed 109 pounds. They had  
21 to fatten me at basic training so I could—fatten me up before I went to basic training, I  
22 had to weigh 120. So my nickname was "Skinny." For the most part it wasn't that bad, I  
23 guess. I had four sisters. I was the middle child.

24          SM: Now how much about Vietnam were you aware before you—?

25          WD: I watched the news. My grandmother was one to watch Walter Cronkite  
26 every night. So we had to watch Walter Cronkite every night. So I was used to watching  
27 the news.

28          SM: What month in '68 did you leave again or did you join the Army?

29          WD: I joined the Army in, I think it was June of '68.

30          SM: Okay, so you knew about Tet.

31          WD: Knew about Tet.

1 SM: You knew about—  
2 WD: My neighbor was one of the first kids in town to be killed in Vietnam. He  
3 died—that movie *We Were Soldiers*, he died in that battle.  
4 SM: In Ia Drang Valley.  
5 WD: Yeah.  
6 SM: Wow.  
7 WD: He was supposed to be coming home a day or so before he died.  
8 SM: What was the overall attitude in your community there in Virginia about the  
9 war? Did it seem very supportive?  
10 WD: I didn't really pay attention to it. I mean, we didn't really talk about it that  
11 much. It was just something on the news. It didn't affect us.  
12 SM: Did you see many blue stars in windows?  
13 WD: No. Like I said, my neighbor was the first one to get killed.  
14 SM: Yeah, okay. What was your indoctrination into Army life like going down to  
15 Ft. Polk, Louisiana, for basic?  
16 WD: The first time I ever went far away—I had been to North Carolina and I had  
17 been to Maryland to see some relatives, but I had never really been away from home  
18 before. So it was one of those things. It was different. I never really got homesick, per se.  
19 I never had any brothers and it was great being in the Army, no sisters around. So it was  
20 great.  
21 SM: When you went to the recruiter what did you sign up for?  
22 WD: Because I was underweight I had to do RA (Regular Army) unassigned. My  
23 basic joke I tell people I had to sign up for military intelligence, MI, and they sent me  
24 mechanized infantry. Basically I had to do RA unassigned because I didn't have the  
25 proper weight. I finished basic training and they sent me down to some place to sign me  
26 up and the only thing they offered me was shoe repair or infantry. Well, I took infantry.  
27 They sent me to indirect fire infantry mortars, which I'd probably rather have been  
28 straight leg infantry, 11 Bravo than 11 Charlie because mortars can be very, very boring.  
29 You sit around waiting for a fire mission then you do the fire mission. Then you've got to  
30 spend all that time replenishing the ammunition supply and wait again, you know. I just  
31 like to stay active as much as I can.

1 SM: That's a heavy base plate.

2 WD: Well, 4.2 inches is fairly heavy, but they were already emplaced when we  
3 got there. We were on LZ Dragon and we were there 'til it shut down.

4 SM: Oh, you mean in Vietnam.

5 WD: In Vietnam and then we went to LZ Charlie Brown because they were  
6 paving the road, Highway 1, and we were there to support the paving of the road.

7 SM: What do you remember most about basic?

8 WD: It was hot.

9 SM: Hot.

10 WD: The stupidity of giving us salt tablets for the heat, not drink water take salt  
11 tablets. That's the only thing the Army knew back then was salt tablets for heat. Of  
12 course, Louisiana was a unique place, very hot. I went back there back in the '70s when I  
13 returned from Berlin to be permanent party with the 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry, 5<sup>th</sup>, yeah, I  
14 think it was 5<sup>th</sup> Mech. I got to drive around and I found my old basic training company  
15 and drove out to the ranges. Oh, I guess it was so far we had to march, it was just a few  
16 miles. I thought I was marching five or ten miles out to these ranges in the heat and it  
17 wasn't that far at all. I was really surprised.

18 SM: Well, when you finished your basic training at Louisiana did you stay there  
19 for advanced infantry training or did you go on to someplace else?

20 WD: I went up to Tigerland and it was north fort.

21 SM: Yeah. Have you seen that movie, by the way, by the name *Tigerland*?

22 WD: I saw bits and pieces of it. Normally I don't watch Vietnam movies. I mean,  
23 I saw *Apocalypse Now* and I had bad dreams. The scenery was correct, but the story line  
24 was bullshit.

25 SM: *Apocalypse Now* or *Tigerland*?

26 WD: No, *Apocalypse Now*. *Tigerland*, what little bit I saw was bullshit, I saw like  
27 ten or fifteen minutes of it and it was bull.

28 SM: In terms of basic and AIT, how physical were the DIs (drill instructors), the  
29 trainers, with you guys?

30 WD: I mean, they weren't that physical.

31 SM: They weren't?

1 WD: No.

2 SM: By '68 they had kind of—

3 WD: I mean, it wasn't—no one really got beat up by them. We were scared of  
4 them. We were scared to go to jail. We were all scared of them. I mean, if you're scared  
5 of somebody you're not going to try them out that much. When we got to AIT, yeah, you  
6 had a drill sergeant, but you also had these young shake-and-bake sergeants and they  
7 wound up going to Vietnam with us. They were the ones basically helping out the  
8 sergeant, helping to teach us and stuff. I ran into some of them over there. It was like  
9 running into a buddy from basic training. I mean, rank didn't matter.

10 SM: What was the most challenging thing about basic in Tigerland?

11 WD: I don't think there was a real challenge to it in the fact that you just worried  
12 about finishing up the test to graduate. You wanted to graduate with your group, but there  
13 was no real thing to it. To test they used to come in there and give us the answers to all  
14 the tests and it was a rote type thing. They keep yelling questions and somebody would  
15 have to answer it and they'd do it over and over and over again. The only thing I  
16 remember about basic training, the actual hands-on test is I was told to do a horizontal  
17 butt stroke to the head with a bayonet. I did a vertical butt stroke instead and I took the  
18 head off the dummy. I failed that part of it and then I failed the one where I come up on a  
19 guy who was supposed to have gas and instead of donning my own mask I put a mask on  
20 him first and donned my own. I flunked that, too, but I still passed basic.

21 SM: Okay. Now Tigerland, how effective do you think that was in preparing you  
22 for service in Vietnam?

23 WD: I guess it was the best they could do. I mean, what they did it was like the  
24 British training the troops to go to World War I after their Regular Army had been killed,  
25 the Reserves. They were going to kick a soccer ball from one end of the line to the other  
26 to beat the Germans. They were all trained so we were all gung-ho. We were the class of  
27 '69 basically, the class of '68, rather. Everybody was gung-ho, bong the cong. We were  
28 all gung-ho ready to go. Compared to the people I saw my second tour, they had no  
29 motivation at all.

30 SM: Interesting.

31 WD: We were all motivated ready to go.

1 SM: Now did you go over as—you went over as individual replacements, though.  
2 WD: Right, yeah. Like I think about maybe ten guys from my AIT unit came  
3 over with me to the Americal Division and went to the combat center with us. I ran into  
4 one on LZ Professional later and he asked me about a certain guy, I forget his name now.  
5 He came with us. He was supposed to leave to go to a unit the same time we did, but  
6 there was mortar attack or a rocket attack that day. He never showed up to his unit. So we  
7 don't if he died in a rocket attack before he even got to his unit or not. One of the guys  
8 had been in a mechanized unit and they got hit by an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) and  
9 he was messed up as far as, mentally not physically. Other than that I didn't see too many  
10 of them. The one guy I did talk to, he was on LZ Professional. He'd land there  
11 occasionally and work for him. He would come over and say hello. He was on a mortar  
12 platoon there. We'd shoot the shit a bit. For the most part I was just with the Rattlers.  
13 SM: When did you arrive in Vietnam again?  
14 WD: It was December of '68.  
15 SM: What were your first impressions when you got off that plane?  
16 WD: It was hot, it was—  
17 SM: When did you arrive?  
18 WD: It was dark and hot. We went to Saigon.  
19 SM: Okay, you were landing at Tan Son Nhut.  
20 WD: Yeah. Then the sergeants talked us into anybody got a field jacket that  
21 doesn't want it go ahead and throw it away. Well, you know, it's hotter than hell.  
22 SM: What?  
23 WD: Yeah, you gave them your field jacket. I think they sold the field jackets.  
24 SM: Oh, oh, okay, field jackets.  
25 WD: So we gave up our field jackets and then, of course, you start flying with the  
26 Rattlers you need that field jacket because it gets cold sometimes at two thousand feet.  
27 Sometimes you just want something to stay warm, but they got everybody to give up their  
28 field jackets. I'll always remember that. For my second tour I kept my field jacket. I  
29 wasn't going to give it up. They introduced us to burning manure and I don't think we  
30 were there that long before they sent us on up to Americal.

1 SM: When you arrived what unit were you assigned to? You were probably  
2 assigned to the replacement detachment first and then on.

3 WD: Yeah, replacement detachment. Then they sent me up to Americal at Chu  
4 Lai. From there they sent us to the combat center and then from there they assigned us to  
5 a unit.

6 SM: Okay. So how long were you with the Americal?

7 WD: The whole time, one year with Americal.

8 SM: Oh, okay, you were with the Americal.

9 WD: The whole time, yeah. The 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry was part of the, pardon me, the 1<sup>st</sup>  
10 of the 20<sup>th</sup> was part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade which was in the south at, oh, what was  
11 it, Duc Pho. That was from LZ Charlie Brown up to just south of Quang Ngai. That's  
12 where the 198<sup>th</sup> picked it up to Chu Lai. Then from Chu Lai north was the 196<sup>th</sup>.

13 SM: Okay. Where were you assigned when you first got there before the 71<sup>st</sup>  
14 Assault Helicopter assignment?

15 WD: That was the CSC (Comabt Support Company) Company 1<sup>st</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
16 Infantry.

17 SM: What kind of briefing did you get when you got there?

18 WD: Not much. They just got us there. We spent the night in the little chapel  
19 they had there and they gave us our weapons the next day and they sent us on out to the  
20 LZ.

21 SM: Okay. And you were a mortar man?

22 WD: Mortar man, yeah, ammo barer.

23 SM: How long did you do that?

24 WD: From December until May.

25 SM: Do you remember any particular missions or operations as a mortar man?

26 WD: Not really. I remember we fired at one gas mission.

27 SM: What kind of gas?

28 WD: CS gas, we had a few of those rounds we fired when we were at Charlie  
29 Brown. We fired H&Is (harassment and interdiction) one night, I remember that. We got  
30 a secondary explosion. So we had to keep firing that one and then more ammo to break  
31 out. Of course, the rounds were heavy for 4.2-inch mortar. It was a lot of work.

1 SM: Now the CS gas mission, what was that for? Do you know?

2 WD: No, just that—maybe a bunker or something like that they wanted to flush  
3 some people out. You can't use gas unless you have permission from the, I think, brigade  
4 or higher. They had permission to use it. That's when we covering them, building the  
5 road the—we didn't have that many rounds and that was some old rounds, too.  
6 Occasionally we'd take a piece of chalk and we'd draw little pictures on the side of the  
7 mortar round before we dropped it down the tube, little things to try to amuse yourself.  
8 One of the sergeants, the only thing he liked to do was take bayonets and throw them like  
9 his throwing knife. Of course, all you do is you break the handle off, the plastic handle  
10 and that's the only thing he liked to do. It was very boring.

11 SM: Well, your H&I missions, were these daytime, nighttime, both?

12 WD: Nighttime.

13 SM: Nighttime. You just fire into a particular area they told you to fire into.

14 WD: Right. They would pre-plot where they wanted to fire. Basically it was  
15 where they had suspected contact or enemy movement at night on a certain road or  
16 whatever and we would fire.

17 SM: How often would you do H&I missions?

18 WD: Well, you had four guns so it was every fourth night.

19 SM: Okay. So each night you rotated out.

20 WD: Yeah.

21 SM: Okay. Anything else memorable about your time as a mortar man?

22 WD: Not really. I mean, after I left the platoon on LZ Liz I hadn't been gone  
23 more than thirty days and the hill got overrun.

24 SM: I was just going to ask you that. You guys never had contact in your base  
25 camp.

26 WD: No, I mean they overran the hill after I left. They must've heard I was gone,  
27 but they overran the hill. I think one guy got killed. One guy, I think, he was sitting on a  
28 charge box smoking a cigarette, which was stupid, and got burnt up. Another guy was  
29 lighting one and throwing it and a sergeant was walking by and he had just put his boots  
30 on but hadn't laced them up yet and the charge landed in his boot and burnt up his foot.  
31 He thanked the guy because he got to go home.



1 SM: How bad was the burn?

2 WD: Well, enough to go home. I mean, you put some of those little packs in here  
3 and light them and it would burn this place down. It would throw off enough light to  
4 make you think it's day light and it was a five pack. You know just bored, do something  
5 stupid and he did it. One of our guys, he became an FO (forward observer) and they sent  
6 him out on a mission that went bad. He came on back to the platoon. For the most part it  
7 was probably the most boring life I could ever imagine having.

8 SM: How did you go about changing from being a mortar man to being a door  
9 gunner, just made a request for it?

10 WD: No, I had to reenlist Short 3.

11 SM: Oh, for crying out loud.

12 WD: Yep. So I took a Short 3, became a door gunner.

13 SM: Did they send you to training first?

14 WD: No.

15 SM: They just sent you to—

16 WD: Sent me right up there for OJT, on-job-training, on-the-job training with the  
17 Rattlers and put in 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon.

18 SM: This is May of '69.

19 WD: Yeah, May of '69. May was my first crew chief. I flew with him for a while  
20 until he went home and then I, Newell for temporarily and then I got Midas, Michael  
21 Midas who became a Firebird. I think he spent two tours there, not two tours, but like two  
22 years before he went home. He was at the last reunion. Pretty much it was command-and-  
23 control missions, resupply missions, occasional combat assault and really nothing  
24 spectacular until November when Rankin was killed. We were flying with the Special  
25 Forces—I was on the Special Forces mission when they had the Black Tuesday. So I  
26 didn't participate in that. So I was fairly lucky. Then we were flying Special Forces  
27 missions again, Midas and I. That morning I think it was Waterbury and Curtis were the  
28 pilots and that morning a South—sometime during that night a South Vietnamese unit  
29 with Special Forces has come in contact with some NVA (North Vietnamese Army).  
30 They needed emergency resupply and we went in there and did it for them. There was  
31 some fire took place. We got an area with B-4. Then we finished up the day and on the

1 way back we were near, around Hawk Hill when we got the message there was a downed  
2 bird. So we went in there to get them out and that was where we got out Rankin and  
3 them.

4 SM: This was September of—

5 WD: This is November.

6 SM: November, okay.

7 WD: He died in November. Both pilot and crew chief are dead. That was  
8 probably my roughest day of the first tour.

9 SM: Sure. Well, what was morale like during your first six months when you  
10 were there as a mortar man in that unit? What was the morale like in that unit?

11 WD: There was a lot of boredom, you know, just a bunch of guys hanging out  
12 waiting for something to do.

13 SM: But not a lot of snipers, not a lot of—

14 WD: No, no. You were in a fire support base. No one was going to shoot at a fire  
15 support base.

16 SM: So no one was messing with you.

17 WD: No. The Rattlers and you know there was a lot of camaraderie with the guys  
18 in the hooch and stuff like that.

19 SM: Different atmosphere.

20 WD: Totally. Then we had sheets. I had eggs to order in the mess hall. I could  
21 have an omelet for breakfast. You go to fire support base all you get is powdered eggs.  
22 So I mean the food was better and everything was just a whole lot better up there.

23 SM: This is Chu Lai.

24 WD: Chu Lai, yeah. Heck, we even had ice cream sometimes. Plus we had a  
25 movie theatre on the beach. We had floor shows on the beach. We had a little club. I  
26 mean, it was great. Of course, I think that day when Rankin died was the worst day I had  
27 in-country. The rest of my tour I told the platoon sergeant because you flew two days and  
28 then you had to go on guard duty. When you got off guard duty you had the day off. So  
29 rather than do that I told them just fly me every day. So I had like thirty some-days  
30 straight flying. I stayed busy, but I did not want to have to be laying around there doing

1 nothing. When my number was up it was up. So I just flew until it was time to go home.  
2 They sent me to Ft. Meade, Maryland.

3 SM: Let's not move too far away from Vietnam yet because I've got some more  
4 questions for you there. You mentioned Black Tuesday. Now someone told me a  
5 different, first of all they said Black Monday.

6 WD: Oh, Monday or Tuesday, I forget the day.

7 SM: Okay, sir. I wanted to make sure we were talking about the same one.

8 WD: Same day, yeah. I forget it was Tuesday, Monday whatever. I even called it  
9 Black Thursday one time and one of the co-workers said, "That's racist. Why are you  
10 calling it Black so and so??" I said, "We lost a lot of helicopters."

11 SM: I was told that one of the problems with that event was not enough prep on  
12 the battlefield beforehand. That was unusual. I was wondering if you could explain if  
13 normally when you guys would go into an area, into an LZ, was it normal for it to be well  
14 prepped with artillery and whatnot before you guys went in with the aircraft?

15 WD: Well, I mean, depending on where you were going into and what you have  
16 to support yourself with. The standard thing was somebody would fly over and mark it.  
17 We'd have the Firebirds to rake the tree line. That was primary prep you'd have. If you  
18 start doing artillery bombardment you'd have to wait minutes or hours before you could  
19 go in there and then the enemy knows where you're going. Normally it was just the  
20 Firebirds coming in there and going over the tree line just shooting rockets and mini-guns  
21 and machineguns. We'd come in and we'd blast the tree line.

22 SM: Now, did they not do that on Black—

23 WD: I've no idea. I wasn't there.

24 SM: Okay, so you weren't there for that.

25 WD: I wasn't there. Now, Hobbs is the one you need to talk to because he got the  
26 round in his helmet. I think Melson, his crew chief, pulled a .45 and shot three or four  
27 Vietnamese trying to pull the pilots out of the seats inside the helicopter. So Hobbs is the  
28 one you need to talk to about that day.

29 SM: Yeah, okay, will do.

30 WD: When I left there they sent me to Ft. Meade, Maryland. We had a seventy-  
31 nine percent walk away AWOL (absent without leave) rate. As a young E-4 I could pull

1 battalion guard, I could pull post guard, I could pull coal guard. We used to have to  
2 shovel coal for the old wood burning barracks, other peoples barracks. I could pull KP  
3 (Kitchen Police) and (unintelligible) guard. A PFC (private first class) did not have the  
4 responsibility to do anything other than KP. We had a seventy-nine percent walk away  
5 AWOL rate. Everybody was basically a Vietnam returnee. We were riot control  
6 protecting D.C. Every time Jane Fonda was threatening to come to town we had to stay in  
7 the barracks all weekend on stand-by. They'd give us Wednesday off. I decided, "Well,  
8 maybe it's time to go back to Vietnam." Plus I was feeling guilty about surviving and you  
9 know go back and see my buddies. So I went back to the Americal by December of '70.

10 SM: What was the atmosphere like? You must've gotten some leave or  
11 something when you got back.

12 WD: Well, yeah, I had some time at home.

13 SM: Was the atmosphere in your community different from when you left,  
14 especially of the attitude towards the war?

15 WD: Well, there were people glad I came home and stuff, but nobody wanted to  
16 hear anything about it. They were all going to college so I never told them anything about  
17 it. I tried to, but they didn't want to listen.

18 SM: So you went from there after leave to Ft. Meade.

19 WD: Back to Vietnam.

20 SM: Went back to Vietnam. Now, this is after Nixon's announcement he's going  
21 to change the strategy of the war. We're going to Vietnamize the war, turn more over to  
22 the Vietnamese.

23 WD: Didn't he start that earlier?

24 SM: Yeah. It's '69, '70.

25 WD: Because I remember when I was first over there we were giving them M-  
26 16s, taking their M-1 carbines and M-1 rifles and started giving them M-16s.

27 SM: Oh, so you were doing that with them in that first tour?

28 WD: Yeah.

29 SM: Were you guys carrying many on your missions? Were you transporting  
30 many ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) soldiers in that first tour?

1           WD: No. We had, all the fighting was done by us. When you do the Special  
2 Forces mission you could pick up an M-2 carbine or whatever you wanted because the  
3 Special Forces would give you anything you wanted for weaponry. I was carrying a  
4 (unintelligible) with an M-2 carbine because you had to give the pilots your M-16s and  
5 put it up over their seat. So you wanted something in the back with you just in case. Some  
6 people went for .45s. I went with an M-2 carbine because it looked neat, but it tended to  
7 jam too much. So I traded it off for a grease gun, an M-3 grease gun.

8           SM: How did you like that?

9           WD: I loved it because at Tra Bong, no, not Tra Bong, Tien Phuoc, or we used to  
10 call it Tin Fuck, a little ARVN base they had tracer rounds for the .45. I didn't care about  
11 the barrel life anyway so I would load straight tracers. I could always see what I'm  
12 aiming at. So it was a fun little thing to have.

13          SM: What kind of range would you get out of that?

14          WD: Not much, about the same as—a little bit more than a .45 pistol. You looked  
15 bad walking through the PX (post exchange) with it.

16          SM: Bad as in good, or bad as in bad?

17          WD: You know real bad, real bad dude, look at that grease gun. It was a good  
18 weapon to have and it was short, a little heavy, but you could have it back there with you  
19 no problem. It fit right in the tool box if you had to put it in the tool box. I had like, I  
20 think I had six or seven magazines for it. I always made sure I had plenty of magazines.  
21 Forty-five ammo can be very, very heavy. That was about it. I had my first Army  
22 Thanksgiving at Chu Lai. I didn't expect it and we had a great meal, turkey, all the  
23 trimmings. It was great. I think the general himself come down to eat with us. I didn't  
24 know the Army put anything like that out for a big meal because I had never had a big  
25 holiday meal in Army mess hall before. It was nice. I remember that. Of course, they  
26 built a new EM (enlisted men's) club because we were on the beach out of concrete  
27 block. I was there when the Seabees came over to do redo our bunkers. As they were  
28 doing it they uncovered turtle eggs. Of course, little Vietnamese kids were taking them all  
29 home. They were there helping fill sandbags and stuff. I was not flying one day and  
30 somebody came running, "Hey, come to the beach." I run out there and there's little  
31 turtles that they didn't find were going down to the ocean. I had never seen that before

1 except for on National Geographic. So that was a memory. Of course, the big sharks that  
2 was also a memory out there.

3 SM: How big?

4 WD: Big. Had a little Vietnamese boat the size of a little fisherman round boat,  
5 fisherman in it. You fly over and there was this big shadow underneath him, climb up and  
6 come back around and it was a shark, a big shark.

7 SM: Did it get the fisherman?

8 WD: We don't know. We don't know. We had things to do, but it is the idea  
9 when you were off you could go down to the beach, swim, relax. We even had a life  
10 guard on the beach, rough job being company lifeguard in Vietnam. So we had a  
11 lifeguard on the beach. I mean, there was things to do. These Seabees were near there. I  
12 went down to the Seabee PX and found a Risk game and brought it back and taught the  
13 guys how to play Risk when we were all sitting around doing nothing. So they all got into  
14 Risk. We played spades, Risk, we drank a bit. The platoon had called a collegiance or  
15 something like that. No one knew what the patch was. Everybody had a patch but the 1<sup>st</sup>  
16 Platoon. So over a bottle of Jim Beam and all the door gunners and crew chiefs in one  
17 hooch, we came up with the Widowmaker patch and that's how we got that done. Some  
18 colorful characters in the squad, our platoon at the time. What was his name, Cheek and  
19 Keiser, they always flew together and they were crazy as hell. One story where they're  
20 leaving I think it was Baldy. You know, you get clear up left, clear up right and they are  
21 flying out to either center or west. Cheek had a monkey strap. So he sat out on the skid.  
22 When they get ready to land he gets to, I mean Keiser would get on the skid and got  
23 ready to land and Cheek goes clear down left. There's no clear down right. So they look  
24 around and there's nobody in the gunner's well. "We must've left him back." They fly all  
25 the way back looking for him right and he climbs back in and he clears them down right.  
26 Well, it was something to do I guess, entertained him. We thought it was funny as hell.  
27 Of course, Cheek is one he'd put on his monkey strap and he would go out and he would  
28 wash the windows at two thousand feet flying out.

29 SM: Two thousand feet?

30 WD: Yeah, he would get up two thousand feet. He's got a monkey strap on and  
31 he climbs out on the skid. He's washing the windows for the pilot.

1 SM: That could be a little bit disconcerting to look down and see a guy  
2 underneath the aircraft.

3 WD: He's not underneath the aircraft. He's on the skid and he's right beside you.

4 SM: On the skid. Oh, right there beside him.

5 WD: Right beside him polishing. You're flying around and all of a sudden he's  
6 cleaning off the—what's this? He kept the pilots on their toes. Like I said, we had some  
7 crazy people, very colorful.

8 SM: What was the craziest thing you did?

9 WD: I didn't do anything crazy.

10 SM: No?

11 WD: No, not me. No, no, not me.

12 SM: I guess I'll have to get those stories from somebody else.

13 WD: Probably somebody else, but let's see. I'm trying to think now.

14 SM: Well, morale is obviously very good in the unit.

15 WD: Oh, yeah.

16 SM: Relationships between the enlisted and officers was pretty good.

17 WD: Yeah, pretty good. You had a couple of assholes, but you could stay away  
18 from them. I used to like getting some young officer coming in there and I'd salute him  
19 when he had a handful of papers and he would drop everything to return the salute. I used  
20 to think that was funny. I think I pissed off, it might've been Captain Alexander. I forget  
21 the name of the captain. I pissed him off somehow. I was just a nineteen-year-old kid and  
22 I pissed him off. He sent me down to the milk plant because they were on strike. It was  
23 okay until the general's mess hall ran out of milk. Then he wanted troops down there to  
24 do it. So I went down there like everybody else on the detail. The guy came up and said,  
25 "Well, we're on strike. There's a freezer full of ice cream back here. Eat all you want.  
26 We aren't doing anything today." So I sat there and ate ice cream all day and went back  
27 to the unit, rough detail. PX was always somebody out there telling you, you need to  
28 shave. Your uniform ain't clean enough to walk in. So you know you didn't go to the PX  
29 that often and you had to have a trip ticket to get to the PX if you're going to use a truck.  
30 Well, two of the guys in the platoon, names will not be mentioned, decided they were  
31 going to get their own vehicle. So they go up to division headquarters and find a nice

1 shiny new jeep. They bring it back down to the Snake Pit where our helicopters were at,  
2 proceeded to dirty it up, changed the numbers, get their own log book. It's the same log  
3 book we use for the helicopters is the same thing you use for the vehicle. They had their  
4 own vehicle. The night the guy was supposed to go home he had one or two too many  
5 and decided he was going to drive home instead. The next morning MPs (military police)  
6 are letting us know that one of our jeeps in the South China Sea. We informed him we  
7 had all of our jeeps accounted for. It wasn't us.

8 SM: Oh, that's funny.

9 WD: Yeah, so little things like that. Of course, I don't know if you've read our  
10 stuff in the thing, Midas and I were doing a sniffer mission the first tour. We were around  
11 center-west area. We were the one with the sniffer device. We've got our machine guns  
12 about two thousand rounds of ammo per gun. We've got two Firebirds with us. One has  
13 got the chin turret, the thumper, 40-millimeter grenade launcher, and a regular Firebird  
14 and the thing goes hot. I'm just thinking, "Oh, my God. What great things we can in this  
15 modern day we can sniff the enemy out and just blow them up. It's great, modern  
16 science." We just rake this area. Firebirds go in and I think we both emptied both our  
17 ammo cans on in. I don't know if they called in artillery or an airstrike. They finally sent  
18 the infantry in and they had 350 confirmed kills, all monkeys. We hit a tree full of  
19 monkeys. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is looking for me today.  
20 I'm a war criminal, but we killed all these monkeys. I found out when I went back the  
21 second tour Midas was there and he was sitting there, "Skinny, do you remember the time  
22 we had that sniffer mission?" I go, "Yeah." "You know we had 350 confirmed kills?" I  
23 said, "Really?" He goes, "Yeah, they were all monkeys." So he knew all about it. Midas  
24 also in between my tours they hit a Vietnamese convoy of elephants in one of the dry  
25 river beds. He got a secondary explosion when he hit the elephant. Midas is somebody  
26 you should talk to, too.

27 SM: When you went back did you notice very much different about the unit?

28 WD: Not really the unit. The atmosphere had changed.

29 SM: Hold on one second. Okay, we're back.



1           WD: You know you've got some colorful people to talk to. My first tour was not  
2 that exciting. It was good enough to make me—you know I was guilty so I came back out  
3 of that, but I didn't realize how bad it could get because only that one day—  
4           SM: Right, Black Tuesday—  
5           WD: Not Black Tuesday. I mean Dave Rankin died. That was a serious day.  
6           SM: What happened that day? What was the mission that day?  
7           WD: I was flying the Special Forces missions where you start at Da Nang and  
8 you go to Khe Sanh. You'll fly through all the Special Forces bases in I Corps and then  
9 back up.  
10          SM: And these are ash and trash?  
11          WD: No.  
12          SM: What kind of support were you providing Special Forces?  
13          WD: Basically just somebody who will go down and visit the bases and stuff like  
14 it could be resupply mission. It could be just somebody on a little tour. The good thing  
15 about the mission—  
16          SM: The mail runs and things like that?  
17          WD: Yeah, stuff like that. The best part about that mission was you stayed in Da  
18 Nang. They had a club. In their club you could get a mixed drink with ice in the glass,  
19 right, for fifty cents a shot. Back in Chu Lai us lower enlisted dogs we could only get  
20 beer. Now the guy running—  
21          SM: Was it cold beer?  
22          WD: Well, what stays cold at ninety to a hundred degrees?  
23          SM: So, no, I mean you didn't have refrigeration.  
24          WD: That's the way I learned how to drink beer in other words if you—well, we  
25 had refrigeration, but you take an ice cold beer out and you go to a picnic with an ice cold  
26 beer and you set it out and it's a hundred degrees out and you want a cold beer you've got  
27 to drink it quick, chug-a-lug or else you got hot beer to drink and nobody likes hot beer.  
28 We enjoyed that part of it and occasionally you could get a woman.  
29          SM: Okay, mm-hmm at Da Nang, but not in Chu Lai.  
30          WD: Not really. There was no real pickings for women in Chu Lai. Of course,  
31 they were all built like the road between Dallas and Fort Worth, straight no hills or

1 curves. They were real short, flat-chested little Vietnamese women, delight but nothing to  
2 really write home about.

3 SM: Okay. Well, did you write home very often?

4 WD: I started to. Then I got a tape player and sent them one and we would do  
5 some cassette tapes. I don't know whatever happened to them, but they—I did slides. I  
6 guess you would refer to my relatives as basically hicks. My grandmother passed away  
7 when she was 104. They would sit there and I'd have these slides of things around Chu  
8 Lai. There was a little nail hole in the wall where they had a picture hung at one time and  
9 they would think that's my helicopter up there. "Look, there's his helicopter." Then  
10 eventually, no, no, that's a nail in the wall. Every time, oh, that's his helicopter. Like how  
11 can I be in my helicopter there and taking a picture on the ground? They weren't that  
12 bright. I did finish my GED (general equivalency diploma) at Chu Lai. They did let me  
13 do that. So I got my GED there. Before I retired I got an associate's and a bachelor's.

14 SM: Oh, very good.

15 WD: I mean, when I went back the second tour it was very racial as far as, you  
16 know, we all got along, but you had black militants going around beating people up. It  
17 was really bad when I was gone, curtail of fights in the club and stuff like that people  
18 were telling me about.

19 SM: Were guys writing to you?

20 WD: No. I mean, when I got back talking to them they were telling me.

21 SM: When you got back they told you about it. I didn't know if you maintained  
22 any contact with your unit when you came back to the States.

23 WD: No, I'm not a great writer. I've done a little bit since then, but back then I  
24 wasn't.

25 SM: Okay. So there was more of a race issue in the unit.

26 WD: Well, it was not in the unit. It was throughout the whole Army.

27 SM: Throughout, yeah. Well, yeah, throughout the Army.

28 WD: The Army is only a reflection of society itself and society in the 1970s was  
29 really bad with rights and stuff.

30 SM: Sure, but you didn't witness that your first tour.

31 WD: No, second tour you could feel it. The underlying tension was there.

1 SM: Okay.

2 WD: In the platoon everything was hunky dory, you know. Basically you  
3 remember the people you flew with and you remember the guys in the platoon and you  
4 might know a few people in the company, but pretty much your world was the platoon  
5 and the hooch. Basically the guys in my hooch, we all played spades at night. We might  
6 have two different games going, eight people in the hooch, two games, four people to a  
7 hand or we would go down to the club and have something to drink, but we would always  
8 stay in a group so that nobody messed with us.

9 SM: Now was this black guys and white guys together or—

10 WD: Well, basically I don't think we had any blacks in the platoon, in 2<sup>nd</sup>  
11 Platoon. We had some Hispanics, mostly white. We had one black door gunner in 1<sup>st</sup>  
12 Platoon when I first got there and he rotated on out. You had a few black pilots. I mean,  
13 there weren't that many blacks in aviation at the time. There were a lot in maintenance.  
14 Of course, the dopers were having a towel around their neck. I guess they needed it  
15 because the cocaine they were taking they needed a towel to wipe themselves up during  
16 the day. You could always tell who the dopers were.

17 SM: Okay. Was that a problem?

18 WD: Well, not really. I mean, it might've been a problem back there for them  
19 financially and stuff like that. It was really a problem when I got back to the States  
20 because they had so much thievery going on from people on drugs having to steal things  
21 in order to supply their habit. They had to have barracks guards twenty-four hours. Of  
22 course, they were the ones on the drugs stealing you blind.

23 SM: This is at Ft. Meade?

24 WD: This is when I got back, it would be Ft. Hood when I got back.

25 SM: Okay, from your second tour.

26 WD: Second tour, yeah.

27 SM: What about at Ft. Meade? Were there any problems like that?

28 WD: No, not really. Like I say, it was seventy-nine percent walk away AWOL  
29 rate. You never knew who you're going to have around. They didn't stay around.

30 SM: Many guys get picked up and brought back? I forgot to ask that.

31 WD: If they did they didn't come back to us.

1 SM: When you got back to Vietnam for your second tour you went back to Chu  
2 Lai. Was that hard to arrange, to get back with your same unit?

3 WD: Yeah, it took a little while to do all that. They got me Americal and I was a  
4 door gunner so they sent me to the Boxcars, 178<sup>th</sup>. That was a Chinook outfit. I went  
5 ahead and did all my flight physical stuff and the like, got all my stuff issued. I flew with  
6 them for like maybe a month, December, early January. This other guy that came in with  
7 me, he was a Huey guy, too. So we went down to see the chaplain and told him, "Hey,  
8 we're Huey people. They've got us here in the Chinooks. We want to go back to Hueys.  
9 The chaplain put in a word for us and we got shipped over.

10 SM: Oh, cool.

11 WD: He went to another unit. I went back to the Rattlers. Not long after I left  
12 they lost a Chinook. I don't know what happened to it mechanically, but it had a water  
13 blivet or a fuel blivet on it. Somebody had a picture in the *Stars and Stripes* when the  
14 thing went down it looked like a balloon. The little thing full of fuel or water was holding  
15 up a Huey. The Huey was upside down. It fell down and killed everybody.

16 SM: You mean the Chinook.

17 WD: Yeah. Everybody in the Chinook died. They had a picture of it in *Stars and*  
18 *Stripes*. I don't who the crew was. The First Sergeant Harris, he put me in maintenance  
19 because all the people who flew came from maintenance. Even though I was an  
20 experienced door gunner with two Air Medals with V devices, actually I had 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>  
21 device were V. So I had nine Air Medals. He put me in maintenance. So I was in  
22 maintenance for like thirty days. We went up to Quang Tri. I went by convoy at night and  
23 got up there. Shit was real bad. They needed replacements for the flight platoon and  
24 nobody in maintenance wanted to go. I saw my chance and I wanted to go to 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon,  
25 but 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon asked me first. So I stuck with 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon. I gave my word I'd go and not  
26 five minutes after he asked me to go to the platoon up come 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon wanting me to go.  
27 So I stuck with 2<sup>nd</sup>. So I was with 2<sup>nd</sup>.

28 SM: Did you know anybody who was there?

29 WD: Midas was still there. He was in Firebirds. He was trying to get me into  
30 flight platoon. I remember when we were up there Willie Correl, I don't know if you've  
31 talked to him yet or not.

1 SM: No, I've not.

2 WD: He's not here this time. He just—last time I talked to him he had an  
3 appendix—in the hospital his appendix busted two weeks before he went to the hospital.  
4 He lost over eighty pounds. I don't know what his condition is right now. He was  
5 supposed to email me and never has. Somehow he got all these centerfold pictures. We  
6 had this Hispanic sergeant from maintenance who would walk in every day and wake  
7 people up. So we proceeded to tape or pin these centerfold pictures on one side of the tent  
8 where our bunk was. He would come in to wake everybody up and he spent maybe ten,  
9 fifteen minutes extra before he started to wake us up. He got us ten or fifteen minutes  
10 extra time in bed. Then, of course, we had to get up. Correl got a hold of the bottle of I  
11 think it was crème de coco and had to go on guard duty, but he only had like you know—  
12 "I only have coco on my breath." I mean, nobody ever caught him.

13 SM: Okay. What was the—you mentioned that there were some people who were  
14 using drugs.

15 WD: Yeah, it was drugs.

16 SM: Were these people that were outside of the 71<sup>st</sup> or were they—

17 WD: The inside of the 71<sup>st</sup> probably maintenance people. Probably more  
18 maintenance because they, you know, boring again. You're working on helicopters.  
19 You're going back to the company area. There's nothing to do. No women, nothing to do.  
20 About that time I think the Army had decided that if you were over twenty-one you could  
21 have hard liquor because they realized they had a drug problem. So I had just turned  
22 twenty-one in January. So I could now go down and buy liquor. We were on the sandy  
23 part of the runway there at Quang Tri. One of the trips to the PX we were washing the  
24 truck one time. The platoon sergeant he would take us down to wash the truck when we  
25 weren't flying. There was a stream. We'd get in the stream and basically wash ourselves,  
26 wash the truck. We found the doggy compound doing that. It was like, what was it, it was  
27 a mess hall or thing they used for the mess hall, orderly room. I think it was like two or  
28 three barracks type thing like we had back in Chu Lai. They moved the unit over there  
29 and that was our new base of operation. Across the road you had our tents and a shower.  
30 You had the orderly room, mess hall, and then the pilots slept over there. The CO  
31 (commanding officer) slept in a little GP (general purpose) medium type tent, real small

1 hexagon type tent over by our tent so we had to be very, very quiet. It was a whole lot  
2 better life over there because we didn't have all that sand. I remember we all came down  
3 with dysentery at one time.

4 SM: Dang.

5 WD: I don't know if you were there for that dysentery.

6 SM: How do they treat that?

7 WD: They give you some pills to take. I think I was on the toilet for like the  
8 fourth time that night when somebody blew up the ammo dump. So I was in the right  
9 place when the ammo dump went up because everybody else probably needed to clean  
10 their underwear. It just went (makes ka-woom sound).

11 SM: What set that off?

12 WD: Sapper.

13 SM: This was the ammo dump where?

14 WD: Quang Tri.

15 SM: The Quang Tri ammo dump, when was that?

16 WD: It was—we were up there doing Lam Son 719.

17 SM: This is Lam Son 719.

18 WD: Yeah. We used to fly different missions out there.

19 SM: Who were you supporting during your second tour?

20 WD: Well, I mean, normally we support the 196<sup>th</sup>, but because we were going to,  
21 went up to support this ARVN thing we were supporting the units involved in that. We  
22 were flying out of Khe Sanh. They had what they call the Yellow Brick Road that went  
23 around the big mountain of Khe Sanh like a little circle. There was an armored unit  
24 working out there. Their main base camp which was somewhat portable they called  
25 Emerald City. The Yellow Brick Road went to Emerald City and the armored units were  
26 working out there. You know I had seen Khe Sanh before in my first tour. I remember  
27 watching TV when they tried to land a jet there and it got hit by a rocket, burnt up—well  
28 part of the jet was still there in '69. I saw it when I went by. Then go back out there in  
29 '71. Of course, they had cleaned it all off. They had swept the whole area. It was a fairly  
30 large bustling place, a lot of things going. I had to fly an—I think he was the general of  
31 the Air Force came out and they wanted somebody to fly him over to where they had

1 some Air Force personnel working. It was an old hill with concrete bunkers on it. I don't  
2 know whose it was, the French or whatever, but these guys were out on that hill. We  
3 landed it and he talked to the people and we took him back. I was also on short final  
4 coming in west to east. That was the day they sent two rounds over. One hit a helicopter  
5 winding down and the other one hit the bunker, hit the actual control tower itself. We  
6 were flying down and it shook the whole helicopter. It had to be a fairly heavy round they  
7 were using, but they had FOs up on the mountain. They had artillery dug in across the  
8 border. So they could hit anything they wanted to hit. It's not like they had never seen  
9 Khe Sanh before and didn't know where everything was at. So everything was probably  
10 already pre-plotted on their maps. Occasionally you would get a mission late in the  
11 afternoon to fly out to Khe Sanh and you got hundreds of helicopters coming back at you  
12 because they were bombarding Khe Sanh. So that ended that mission. You could go on  
13 back. I mean, all of them kind of blend in together, per se, until we started crossing the  
14 border into Laos. We started at—

15 SM: This is Lam Son 719.

16 WD: Yeah. We started in at, I think the first time I crossed was like third of  
17 March. We did a low-level crossing. You could see a road below you and every now and  
18 then you could see a hooch and people walking around. We picked up the ARVNs and  
19 then we went into Lolo. I was the second ship and we got shot down. They got a bunch of  
20 other ships behind us burning up.

21 SM: What were you hit with?

22 WD: Everything. Supposedly it was secure to secure, but if it was secure it means  
23 somebody is on the ground.

24 SM: Sure.

25 WD: No one was on the ground. Supposedly according to the research I had  
26 some lieutenant said it was secure to secure and that the place had been hit by B-52,  
27 something like a day before. It was all secure and we didn't have to worry about  
28 anything. The first ship in takes hits, drops its troops off, gets out. We come in next and  
29 they just tore us up.

30 SM: And you were carrying ARVN?

1           WD: ARVNs, yeah. They tore us up. I mean, the whole front of the aircraft just  
2 hit with AK fire. Blackburn was my gunner, I mean my crew chief. He had to engage the  
3 trench line and a .51-caliber machine gun. We never dropped the troops off. We came in  
4 too fast. We were kind of hovering there. We couldn't land. So we tried to pull up over  
5 the trees. I was just shooting the guys in the trench line. Somehow I think the .50 cal got  
6 the tail rotor. We went into a spin. We crashed on the other side of the little cliff. We  
7 landed on the short side of the cliff, not the long side when we crashed. We went into a  
8 real bad spin and all the ARVNs just started flying out, never saw them again. We rolled  
9 over and crashed. We all got out and started heading toward this rock. Then we heard  
10 Johnny saying he had been hit. We went back and got Johnny. They sent me back to the  
11 aircraft to look for weapons. I think I went twice, once for weapons and once for first aid  
12 kit. We patched him back up. Then we got ourselves back into the trench line, up the hill  
13 and into the trench line. Basically we only had one .38 between us because I couldn't find  
14 any weapons. When we rolled and everything crashed everything just went everywhere. I  
15 couldn't even find the M-16s and the ammo I had put there on the pilot's seat. We were  
16 stuck there for like, what, that was the—I think the initial assault happened around ten  
17 o'clock, nine-thirty or ten o'clock. We were there until like the one-thirty assault finally  
18 got everybody out. While we were there we went into trenches. Somebody had a radio  
19 and got on the right frequency and then they tried to come back in about maybe an hour  
20 later thereabouts. The helicopter was coming in on short final. So we've got Johnny and  
21 we're trying to get Johnny to the helicopter. As soon as he dropped the ARVNs out we  
22 were going to get in the helicopter and get out, smart thing to do. It wasn't a good piece  
23 of ground to be on. Helicopters coming in and all of a sudden it's not making any noise  
24 anymore, you know helicopter engine, no helicopter engine. It sets down and of course  
25 we're moving up and it's coming. It's setting down with no noise just the blade turning  
26 and no engine noise. The crew gets out and starts running. One of the pilots—a blade can  
27 dip down to 5'6" and he forgot. It took off the top of his helmet. I still have nightmares  
28 with the brains running down on top of him. I still see that. Actually, I've never left that  
29 hill. From there we took Johnny back, of course, to the trench line. Of course, now it's on  
30 fire and I look back at it and there's M-16 machine guns still mounted on it. I ran out  
31 between the trench line to the chopper. Of course, the .51 is still active on the other side,



1 but I guess one target wasn't enough for him to start opening up on me. So I got the  
2 machinegun and brought it back to the trench. Now I had a weapon. We waited and  
3 waited and then they decided to come in. According to the research I got the ARVNs  
4 were laying, the NVA were laying down on the only approach just shooting straight up at  
5 anything that had to fly over, sort of like the Russians sat outside of Stalingrad for the  
6 Germans trying to come in. Everybody just shot straight up in the air and you're going to  
7 hit something.

8 SM: A wall of lead.

9 WD: Yeah. So they had a wall of lead. Then they decided to shift the LZ down a  
10 bit. They used Phantoms to bomb the hill. So we got bombed by I guess 500-pound  
11 bombs.

12 SM: How close were they?

13 WD: Very close. That or napalm, I think it was 500-pound bombs. I don't  
14 remember napalm. I do remember seeing the big things drop.

15 SM: Did you guys have a radio? Were you in communication with anybody?

16 WD: We had one radio. It was an ARVN radio. Of course, some ARVN offered  
17 me a souvenir of a helmet taken off NVA. I think, well, it would be a nice little souvenir  
18 to have, but if we don't win this hill I don't want to be caught with it. Know what I  
19 mean? When they decided to reopen the thing we sent some ARVNs and I think maybe a  
20 couple of GIs went in and they took care of that .51-cal after the bombing and brought it  
21 back. So then we had the .51. So that part was open, but the unit was still down the hill.  
22 No one was trying to do anything to us right away because by nightfall they would have  
23 us anyway. As long as we were there they were going to keep trying to get us out.  
24 According to the research I've got it is the Comancheros, he had like fifteen ships that  
25 hadn't dropped off their troops yet, went back to Khe Sanh and refueled. They got  
26 together and said we can't leave them there. One of the pilots said, "Who's with me?"  
27 We all went back. (becoming emotional)

28 SM: We can—

29 WD: No, we'll keep going. So they shifted the area to land further down the hill  
30 and that was out of the fire of the AKs. So I think the pilot and the copilot took Johnny on  
31 down. One of the pilots wanted people to get this other pilot who lost his head out. So I

1 stayed back with them and we took his body on up and got him on a bird. Then there was  
2 no room for me so I had to wait for the next one. There was really heavy fire going out. I  
3 went back—

4 SM: How far behind the first was the second bird?

5 WD: I don't know, forever.

6 SM: I'm sure it seemed like that.

7 WD: Yeah. Then from there we went back to Khe Sanh. I didn't see anybody I  
8 had seen on the hill. I went up to a Firebird and asked for a ride back. Of course, they  
9 couldn't take the extra weight. So I finally found a helicopter going back to Quang Tri  
10 that would take me back. I got there at night. So I figured it was probably depending on  
11 what time they say the attack started it was probably about two o'clock before I got off  
12 the LZ, anywhere between nine-thirty and two o'clock in the morning from the whole  
13 time the whole action went down. I never went back. I never knew what happened to the  
14 LZ after that. I don't know if they just dropped those people off and got us out and I don't  
15 know if they ever resupplied it, they put more troops in or what. I never heard what  
16 happened to the LZ after that. Go back and land there at big Snake Pit, get out. I meet Mr.  
17 Arend, he was the pilot. I guess he was standing around to see if I was ever going to  
18 come back or whatever. So I said, "Let's go get a drink." We walk into the EM club, the  
19 little club across from—that we had there. I guess it was both all ranks or whatever they  
20 had. We walk in there and as soon as we walk in the whole club goes silent. Then the first  
21 sergeant comes over to me. We go on out and head back to my tent and get there and they  
22 had packed all my stuff up, KIA (killed in action). Then I played spades. I was down for  
23 a couple of days. I think the next day is when they did that long one to—whatever that  
24 base was.

25 SM: Tchepone?

26 WD: Yeah, the longest combat assault in the history of Vietnam.

27 SM: Into Laos you mean?

28 WD: Yeah.

29 SM: Tchepone, yeah, into Tchepone.

30 WD: Yeah, I was down that day. They let me sleep for a couple of days. Then  
31 they gave me a helicopter. It was called Screaming Yellow Zonkers. It had a peace

1 symbol on the front of it. Screaming Yellow Zonkers was like a version of Cracker Jacks,  
2 but Army brass thought it referred to drugs. It was a D model converted to an H. So the  
3 fire extinguisher was mounted behind the console instead of beside the, I think peter  
4 pilot, that's the guy on the right. They gave me that and I got a gunner named Sanchez.  
5 So we started flying. The thing was near three-thousand-hour rebuild so it was a pig.  
6 Anything wrong with it was wrong with it, but not enough to DX it or to have to fix it  
7 because it was all within tolerance. I forget how many pounds of pull you had to do to lift  
8 up. It was just a few ounces from being hard. You had to be a real big weight lifter to get  
9 the thing up off the ground. No one liked to fly it. They have to rebuild it with like brand  
10 new aircraft, but you know that was months down the road. We have to resupply a place  
11 called Delta and I'll never forget that. We're going in there and the first day it's like  
12 cowboy and Indians. Delta is the fort and the Indians have surrounded it. They're digging  
13 in and it's going to be a siege. Well, you take AKs. Okay, no problem, fly in with AK and  
14 out. The next day they've got 51 NAKs. So I guess we're going in a—we form a daisy  
15 chain, everybody in a circle at two thousand feet. I had to go up a little higher because the  
16 .51s would come up and get you. Then you start—one bird would go down and about  
17 thirty seconds later somebody else would follow. We would land, take off supplies and  
18 that did all right the first day. The next day they start mortaring the LZ as we come in and  
19 everybody has got maybe two, three hundred pieces of shrapnel in their tail boom. The  
20 next day we go in and we're throwing out sacks of grain, rice, and cages of chickens out  
21 from two thousand feet. You can imagine the bursting radius of a sack of rice from two  
22 thousand feet on top of your friends. That was the only way we could resupply them.

23 SM: My goodness. You guys didn't double sack them?

24 WD: Huh?

25 SM: You didn't double sack them?

26 WD: I had nothing to do with that. They just put it on the helicopter and we had  
27 to get rid of it. We didn't load it ourselves. We just got rid of it. I guess the chickens  
28 could flap their little wings before they hit the ground. I don't know.

29 SM: But you dumped that stuff from two thousand feet.

30 WD: Yeah, two thousand feet. The next day when we go out there, there's a T-34  
31 tank sitting on top of the LZ. They got overrun during the night.

1 SM: Oh, goodness.

2 WD: Extreme ARVNs moving out. We were told to pick up any wounded  
3 because they all had a bandage on. We wound up taking—somebody counted the troops  
4 we took off and we took more troops off that were streaming toward Khe Sanh than  
5 ARVNs that were supposed to be on top of the hill. One of those days that's where  
6 Womack went down without orders and picked up about twenty or so wounded guys on  
7 the hill and got his Silver Star or DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). I think it was Silver  
8 Star that time. Then everything just kind of basically, it all went the same anything  
9 overlaps about the same. We were flying around one day. We get an emergency thing to  
10 rally everything together and we had maybe ten aircraft. They sent up an observation  
11 aircraft that got shot down. They sent a Huey to look for it, it got shot down. Then they  
12 send a lone Cobra out and it got shot down. So somebody should've realized, hey,  
13 something's wrong with this scenario. Then they send us in. I don't know how many lifts  
14 I went in there. I was the first or second lift, but on one of the lifts we got caught in the  
15 crossfire. I'll show you the pedal. It's in there. The right pedal, the captain who was  
16 flying with us that day had been telling me that, "Yeah, the last three days in a row I've  
17 come within an inch of getting shot. Rounds missed my head by about an inch." We go in  
18 there and the .51-caliber goes right through the pedal missed his foot, both of them, hits  
19 my console and goes right through the console and then explodes the fire extinguisher.  
20 Now, my nerves are a little bit shot by this time. (Makes kawoom sound) what the hell  
21 was that? We had one chicken plate. That's the armor plate. We just had the front of it,  
22 didn't have the back. We had two flack vests. So I asked the gunner, "What do you want?  
23 The flack vest or do you want one chicken plate?" He took the chicken plate. So I was  
24 setting on one and wearing one. The thing blew up and hit him right in the ass. That was  
25 the only funny thing that happened during the day.

26 SM: How badly was he hurt?

27 WD: Not that bad.

28 SM: But still.

29 WD: Whenever somebody asked you where you were hit, in Vietnam. No, it  
30 wasn't that bad. We all asked him, "You all right?" "Yeah, I got hit in the ass." The bird  
31 didn't sound right. I mean, we had hits in the blade. I mean, I didn't know if we were

1 going to make it back to anywhere. We found some little base to land on near Khe Sanh. I  
2 had to turn the fuel off to the engine in order to shut the engine down. We had to be slung  
3 looped back. That's where Womack went in and he got shot up, too. He went down in  
4 flames. He got everybody out. He got a, I think DFC for that. As a matter of fact, they  
5 wrote us all up for a DFC, but a DFC cannot be given as a blanket award for everybody.  
6 So the pilots got DFCs and the crew members got Air Medals with V devices. Air Medal  
7 is equal to a Bronze Star, only a Bronze Star is for ground action and an Air Medal is for  
8 air action. DFC is basically equal to a Silver Star, a Silver Star for ground action and a  
9 DFC for air action. That's basically the way they kind of wrote it down. We did that.  
10 Shortly after that it was time to go back down to Chu Lai. Everybody was happy. We all  
11 rejoiced. I remember going back to Chu Lai and the tower saying, "Welcome back,  
12 Rattlers." One of the cutest things we did is I remember we were flying over Chu Lai  
13 itself. Two of the pilots were talking, I forget who it was. One of them said, "God, I got  
14 fucked up last night." The tower comes back, "Last calling aircraft give me your call  
15 sign." He goes back, "I'm not that fucked up." They pulled him because you're not  
16 supposed to drink before you fly. So that was cute. Then it was normal stuff. We did  
17 reactionary flights. We did eagle flights where we would take the ARVNs into an area,  
18 drop them off and they'd go in and steal chickens. They brought all these chickens and  
19 pigs out for questioning. It must've been communist pigs and chickens because they only  
20 come back with livestock, no prisoners of war, just livestock.

21 SM: Unbelievable.

22 WD: That's what they did. One of them I remember we landed to check things  
23 out. I found that M-1 carbine round had gone under the tail boom where you've got the  
24 long shaft running up above the tail boom had gone into my tail boom and just laying  
25 there. It didn't have enough power to go all the way through. So it must've got it near the  
26 end of it. Correl had a piece of shrapnel in him from something. So I doctored him up. He  
27 eventually got a Purple Heart for that. Other than that, things just kind of melt on in one  
28 mission after another, nothing really spectacular. Went home. Went to Ft. Hood, Texas,  
29 and got out and got married and joined a Reserve unit which was military intelligence. So  
30 I finally got MI. They were letter readers. Well, things weren't working too well for me  
31 so I went back in the Army. When I went back in the Army at least I was around veterans

1 and people who knew what was going on in Vietnam and stuff like that. I stayed in for  
2 twenty-three years. I went to, let's see, from Hood I went to Germany, Berlin Brigade. I  
3 got to see Rudolph Hess. I ran into the 71<sup>st</sup> over there on a mission and I told one of the  
4 pilots I was with the 71<sup>st</sup>. He said, "Who did you fly with?" As soon as I said Michael  
5 Midas he tore the patch off his coat and gave it to me because Midas, he was still over  
6 there with the unit. So Berlin, what was it? Ft. Polk, Louisiana, Hawaii, Ft. McClellan,  
7 Alabama, drill sergeant duty, Ft. Benning drill sergeant, Ft. Lewis, Washington, Korea. I  
8 had problems in Korea. I kept referring to the ROKs (Republic of Korea) as ARVN. I  
9 should've known I had a problem. Then back to Ft. Jackson and I retired first sergeant.

10 SM: Let's take a break for a second.

11 WD: Sure.

12 SM: Okay. We're back from break. What were your—take it back to Lolo and to  
13 Lam Son real quick, how well were you briefed on that mission, that operation? How  
14 surprised were you guys by the resistance you had?

15 WD: Oh, for Lolo the pilots just come back and say, "We're going to do a  
16 combat assault secure to secure."

17 SM: So I mean there was not supposed to be anything.

18 WD: Not supposed to be anything, secure to secure.

19 SM: So this was—

20 WD: Yeah, I mean you landed there—I remember looking at Khe Sanh and it  
21 was like all the helicopters in the world were sitting at Khe Sanh, right? I didn't know  
22 how many were coming with us, but I guess it was supposed to have been a forty-ship  
23 combat assault or something like that. But after the initial insertion everybody was either  
24 shot down or shot up. There was nobody to come get us. I mean, everything was  
25 expended on the first lift.

26 SM: No Reserve.

27 WD: There was no Reserve. The Army got rid of Reserves shortly after Vietnam.  
28 It used to be you'd have two units in the front and one in the rear to be Reserve. Now  
29 everything's at the front. There is no Reserve the way the Army is set up now. We just  
30 went in and did our job. That's all you can do as long as the pilot has got enough balls to  
31 get you in there, you've got to have enough balls to stay there with him and shoot it out.

1 Rattlers, they didn't ever chicken out. I think initially when the unit first got there you  
2 had a good cadre of people who trained their replacements. That's the key to anything.  
3 They trained the pilot replacements. They picked who would be the aircraft commanders.  
4 If you weren't that good as a gunner or a crew chief you were gone, all right. They didn't  
5 have duds. That's probably the key thing to the Rattlers were it was a good, tight unit.  
6 You train people. You just didn't send them out there. Of all the units that I've ever been  
7 in the Army, I've been in a few in twenty-three years, it's my favorite. I'm closer to these  
8 guys than anybody else I've ever been with and it's my favorite unit.

9 SM: What did you think about this concept of handing the war over to the  
10 Republic of Vietnam forces?

11 WD: It's like one ARVN telling me one time, "There are no more VC (Viet  
12 Cong), all drafted." They drafted all the VC in with the ARVNs. So they were already  
13 compromised. We were flying around one day over Laos. An ARVN tank column ran  
14 into a North Vietnamese tank column. They had a shootout. They were losing so they  
15 asked for help. Our Air Force couldn't tell one tank from another so they blew them all  
16 up, everyone they could find they blew up. It's simple. You dive at a tank and if shoots  
17 back at you with green tracers it's enemy. If it's got red tracers it's friendly. The Air  
18 Force blew them all away.

19 SM: Oh, my.

20 WD: We heard that over the radio. We had a tape of a, I think it was a Cobra. He  
21 slung his main rotor blade at five thousand feet and did a mayday and then started  
22 laughing. Guys are getting blown out of the sky at five thousand feet. They had radar  
23 control and anti-aircraft guns. It was, you know, rough. Roughest I've ever seen, but we  
24 still went up.

25 SM: Well, when you left how confident were you in terms of how the war was  
26 going?

27 WD: I think everybody knew that the NVA had beat us in Laos because they  
28 didn't want to commit. They didn't want to commit large American troops and stuff to do  
29 it. The ARVNs were never that good. They weren't well indoctrinated like the  
30 communists were. I guess they were tired of war and just wanted it to end. They didn't  
31 care who won. They just wanted to be on the right side when it happened. I never really

1 had that much respect for ARVN soldiers because they would never stay in the fight.  
2 Even their pilots watched their pilots try to land a brand new Huey and they would jump  
3 all over the ground and boom, boom, boom. They gave them those, I think they were  
4 Cessna jet trainers. They would make bombing runs where our guys would go down to  
5 the deck and drop the bombs, they'd do it at like five thousand feet trying to bomb a  
6 target. These guys are supposed to take over for us? We gave them all the expensive  
7 technology and stuff. They just give it over to the communists. I guess that's what  
8 happens when your foreign policy is to support any right-wing dictator that is going to be  
9 anti-communist rather than just try to get everything to be democracies, but that was the  
10 policy. War is nothing more than an extension of your foreign policy by other means.  
11 Everybody talked about the Domino Theory. If one country falls they'll all fall, and they  
12 did. Of course, we won the war in Vietnam. We lost it on the college campuses of  
13 America. That's where it was lost. On the battlefield we always remained supreme.  
14 That's my opinion, of course.

15 SM: What did you think about the war when you got back? Do you think it was  
16 worth your effort and the sacrifices of your unit?

17 WD: Well, we only lost one person, the first sergeant. I mean, the (unintelligible)  
18 was wounded and he went back to the states, but only one KIA—

19 SM: On your second tour.

20 WD: Second tour, yeah. We lost more the first tour. Midas and I were, I think,  
21 Tien Phuoc and monsoons are coming in and there's two birds there. We low level back  
22 following some road. The other bird, I guess they climbed to get air. They were never  
23 seen again, the whole bird is lost. We never found them. We went low back in and  
24 landed. As a soldier I guess you don't really think about—I've known people who think  
25 about, "Oh, well. Why didn't the politicians do this? Why didn't they do that?" Well, it's  
26 not a politician's job. It's the officer's job and they were playing politics because  
27 anything above the rank of major you've got to have political connections to make it.  
28 These guys, some of the things they had us do was so they could play the politics that  
29 Washington wanted as far as after My Lai happened and I was in the States when it  
30 broke, the story. It was fire for fire pinpoint targets. If you killed somebody they better  
31 have an ID card saying they were VC or else you were a war criminal. That was the



1 mentality they had. You shoot somebody, you had hell to pay. The first tour everything  
2 was free-fire zones. If you got shot at you shot back, no questions asked. So it was totally  
3 different going back.

4 SM: So a lot more limits on your—

5 WD: Yeah, extremely limited because, again, My Lai and politics. They kept  
6 saying, “We’re spending a million dollars a day here so y’all don’t waste anything.” Of  
7 course, sometimes as you’re low leveling up the highway you like to throw smoke out  
8 just so when you climb up you’ll see the different color smoke. What was it five or ten  
9 dollars a smoke grenade. Another funny one, we were low leveling down Highway 1  
10 toward Tam Ky south. We had a five-gallon container of milk that just happened to fall  
11 out of the helicopter and landed in a motor pool area. When it did it exploded, of course.  
12 We were like maybe two or three hundred feet up. Everything had a thin sheet of  
13 chocolate milk over it. It was great. Occasionally you could steal bread, nice warm bread  
14 from the bakery, something to eat.

15 SM: Otherwise your food in the 71<sup>st</sup>, you second tour, was as good as the first.

16 WD: No.

17 SM: Oh, it wasn’t?

18 WD: No, because we didn’t have company mess hall. We had consolidated  
19 battalion mess hall. I’d go down to get a cup of coffee before I went down to the air field.  
20 If they had fresh fruit I’d stuff my flight bag full of fresh fruit and eat that. Then we’d get  
21 C-rations while we were out.

22 SM: Did you eat on the economy at all?

23 WD: No.

24 SM: Out there with the Vietnamese?

25 WD: No. Occasionally you’d buy some bananas. You could buy green bananas  
26 and leave them in your helicopter and they’d be ripe by noon, I mean.

27 SM: Did you interact with Vietnamese civilians very much?

28 WD: For a short time. Short time. That’s it. But no, we didn’t have that much  
29 interaction with them, Army discouraged it. We had hooch maids and we paid them.  
30 Occasionally they would talk to us, but it was all broken English no real communication.  
31 As long as they had your boots done and had the hooch squared away you were all right.

1 We were on the second tour, the battalion sergeant major or it could've been brigade,  
2 some sergeant major was coming down to inspect the company. He wanted everything  
3 dress right dress.

4 SM: Oh, goodness.

5 WD: Well, you know, we were 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon so we could think on our feet. We get  
6 some white paint and we paint the hallway of the hooch white. We send somebody down  
7 to this little Korean store that was on the post and they had these little like shower  
8 curtains wide enough to go in the door way that were white and blue striped. We had  
9 enough for every doorway. So when you walked into the hooch everything was dress  
10 right dress, but I mean the little areas where you lived was clean and nice. He went into  
11 the other company platoons and hated it and got to ours and everything was dress right,  
12 dressed good a breath of fresh, the finest thing he had seen all day long. It's because we  
13 used our noodle. Again, if you didn't fly you were out that morning you had to get up and  
14 you had to rake the area around the hooch. You come up with all these little vials that had  
15 cocaine in it or heroine. They were all over the place. We take them sometimes and  
16 would open them up and put foot powder in them and throw them away somewhere  
17 somebody would find. We would rake and I guess it was a Soviet spy satellite coming  
18 over Chu Lai every day at a certain time. They had to see that the sand was raked and that  
19 we were a strict unit.

20 SM: There you go.

21 WD: We don't know why. Again at Chu Lai all the weapons were taken away  
22 from you and went to the arms room. The only thing good about being in Quang Tri you  
23 got to keep your weapon with you. In first tour I kept my M-16 in my wall locker until I  
24 was ready to go out. I had the weapon right there with me and ammo. You know, we  
25 were ready to go out at any time. Second tour after My Lai, unh-unh.

26 SM: You couldn't keep your own weapon?

27 WD: No, could not keep a weapon.

28 SM: You had to go and check one out of the armory?

29 WD: Arms room, yeah. That's how bullshit it got, really Mickey Mouse.

30 SM: Wow. So you didn't have a grease gun your second tour.

1           WD: No. I got a .45. I sent home for a Bowie knife because I knew I could have a  
2 knife. Somebody saw it and liked it. It was one of those Case Bowie knives and it cost  
3 like thirty bucks. It had a nice black handle and nice blade. A guy gave me a .45 for it so I  
4 was carrying a .45.

5           SM: That's quite a trade.

6           WD: Yeah. I had like three magazines.

7           SM: Did you bring home any souvenirs?

8           WD: I brought home patches. That's why they got all these patches here. I gave  
9 mine to somebody to bring over here and they started making copies of them because  
10 nobody had patches. I had a habit of saving all my orders. From my orders they found a  
11 bunch of people.

12          SM: Oh, good.

13          WD: It was a delight. Nothing. Since I've got back I've gotten some stuff that  
14 they used over there. I've got a, in my collection, I've got a model 44 Mauser Nagant  
15 rifle with like a folding bayonet on it. I've got an SKS, got an AK-47 and I've got the  
16 pistols used over there. I'm a gun nut and I like to shoot. So I've got them and they're  
17 cheap to get right now and ammo is cheap, so why not? For the most part I don't regret  
18 anything. I'm lucky to be here and good people and it was a good unit. They always did  
19 their job. Any fault with us over there came from the command through the politics of  
20 Washington. Because politicians, like they're arguing today about how to run the war in  
21 Iraq. A politician has got no business running a war in Iraq. They control the purse strings  
22 only. What kills me is these commercials they've got on about the Army and the future  
23 where somebody back in headquarters can see how the troops are maneuvering and what  
24 they're firing at, why? They're not a platoon leader. They're not on the ground. They're  
25 back watching it. How do they know what's going to happen and what to do? That's why  
26 you train platoon leaders to lead their platoon, but it's a different world totally.

27          SM: Has your opinion changed over time about the war?

28          WD: Well, I never really had a strong opinion about the war. See, the fallacy  
29 with war is you go to war to protect your way of life. We can all agree on that, but the  
30 very nature of war destroys your way of life. Your society changes because of a war.  
31 Anybody who went out to fight World War II in 1940 came back to a different America

1 in 1945. Same thing in Vietnam, America changed while you were over there. So you  
2 didn't fight to come back for the same thing you left with because the very nature of  
3 society changes. So everything was different. Therefore you can never fight a war to save  
4 your way of life because life changes.

5 SM: But did your opinion of the Vietnam War and what we were over there for  
6 and why we were over there?

7 WD: I was there to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnam people.

8 SM: Seriously?

9 WD: Seriously. We were supposed to be there to stop communism, right? The  
10 communists won because of people back home. It would probably have been a different  
11 world had we won, but we didn't. So we had to slug out the Cold War longer.

12 SM: Now when you came back and you stayed in the Army or got out and went  
13 back in the Army, what was the Army like? I mean, I've heard different stories about  
14 different issues in the Army of the '70s especially after the war ended.

15 WD: Well, I think I was in this unit in Texas for like a year before they wanted us  
16 to do PT at all, physical training. They started off with physical training. I went to  
17 Germany. It was a lot of physical training and organizing, but Jimmy Carter was  
18 president and he didn't give us anything. It wasn't until Reagan became president that  
19 they started really building us up with modern equipment. The Army had done some  
20 experimentations with vehicles that could float so that they would have these vehicles to  
21 replace a two-and-a-half-ton truck and three-quarter-ton truck, okay? Well, they did it.  
22 They tested it. They had all these vehicles, but the system wasn't good. So the Army  
23 didn't want them. Jimmy Carter said, "Issue them." So we were stuck with Gamma  
24 Goats. We were stuck with—they had another one that was supposed to be like a fueling  
25 truck. It had an articulating joint, also. So we were stuck with this equipment that the  
26 Army had already tested and was no good, but because we had already bought it Jimmy  
27 Carter wanted us to use it. So we were stuck with a lot of things. We're still stuck with  
28 the M-16 today. Now it's an M-4. It's still an M-16. It was a piece of crap. It's always  
29 been a piece of crap, but we're still using it because we're stuck with it. Even the Israelis  
30 knew the AK was better than the M-16 so they got the (unintelligible) an AK. The AK is

1 a whole lot better system; easier to clean, easier to field strip and can take a whole lot  
2 more punishment than an M-16 ever could, but we're stuck with it.

3 SM: So you didn't care for the M-16, obviously.

4 WD: I took basic with M-14. I was selected from some other people to go shoot  
5 an XM-16 before I went to Tigerland and then I got an M-16. We were all, "Hey, it's  
6 neat. We're going to get to shoot an M-16." Guess where we all went. Tigerland. The  
7 other guys shot the M-14 and they went back to their Reserve units. I guess the M-14 was  
8 a different time. It was heavier and you could do a lot more with it, easier to clean, easier  
9 to take care of than the M-16. I mean, if you had time and stuff to take care of it and treat  
10 it real good it would work for you, but I never really liked it and never have.

11 SM: Okay. What do you remember thinking when you heard that Saigon fell in  
12 April '75? Did it even register?

13 WD: Not really. I was gone from there. I think I was in Germany in '75. Berlin  
14 Brigade was enough to keep you busy. I don't think it really registered. It only registers  
15 every now and then when they do, "It's the tenth-year anniversary, fifteen years ago  
16 today." Then it registers a little bit like, "Well, why did we do this?" You know we  
17 could've sent stuff in there—had we sent troops in there doing something the commies  
18 would've probably stopped because we weren't going to come in and they knew they  
19 could finish on up.

20 SM: You mentioned going to Korea and referring to Koreans as ARVNs. You  
21 said that made you realize that—

22 WD: I should've realized I had a problem there. I didn't like going downtown, a  
23 bunch of Oriental people, small alley way type things. I was never really comfortable  
24 going downtown. My wife was with me. She was a CID (criminal investigation  
25 department) agent and we were both stationed at Camp Casey. So we would go  
26 downtown together. She didn't understand. She understands now because she was the  
27 (unintelligible) lady in Northern Iraq during the Gulf War at Camp Victory. She has  
28 PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). She understands now everything. I just kept  
29 referring to them as ARVNs. That's what they reminded me of with their uniforms with  
30 their M-16s or not M-16s, they were whatever they call those things they use, dao weis or  
31 whatever or some of them had M-16s. I mean, they were better soldiers. I have more

1 respect for a ROK than I do an ARVN. They're good, tough soldiers. I shouldn't refer to  
2 anybody as an ARVN. It's kind of a derogatory term, I guess, for a soldier. It was  
3 strange. My father had a stroke so I had to leave after about nine months. That counted as  
4 a full tour so I didn't have to go back. She finished up her tour and came on back and  
5 went to Ft. Jackson. She later became a warrant officer and retired a CW-4. I don't know  
6 what else you want out of that.

7 SM: Well, when you—what do you think about the VA (Veterans  
8 Administration) and how they're taking care of you as a veteran and veterans in general?

9 WD: Well, I just put in my claim for PTSD in December. I've been to—spent  
10 one day there. I've been there twice. I went there for a whole day. My last point was after  
11 six o'clock at night. Basically I rehashed everything I had put down on my retirement  
12 physical plus PTSD. They had my name wrong. So I had to go to some office to get my  
13 name straight. I went to all my appointments to include the guy from PTSD. He didn't  
14 seem—I took all my awards so I had orders for everything. He made copies of them and  
15 gave me a copy of the book because I'm in the book. He said, "I had some problems," but  
16 he wouldn't commit himself to anything because VA hadn't sent him anything yet saying  
17 he could interview me for it. So I've been talking to these guys and when I get back I'm  
18 going to get one of these—I've got an appointment with this counselor I'm seeing once a  
19 month and I'm going to get the name of some organization I can do a power of attorney  
20 so they can represent me for the VA because obviously I'm in over my head dealing with  
21 these people. What are they there for if not to help veterans? They're bean counters.

22 SM: I've not heard of this arrangement where you can use a power of attorney to  
23 give people authority to represent you for the VA.

24 WD: Some of the guys were telling me about it. There's some service  
25 organizations that if you give them a power of attorney they're going to represent you for  
26 the VA, push things to the VA.

27 SM: Do you have to pay them to do this?

28 WD: No. It's like VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) and things like that. They do  
29 it for free. I'm going to do that and see what happens, see what they're going to diagnose  
30 me with. My feet do swell up occasionally. They tell me that could be diabetes, but here  
31 lay people like me so I'm going to get checked for that, too. They're going to check me

1 for Agent Orange next month. We used to spray that stuff. We used to keep it down by  
2 the flight line. We had a, what do you call it? Smoke ship. You could either put a  
3 pesticide in there to spray for mosquitoes.

4 SM: Malathion or something.

5 WD: Whatever that was. Then you had the Agent Orange to defoliate and you  
6 had diesel fuel to send to the engine to cause smoke. We used the same thing. We never  
7 cleaned it out. We used the same thing over and over again. Hobbs remembers one day  
8 when we had to put it, you had to put it in by hand. In other words, you had to hand pump  
9 like something out of World War II to just go ahead and siphon the stuff on in until you  
10 had it filled up. Usually I think it took like fifty-five gallons to fill the thing up. You  
11 didn't have gloves and you didn't have a mask. That's what you've got to expect back at  
12 that timeframe because no one knew anything. That's why we were still taking salt  
13 tablets for heat because they didn't know anything.

14 SM: How often would they spray using the aircraft, the Agent Orange?

15 WD: I remember doing it once, first tour, mouth of the Hoi An River. I helped  
16 put it in and Hobbs was low ship. I was high ship. Of course, they got their ass shot up  
17 because it was the Hoi An River and that was theirs. They owned the Hoi An River and  
18 they owned Barrier Island that was the big sand bar between the Hoi An River and Chu  
19 Lai. One time a loach (LOH, or light observation helicopter) had been shot down. They  
20 sent a recovery aircraft looking for it the next day to pull it out and they had moved it like  
21 five miles. I mean, that was theirs. They had it. That was where Rankin died at Barrier  
22 Island. First tour we were resupplying a unit that was out on Barrier Island. We low  
23 leveled into them, landed and gave them their resupply and then the pilot decides he's  
24 going to spiral up and out and got the windshield shot out. It didn't hit anything vital. All  
25 the Marines onboard because Marines had taken over at the time they were all laying on  
26 the floor of the aircraft like that's going to save them. Of course, you couldn't shoot back  
27 because you didn't know where the Marines were and you didn't know where they were.  
28 So it was not like you could spray any area. You're spiraling up. You don't know where  
29 they're at. So there was nothing we could do but just get the hell out of there. The pilot  
30 was not wearing his visor down so he had pieces of Plexiglas in his face, didn't hit his  
31 eyes.

1           SM: That's lucky.

2           WD: The crew chief got a piece of Plexiglas in his finger. He went and got a  
3 Purple Heart for that. Shortly he left the unit after that. I guess they got tired of him. I  
4 think his name was Carloft or something like that. The only thing I remember about that  
5 guy is he went down to the PX and bought some speakers that were bigger than the  
6 footlockers. So he had these big speakers and he could actually get on his little machine  
7 and like, "Private Smith report to the orderly room," and people would hear it and Private  
8 Smith would go to the orderly room.

9           SM: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences in  
10 Southeast Asia?

11          WD: Not really. Anything else you need to know?

12          SM: I think we pretty much covered everything.

13          WD: It was good talking with you.

14          SM: Thank you very much. I'm going to go ahead and put an official ending to  
15 this. This will end the interview with Mr. Drewry.