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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with David Stroud
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with
2 Mr. David Stroud. Today is 25 June—no, 24 June 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr.
3 Stroud is joining us from Kilgore, Texas. Mr. Stroud, I wanna thank you one more time
4 for consenting to participate in this interview.

5 David Stroud: Well, you're welcome.

6 KC: First off, let's start with some brief biographical information. Can you tell me
7 when you were born and where?

8 DS: Yes, sir. August 30th, 1944 in Tyler, Texas.

9 KC: Tyler, Texas. What were your parent's names?

10 DS: Walter and Vernon Stroud. Excuse me, Bernie Stroud and Annie Stroud.

11 KC: Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

12 DS: My dad was an independent dirt contractor. He cleared things for oil leases,
13 and he owned a trucking company for a while. My mother was a stay at home mom.

14 KC: Very good. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

15 DS: Yes, sir. I got a twin brother. I'm exactly one minute older than he is. He
16 didn't go to Vietnam, he was in college, got the draft deferment. When I came home, he
17 told me he said, "I hate to tell you, I'm against the war." And I said, "I'm glad to tell you

1 I don't want you over there." And I often ask him, I said, "What would have happened if
2 you got drafted?" He said, "I'd have gone." But he just never did. And to this day he's as
3 far from a wannabe as you' ever—he's so proud. He said, "I think I was one of the first
4 ones that came out against that war." But yeah, he's my twin brother. I had an older
5 sister. She died in 1980, and so that's the extent of my family.

6 KC: Well, describe life for me, if you would, there in Tyler, Texas. Which of
7 course, especially at that time was a very rural part of the state.

8 DS: Yes, sir. I was born in Tyler. I grew up in a place called Joinerville, Texas.
9 That doesn't even have a "slow down" sign. It's on the side of a road, Highway 64,
10 between Henderson and Tyler. It was named for Dad Joiner, who discovered the well in
11 1930, the discovery well that brought in the great East Texas Oil Field. We lived on, I
12 guess, we called it a ranch, but we didn't do that all the time. My dad had about 180 acres
13 or so, and we had cattle and stuff like that. We went to a school called Gaston. It's on the
14 side of the road. Elvis Presley once performed there on his way to *Louisiana Hayride*. It
15 was just country life. We rode horses and stuff like that, and went hunting and stuff. Just
16 lived out in the—well, just did a lot of stuff out in the country and everything.

17 KC: How would you describe life in terms of your socioeconomic position? You
18 said your dad was an independent contractor working with the— (inaudible)

19 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh, definitely middle class. Yeah, middle class,
20 maybe upper middle class. We were doing pretty good. I don't think we were rich as
21 everybody thought we were, but in those days if you had anything you were rich. But
22 yeah, I would say middle class. Certainly not upper class.

23 KC: Sure, sure. Well what about your schooling? Where'd you go to school all
24 the way through high school?

25 DS: Okay, I went to Gaston, and then I transferred to Henderson. I graduated
26 from Henderson High School in 1963, and then—you're gonna find this difficult to
27 believe. After playing football and all, they discovered I had a heart murmur. The way
28 they discovered it is I went to enlist in the Marine Corps. A Navy corpsman discovered it
29 and I had to see a doctor. So I had to have open heart surgery before I went into the
30 Marine Corps.

31 KC: Really?

1 DS: Yes, sir. Back in 1964, right after I graduated from High School—I mean '63.
2 Once I did that, I had to have a letter from him to get into the Marine Corps, and it stayed
3 in my service record the whole time. I had to wait six months after that surgery before I
4 could enlist. I spent my six months working in the East Texas Oil Field. (laughs) Then I
5 went in the Corps in January of 1964.

6 KC: Well, that will kinda prepare you for life in the Corps. Well, let me back up
7 here a little bit. Tell me a little bit about school. You said that you played football
8 through high school.

9 DS: Yes, sir. I did.

10 KC: What other sorts of things did you do?

11 DS: Well, I started out in jr. high at Gaston, but then I played high school in
12 Henderson. We thought we had a good team. I don't think we were as good as we
13 thought we were. But yeah, I played tackle—offense and defensive tackle.

14 KC: What about school?

15 DS: Didn't do very well. I did not care for school. My brother did, he did real
16 well. I got out with the lowest "C" average as you could. In fact, when everybody was
17 going down to take the ACT or whatever for college, I remember I went to Dairy Queen
18 because I was gonna go into the Marine Corps. Then when I was in the Corps and
19 decided to go to college, I got into SFA (Stephen F. Austin State University) and was
20 scholastic probation, that was my challenge. My GPA, you know, I got out. (laughs) I had
21 a two points—I mean, I had "C" average or something like then when I got out. But I
22 found I really enjoyed it; I really did like it. I respected all those professors and even if I
23 didn't do good in the class, I just thought it was great class. But I didn't do—I was not a
24 student when I was in high school by any means.

25 KC: You mentioned that you intended to go into the Marine Corps when you
26 graduated high school. What was it about the Marine Corps? Why did you want to enlist?

27 DS: Okay, the reason, and the way I remember it is my sister, at the time was
28 engaged to a guy I just think the world of. When I first met him, she said that Ed was in
29 the Marine Corps. I don't remember I'd ever heard of the Marine Corps. So, I went home
30 and I looked them up in the encyclopedia. There was this sergeant in these dress blues
31 looking at me like, "If you think you're tough, you just try to become one of us." And

1 that's when I got hooked. Then I started reading books like *Battle Cry* by Leon Uris and
2 things like that. My brother-in-law never told me to go into the Corps. He hardly ever
3 talked about it or anything, but that's when I discovered 'em. What I liked about 'em is
4 'cause the reputation of being the toughest. Because at that time I thought I was gonna be
5 one of the toughest and everything. And I like 'em, you know, Iwo Jima and all that kind
6 of stuff. I read everything I could on the Marine Corps.

7 KC: Now was your brother-in-law in Korea?

8 DS: No, he wasn't (laughing). I talked about being a drill instructor as a corporal,
9 he was a drill instructor as a PFC.

10 KC: How did that work?

11 DS: What he did—now he tell me this and I'm not documenting it, okay?

12 KC: (laughing) All right, I won't— (inaudible)

13 DS: (speaking at the same time) He was getting ready to go to Korea, and they
14 had this fire watch guy come by. He went up just playing around with him, and knocked
15 his helmet liner off. Well, it was dark, and the night guy didn't see who it was, and so he
16 finally caught him and said, "What's your name?" He said, "Jessie James." He told me it
17 was the longest court martial in the Marine Corps history (laughs), for impersonating
18 Jessie James. Because he got court martialed and it took so long, he missed troop
19 movement to Korea. They didn't know what to do with him, so they sent him to San
20 Diego to be a drill instructor.

21 KC: (laughing) That's quite a story.

22 DS: And he showed me graduation photographs, and there he is, PFC and his drill
23 instr—senior was a corporal, had been a Marine Raider in World War II.

24 KC: Oh, wow.

25 DS: Yeah, and like I said, he had no reason to make that up. He told me that's
26 why he didn't go to Korea, he was being court martialed at the time, and he didn't have
27 enough time after the court marital. They sent him down to San Diego to be a drill
28 instructor, so he got out.

29 KC: Interesting.

30 DS: Yep, but he's the one that got me in, but like I say, he didn't tell me any
31 stories or anything. I just—it was outta the encyclopedia, the reputation of the Marine

1 Corps. And I wanted infantry. I wanted infantry. I didn't even know about Recon. I never
2 heard of Recon and I got to Vietnam. I just wanted in the infantry, and that's what I got
3 in. They gave me my wish. That's when you have to be careful what you wish for. But
4 I'm proud I was in the infantry, but I tell you it was as tough as anything I ever wanna do.

5 KC: Now you are eighteen years old in 1963. You just graduated high school, you
6 say your friends are going off to take the test for college and you go to the Dairy Queen
7 because you know you're going to go into the Marine Corps.

8 DS: (at the same time) The Marine Corps. Yes, sir. I was gonna go in for twenty.

9 KC: Now, you made this decision very, very early in your life.

10 DS: Yes, sir.

11 KC: You mention that you hadn't had all that much knowledge about the Marine
12 Corps, but you were building it up over time.

13 DS: I did, but as I remember when she told me he had been a Marine, I think I
14 knew it was some branch of the service, but I didn't know anything else about it. That's
15 why I went home and looked it up in the encyclopedia. And then, of course, I started
16 seeing a few movies. But a lot of those guys in my age got into the Corps because of John
17 Wayne's *Sands of Iwo Jima*. I never saw that movie til after I was out of the Corps. I saw
18 *Battle Cry*. Like I said, I read the book and then I saw the movie, and probably a few
19 other things. I read some histories of the Marines in the Pacific and read some of the
20 novels of the Marines in the Pacific. That's what I was reading. That's what really got me
21 into it.

22 KC: How aware were you as an eighteen-year-old in East Texas about what was
23 going on in the world and what, as a Marine, you might be called upon to do? Were you
24 aware of world events or global affairs?

25 DS: Oh, we had the—I'm trying to remember exactly when—the Dominican
26 Republic Crisis. We had the Marines landed in Lebanon. 'Course, we had the Cuban
27 Missile Crisis, what that had to do—that was a couple years before us and stuff. When I
28 went into the Corps, I just wanted to be a Marine, and then once I got in the Corps,
29 because this is before Vietnam hit it up. We had a few advisors over there, but we hardly
30 ever heard anything about Vietnam. Once we got to Okinawa, the infantry battalion I was

1 in, we definitely wanted to go to Vietnam. You know, in bootcamp they'd make us pray
2 for war every night. "Pray for war, peace is hell." Yep.

3 KC: Okay, well it sounds like that you made this decision, although maybe global
4 affairs wasn't something— (inaudible)

5 DS: (speaking at the same time) No, I just wanted to be a Marine.

6 KC: Just to be a Marine. You made that decision.

7 DS: And I'll tell you what, I had to go from Henderson to Dallas to enlist, and I
8 was getting ready to sign the papers, and I figured since I graduated from high school I
9 would ask a smart question. So I asked a recruiter, I said, "If I enlist in the Marine Corps,
10 what can you promise me?" He looked at me and he said that "If you make it through
11 bootcamp, you'll be a Marine." And I said, "That's all I want." (laughs) And I signed as
12 quickly as I could.

13 KC: So you signed up, but you had to go through the physicals, of course. And
14 this is when you found out you had a heart problem.

15 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh, yes. I had to go through another one. Yeah,
16 this was signing up, and this was the second time. And they still have it now where you
17 can do an early enlistment. I don't think it was as long as it is now. I had it timed that if I
18 enlisted then, then I wouldn't have to leave till right after high school graduation. That's
19 when they discovered I had that heart problem. So once I got over that, I had to go back
20 through it again.

21 KC: Okay, okay. Well, tell me about this surgery that you had. It's a heart
22 murmur, but this can be anytime they're working on an organ like that it's very, very
23 serious business.

24 DS: Oh, it is. Oh yeah, I tell you what; I got a scar from the middle of my chest to
25 the middle of my back. This was like in the dark ages compared to now, in Gaston
26 Hospital in Dallas. Well, I was young and tough then, though. It didn't take me long to
27 get over it.

28 KC: Did you consider for any length of time that maybe this condition was gonna
29 hold you out of the Marine Corps?

1 DS: Nope. In fact, I asked the surgeon that day when they took me down, I said,
2 “If I have this surgery, can I get in the Marine Corps?” He said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “that’s
3 all I wanna know.”

4 KC: So it obviously went very, very well.

5 DS: Oh, it did, it did. I was too young and stupid and gung-ho to even worry
6 about anything like that.

7 KC: What was your recovery period like?

8 DS: When we had surgery over there at Gaston, I don’t remember—they didn’t
9 have intensive care, I don’t believe. But I was up on a certain floor where all the heart
10 surgeries or something like that was. My friend from high school came to see me, and he
11 snuck me in some blue jeans and a t-shirt, and we went out and got hamburgers. When
12 we came back, I told ‘em I needed to get back up to that floor, and they thought I was
13 lying because there’s no way I would be out. I had to pull my shirt up and show them the
14 stitches and they let me back up there (both laughing). I’m not near as tough anymore. Oh
15 yeah, he brought me in some old blue jeans and t-shirt and off we went.

16 KC: Oh, very good. Very good.

17 DS: I was only there—and I could tell students I wasn’t taking notes, but I think I
18 was out of there in like a week, maybe even less than that. Of course, I couldn’t go to
19 work in the oilfield for a while, but it wasn’t long until I was doing it, and that was pretty
20 heavy duty stuff.

21 KC: Right, right.

22 DS: So I wasn’t even concerned about that holding me back in the Corps or
23 anything like that.

24 KC: Okay, but you said it had to be six months after the surgery.

25 DS: They told me, if I remember right, it would have to be six months before
26 they’d let me go back to the Corps.

27 KS: Okay, so you were biding your times then I guess— (inaudible)

28 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yes, sir. And I worked in the oil field.

29 KS: Well, what was it like biding your time in the oil fields in the 1960’s waiting
30 for the Marine Corps?

1 DS: We worked for a guy who was— are you familiar with oil fields and what
2 workover rigs are?

3 KS: Somewhat, yes.

4 DS: Yeah, I did workover work for a place called Major and Garvin out of
5 Turnertown. If I remember correctly, we worked seven days a week, and it you weren't
6 there at six AM—so if we had a crew of four—you were fired. Then they had people
7 inside waiting for a job, and one of them would take it. If you came back, you had to take
8 your turn again and wait until somebody else didn't show up.

9 KS: Yeah, that sounds like the typical kind of approach to (inaudible).

10 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yes, it was. Yeah, that was it. And so as I recall
11 we worked seven days a week because there was so much business at that time.

12 KS: I assume you're looking forward to getting out of the oil fields and then in the
13 Marine Corps.

14 DS: Oh yeah, yeah. I kind of liked it. It was that macho stuff, but I didn't like
15 doing it seven days a week. It was, you know—they used to have a saying that oil gets in
16 your blood, and I can kind of see how that did that.

17 KS: Well, it would be good training, I think to help continue to toughen you up
18 for the Marine Corps.

19 DS: Oh, it was. It was rough. It wasn't easy. Especially if we did it in the summer
20 and that kind of stuff. I'd done that when I was going to high school, you know, during
21 the summer some. The other thing we did, of course, growing up was we loaded hay and
22 that kind of stuff. Hell, I'd work out on the oil field in the summers, too.

23 KS: Right, right.

24 DS: Yeah.

25 KS: Well, you say you joined—not joined, but you reported—what was it? In
26 January of 1965?

27 DS: Yes, sir. I actually enlisted then because the first time, see, nothing happened.
28 I don't recall that I signed any papers, or I don't remember. But everyone, regardless
29 what service you were going into, went through this physical. Because I didn't pass that
30 physical, I didn't sign any enlist—I don't recall signing any enlistment papers or
31 anything. But then after I got the six months with that letter, I went back up to Dallas and

1 that's when I count I enlisted. That's when I did the physical again, and that's when I
2 signed the enlistment papers, and didn't come home after that.

3 KS: Okay. Now you said that you had intended to serve twenty years in the
4 Marines.

5 DS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was gonna make it twenty years minimum. And I tell
6 people today I don't know when that went to plan "B," but it was bootcamp or the
7 infantry. But it was one of those two that I decided "four for the Corps" was enough.

8 KS: Yeah, well, there you were in Dallas, did you go to North Carolina or did you
9 go to California?

10 DS: No, went to California, San Diego. Now, in the Corps, and I think it's still
11 like this, west of the Mississippi, you go to San Diego.

12 KS: Okay. Tell me about your time in bootcamp. Tell me about Marine Corps
13 bootcamp as best you remember it, from the time you arrived to the time you left.

14 DS: Oh, boy. It was rough and it was three months, and I was in 1st Battalion in
15 San Diego. The drill instructors, (laughs) well they'd hit you. They just knocked the crap
16 out of you. The first time I got—well, when we got in there—I didn't know this, but
17 when you get into the airport, you don't get picked up to go to bootcamp until I believe
18 it's three AM in the morning. They don't want you coming in rested. Everybody comes
19 in at three AM in the morning when it's dark, you don't know where the hell you are, and
20 these guys with the DI (drill instructor) hats on—they're not DI's, but we didn't know
21 that. They jump on that green, we called it a Cattle Car. They start screaming to "get off
22 that damn bus and get on those yellow footprints." The yellow footprints were where
23 you'd be kind of standing at attention. We got off, and I don't think it was me, but
24 somebody—there weren't enough footprints for everybody. That Marine went over and
25 just knocked the crap out of that guy. And told him to get on those damn foot prints, so
26 he hit somebody else, knocked him off, and got on the footprints. That was our
27 introduction. We went in, we get the haircuts and all that, and then we got something
28 called a "bucket issue." Now, this is about as humiliating as you can get. You got your
29 head shaved and you had these stupid green—we called 'em utilities and everything.
30 You're on your damn knees and they're just screaming at you. We had this thing called
31 the bucket issue, that was one or two pair of utilities, a razor, we called it shaving gear,

1 toothbrush, and all that. They were doing an inventory. And so this sergeant or corporal
2 or whoever he was, he'd yell out an item and we have to hold it up. I remember he yelled
3 out "toothbrush," and I could not find that damn toothbrush in that bucket. (laughs) I put
4 up an empty hand, so he came over and he reached right down and found that toothbrush.
5 He accused me of trying to steal that from Uncle Sam and was beating the crap out of me
6 with that damn toothbrush.

7 KC: (laughing) How did he do that?

8 DS: He was hitting me on the damn skin head with that damn toothbrush. It didn't
9 hurt, but it was just really humiliating as you can get.

10 KC: Right.

11 DS: And he's screaming at me, I'm trying to cheat the government and all that
12 kind of stuff. And then we had—and my brother-in-law had told me, the day I was
13 getting ready to leave he said, "I'm only gonna tell you two things: don't wear any
14 clothing up there that you ever wanna see again, and don't wear a watch because you're
15 not gonna need to know what time of day it is." They gotta keep up with that. I had these
16 old jeans or something, but I'll tell you, we were terrified when all this was going on. All
17 this screaming and they're knocking the crap out of people, you know. We had to put our
18 civilian clothes in this box and address 'em. I remember he said, "I don't want you to
19 address it to Podunk, USA that nobody ever heard of." But nobody ever heard of
20 Joinerville, Texas, so I put Dallas. When they saw that, they accused me of killing John
21 Kennedy. I mean it, right there. Said, "You killed our President; you killed our
22 Commander in Chief." And I tell you what, I never saw those clothes again. I guess
23 they're up in Dallas somewhere. Oh, they'd do anything. And we hadn't even met the
24 drill instructors. Hadn't even—now once I became a drill instructor, I know what was
25 going on. We didn't know that we had platoons—four platoons to a series, and I was a
26 drill instructor at Parris Island, by the way. Because I went there from 2nd Marine
27 Division. We had to wait until we had the four platoons before we actually start
28 bootcamp. Well, when you had enough for one platoon, we had about seventy-eight.
29 Those drill instructors would pick 'em up, but you stay in this thing called receiving
30 barracks until you get that platoon made. Then the drill instructor would pick you up, and
31 they just—you hadn't even started training, but they would start doing some preliminary

1 stuff. So once you got the four platoons formed, that's when you started your training. So
2 what we were going through was in receiving barracks, but we didn't know that. It was
3 that night our drill instructors, what we called picked us up, and took us to a squad bay.
4 We had to make our racks. Got in the racks, said goodnight to Chesty Fuller and that. He
5 turned those lights off, and I swear to god thirty seconds later he turned those damn lights
6 on. It was reveille and we were up and moving. We got no sleep that night. I don't
7 remember what time they got us up, it was probably about six AM, may have been earlier
8 than that. When I was a drill instructor, I found out that the Marine Corps, wanted
9 recruits to have eight hour sleep, not eight hours and one second. So, whatever it was, we
10 got our eight hours, but the rest of the twenty-four hours we were busy. Of course,
11 learning to march and doing all that stuff that they did. It lasted for three months, which
12 seemed like an eternity.

13 KC: What was it like for you as a young, I assume, independent Texan eighteen,
14 nineteen years old to be thrust into this kind of environment?

15 DS: Oh, it was strange. Now, I knew about some of it because I had read about
16 bootcamp and things like that. Of course, you didn't know anybody, but you made
17 bootcamp friends. You know, like the guy that was in the rack next to you or something
18 like that. We didn't have a lot of time to visit either. But you still, you had a few friends.
19 And I think I was pretty well prepared for it because I'd seen these movies and I've read
20 these books about bootcamp and everything like that. It didn't bother me. I knew these
21 DI's, although they would knock the crap out you, you know, they'd come up and ask
22 you what side of the street your mother made the most money on and stuff. That didn't
23 bother me at all, but I hear people now that they just send them ballistic. "You don't talk
24 about my mama like that!" Of course, in my Marine Corps, if you even say anything like
25 that, they knocked the crap out of you.

26 KC: Sure, sure.

27 DS: I mean, so that's why I wonder about some of these guys. You may have
28 been able to say that in the Army, but you're not going to say that in the Marine Corps.
29 And they would do whatever they could. If they found there was something that you
30 didn't like, man, you just get ready for it because they're gonna let you have it.

31 KC: What sort of things didn't you like?

1 DS: Well, it didn't bother me. Of course, when they ask what side of the street
2 your mother had made the most money on, how do you answer that? You know, the right
3 the left, north, south, she doesn't? There's no way to answer anything like that. And most
4 of those questions, I found out, even when I was a DI, you ask him where there's no
5 correct answer, so you knock the shit outta the guy. (laughs)

6 KC: Right, right. What sort of things did you—did you do the best, do you think,
7 while you were in basic?

8 DS: Oh, I think I could march pretty well. I went in and I was a little bit
9 overweight. Not anything like these guys are today, I think I went in about one 195. At
10 that time, we were called "fat bodies." So when we went to chow, fat bodies had to go to
11 the rear of the line. When we were going through the chow, the recruits and their server,
12 they knew that once this overweight guy came, we got like half of what they gave you.
13 We got so much exercise and it wasn't long, I was out of that. I went from about 195 to
14 about 175 in bootcamp. I don't remember anything I did best, I think I did it all pretty
15 well, you know. I qualified with a rifle. I didn't shoot expert. Everybody says they did. I
16 shot marksman, but it wasn't the lowest, it wasn't the highest. All they cared about was
17 qualifying. I thought I could march good, but the heck, we all could march good. So I just
18 thought I was a good Marine. I did everything pretty well.

19 KC: At the end of your bootcamp as you see it approaching, you're probably
20 praying for that, you're looking forward to the day for graduation there. You realize that,
21 by god, I'm going to make it through this. What did you want to do? You say that you
22 wanted to go to the infantry, and this is in 1964. What did that mean to you? Where did
23 you hope to be stationed? What sort of things do you want to do?

24 DS: I wasn't thinking about it. I knew that it wasn't that I hope I go to the 2nd
25 Division or anything like that, I just knew I wanted the infantry. I really didn't care after
26 that. I didn't think, "Well, I want to be a machine gunner." I just wanted to get into the
27 infantry. Once you start seeing the light at the end of the tunnel in bootcamp, man you
28 talk about sharp, oh we were sharp. But anyway, I didn't think about it like that. I just
29 knew I wanted to get into the infantry, and shortly before graduation, they read orders to
30 us, so we all knew where we were going. I knew I was gonna go, at this time, 1st Marine
31 Division. So I knew I was going to the infantry. At that time, when we graduated from

1 bootcamp, you didn't come home on leave, we went up to Camp Pendleton for one
2 month of infantry training which we called ITR (Infantry Training Regiment). And then
3 after that you went home for thirty days.

4 KC: Well, tell me about ITR before we bring you back home.

5 DS: Okay, that was a—you lost a lot of your friends. It was basically the series
6 went up there, but I don't remember staying with the guys in my platoon from bootcamp.
7 There was nothing but infantry, and there, where at bootcamp you got eight hour sleep,
8 not up there. We got out in the field and we did just like the infantry, you know, what you
9 learned was how to familiarize yourself with the different weapons: M14, M60s, 3.5s,
10 flamethrowers. You learned about squad tactics, platoon tactics, you stayed out in the
11 field. They had this gigantic mountain they called Old Smokey, and we'd have to
12 hump—you know the word hump. Well, we'd have to hump that damn thing. And I
13 mean, it taught you what infantry was gonna be like. Because everybody in the Marine
14 Corps supports the infantryman first, whether you're a clerk or anything. And it was a
15 familiarization with the infantry; we fired mortars, flame throwers, M60s. We lived in
16 squads and platoons, we ran squad and platoon tactics and stuff like that. It lasted for one
17 month.

18 KC: So you got one month at ITR and you're gonna go back home.

19 DS: Yes, had three months bootcamp then one month at ITR, and then I went
20 home, I think, for thirty days, because all that was going in the 1st Marine Division, 3rd
21 Battalion, 7th Marines. We were what was known as a transplant—we were gonna
22 transplant with a 3rd Marine Division Battalion in Okinawa. And I knew that. I knew that
23 when I came home, because when I left, I told my dad, "go ahead and sell my '60 Impala,
24 'cause I'm not gonna be coming back for a couple of years." So I knew I was going
25 overseas then. We were in the 7th Marines at Pendleton, I think, for a couple of months
26 before we actually moved over to Okinawa. We took the place of 1st Battalion 3rd
27 Marines, and they came back and became MAG-37 (Marine Aircraft Group) in 1st Marine
28 Division. That was in August and September. We went over on a troop transport called, I
29 think, I know the name of it was *Man*. It might have been the *General Man*, and that was
30 miserable.

31 KC: Why was it miserable?

1 DS: You got down and it's just like in these movies where, if I remember, they
2 had this whole damn battalion down in a hold of that ship. They had these racks, and they
3 were just from the floor to the ceiling. There might be six or seven guys sleeping and it
4 was almost like if you had to turn over, you had to get out of that damn thing. Well, not
5 long after we started, people started getting seasick. And that's where I think I was the
6 only one wasn't getting seasick. The only reason I didn't do it is I had to tell myself, if I
7 stopped laughing at those guys, I was gonna get sick as they were. It was that rocking of
8 that damn ship. Man, they were puking in the racks, there was puke everywhere. Nobody
9 could clean it up because everybody was sick. Literally in the head, you'd see this puke
10 just rolling as that ship rolled back and forth, back and forth. As far as—but other than
11 that it wasn't bad except there was nothing to do. Now, the chow lines so long, that you'd
12 form for morning chow, and it would seem like about a thousand jarheads. You'd be
13 circling around the top of that ship. By the time you got through with breakfast morning
14 chow, you'd get in line for dinner, and then supper. All you did was just wait until they
15 sent you down to go to sleep at night. Of course, there were certain times you had to do
16 that. But no, we didn't do anything. We didn't have any work details or anything like
17 that. It was kind of boring. It was about thirty-eight days on that ship.

18 KC: Thirty-eight days, okay.

19 DS: About thirty-five, thirty-eight days. We got a little time in Hawaii, but we
20 didn't have enough money to do anything except go to a bar and get us some beers and
21 stuff.

22 KC: Well, tell me about that. Tell me about stopping in Hawaii. This must have
23 been quite a treat for (inaudible).

24 DS: (speaking at the same time) It was. Oh my gosh, it was about the fifth day out
25 and they told us we're gonna get—I forget how many hours we had, and we were gonna
26 get liberty. My buddies and I, we went to the nearest bar that we could go, because there,
27 as I recall it, the drinking age was eighteen or whatever. So we went there, and I
28 remember I was gonna send a postcard home to my mom and dad. When I was
29 addressing it, I asked the person if I had to put United States of America after that and
30 she said, "Where the hell do you think you are?" (both laugh) And so I decided that I
31 didn't have to put USA when I put Texas down there. But we basically just got drunk. I

1 swear to god, that's what we did. Not so drunk we couldn't get back or anything. We
2 didn't do the sightseeing or anything like that. But I remember that's when I had my first
3 German beer. Have I got some pictures of all this, too. You know, we got little Kodaks
4 taking pictures of us doing all that kind of stuff. But that was fun. We didn't—I don't
5 recall going to Pearl Harbor or anything like that, we just went to the bar and then drank
6 until we had to go back to that ship.

7 KC: When you got back to the ship did you have any problems after having drank
8 so much on that (inaudible)

9 DS: (speaking at the same time) I don't remember I did. I don't remember like
10 being sick or anything like that, and I don't know why. I don't think we got so drunk that
11 we couldn't get back, but I don't remember that. I just remember it was fun because to
12 understand it, we were legal over there. It may have been nineteen, and maybe nineteen
13 was the age, but we were legal over there or we couldn't have gotten in. Or we wouldn't
14 have known where to go get it.

15 KC: You make it to Okinawa eventually.

16 DS: Yes.

17 KC: At this time, again, 1964, did you believe that Okinawa was gonna be where
18 you were stationed for this (inaudible)

19 DS: (speaking at the same time) We knew—yeah, that's where we were gonna be
20 there. As I said, we didn't know about Vietnam. We knew they had some advisors down
21 there, but there was nothing like, "Oh, by the way, you're gonna be going to Vietnam
22 from here." We assumed that's where we would be—our whole tour overseas was gonna
23 be Okinawa. And we were up in the Northern Training Area, a place called Camp
24 Schwab, named after a Medal of Honor recipient in World War II. It was jungle, that's
25 one of the reasons they put us up there. We were always out in that jungle all the time.

26 KC: Well, what sort of things were you doing in there in Okinawa then?

27 DS: Okay, if I remember correctly, O-dark-thirty, before daylight on Monday
28 morning, we'd go on out to the field, go out in the jungle. And we're going to do this
29 stuff, you know, squad tactics, maneuvering, and stuff like that—set ambushes at night.
30 And we're gonna do that from Monday until late Friday night. And then when they come
31 in and—if you got two or three hours of sleep that night you were lucky. I think that's

1 something that really happened to my battalion. We trained like that before we went to
2 Vietnam and we were good. I mean, we trained for several months like that. Vietnam, the
3 only difference was they was using live ammo. I mean, we were just as miserable and as
4 filthy and as sleepy and everything. I mean, you talk about practicing to be miserable, we
5 were doing that. So that's what we'd do, we'd set ambushes and squad tactics, platoons
6 and stuff like that in the jungles. And of course, the people that were supposed to, learned
7 how to navigate through the jungles and stuff with the compass. I don't think we were out
8 there all the time, because I remember one time, they sent us on this long hike. They
9 didn't know what else to do, so we went on a seventy-five mile hike or something like
10 that. But as I remember, we were up in those jungles a lot doing jungle warfare ambushes
11 and stuff like that. Then we'd come in on Friday and we'd clean up, clean your weapons
12 and everything. We'd have inspection the next morning. About noon on Saturday we got
13 Liberty Call. That's when we hit the bars, and you had to be back—it was known as a
14 Cinderella liberty, you had to be back at midnight. So we'd come back at midnight and
15 then the next morning, Sunday, we'd go back up there and then we'd come back in a little
16 bit earlier because we're gonna go out in the field the next day, so we didn't stay quite as
17 late on Sunday night. But that's what we did on the weekends, you know, the beer and
18 the women. A big beer was a dime a bottle, and women were two bucks. (both laugh)
19 Two bucks. Two bucks. Two dollars. And the bars had American names like Bar of
20 Texas, New York, and stuff like that. Country western on the jukebox. I tell ya, that's the
21 best time, and your best buddies sitting there drinking. Oh, that was a great time on those
22 Okinawan bars like that.

23 KC: Yeah, they were—

24 DS: —something else, though. I didn't realize this till then, that each one of these
25 units, like the company and stuff, we kind of had our own bar. I don't know if it was
26 intended that way, but for some reason Marine tankers don't like infantry. When I'd go
27 and I couldn't find my buddies I'd go into a bar, and if it was tankers or somebody they'd
28 say, "You better get your ass outta here." I'd go down and I'd go into another battalion's
29 bar and, "You better get your ass outta here." I said, "I'm looking for Delta." And I
30 finally found them. They kind of had their own bars over there. Even though you were a
31 Marine, you didn't just go into anybody else's bar.

1 KC: You think that was part of a reflection of the cohesiveness of the Marine
2 Corps?

3 DS: Yes, oh yeah. Oh yeah. You know, it just worked down. You know, infantry
4 against tanks. If you were infantry, depending on what company or what battalion you
5 were on and all that kind of stuff, it was a brotherhood, yeah. We didn't realize this.
6 That's one reason we were with our buddies so much. I don't remember how we got the
7 bars or anything like that, but I remember going in the wrong one and looking for
8 somebody and they'd let you know, "you better get your ass outta here." "I'm looking for
9 Delta. I'm looking for Delta Company," or something like that. Because as you know, the
10 Marine Corps uniform, you can't tell what unit a guy is in or anything. You've got no
11 patches; you've got no insignias or anything like that. We've just got the green uniform.
12 Of course, in those days, we had khakis and what we call tropicals, which looked like a
13 really expensive khaki. Yeah, they couldn't tell who you are, so you'd just ask, they'd
14 ask you who you are. I remember that, too, but that's what we did in Okinawa. Then in
15 January of '65, I didn't know this, but one company of Marines had been guarding the
16 airport at Da Nang. I don't know when they started that. My company, Delta Company,
17 1st Battalion 3rd Marines were selected to go do that in January of '65. When the other
18 companies learned that we were going, there was a riot, a fight, out there in the street
19 because the other three companies wanted to go. A first sergeant stopped that fight by
20 promising every one of those guys, "you're going to Vietnam, you're all going." And
21 that's what stopped that fight. That's how we wanted to get to Vietnam. We flew in on C-
22 130s in January and relieved whatever company was down there, I don't know who it
23 was. Had the strangest uniform. It looked French, but the uniform for that company
24 guarding airbase was we had our combat boots on, and we had green utility trousers, a
25 cartridge belt, M14, helmet, but a khaki shirt instead of the regular Marine Corps one.
26 That to me looked French. That was just letting 'em know you were one of the Marine
27 guards there. And we did that until March the 8th, when they flew in the rest of the
28 battalion. That's when Lyndon Johnson ordered the two battalions to go to Da Nang, into
29 Vietnam. The other three companies, the 1st Battalion 3rd Marines came in by C-130s at
30 the Da Nang airport, and I think it was 9th Marines that landed down at Red Beach that
31 day. Yeah, I think they went up the hill at three point. We eventually moved up to Hill

1 327. In fact, the only letter I've got is I'm telling my mom and dad that we're going up on
2 Hill 327 tomorrow. So I've got that date on it, but I don't remember what it was. On 327,
3 that's where our bunkers and everything were. We would go out in the bush by chopper;
4 we didn't have an LZ (landing zone) up on Hill 327. We had to get in six bys, and they'd
5 take us down to the bottom of Hill 327 where the choppers were. Of course, these weren't
6 Hueys, these are these big ole grasshopper looking things.

7 KC: Right, the 34s, right?

8 DS: Yeah. Yeah, that's what we were in. To my knowledge there were no LZs up
9 on Hill 327. I think we went out, normally just platoon size. A few times maybe company
10 size, very seldom in battalion size. I think we'd go out, and I was thinking about this
11 before you called. I don't think we ever very often went out and came back the same day.
12 I think we'd go out, and the way I remember it we'd be out there for three days, three
13 days and two nights. We'd be doing search and destroy, patrolling and stuff. Of course,
14 all this stuff was set down. The lieutenant would brief us before we went out and then, of
15 course, where the LZ was gonna be. Every night, we'd set an ambush or something like
16 that. Then we'd be at the LZ like on the third day at a certain time and get picked up and
17 brought back to Hill 327. Then you went down and—you know, on Hill 327 up at the top,
18 we had some tents. During the day, we had twenty-five percent security on Hill 327. So,
19 if you weren't in the bunker, you could go up there and lie around in the tents on the cot
20 and stuff like that. But every evening, as soon as it'd start getting dark, everybody went
21 back down to the bunkers and everything. That's where our rear area was. And so we
22 were still in a combat area, and every night the artillery and the firefights, every damn
23 night. You could see 'em. You could see the tracers and everything even if they were so
24 far away you couldn't hear the sound. You could see the tracers out there. The artillery
25 would be coming over us on Hill 327 if they had a fire mission. But most of the time they
26 were just firing flares, and they would come over 327 and we'd hear them coming over
27 and then that pop and then that flare would start coming down. They kept the flares going
28 all night long, of course. And so when we were back on 327, that's what we were doing.

29 KC: Well let me interrupt you here, Mr. Stroud, and ask you this question. There
30 you were on Okinawa; you are literally fighting to get to Vietnam and—

31 DS: Yeah, wanting to get to Vietnam, yeah.

1 KC: In late '64 and early 1965 when you get there, what did you know, if
2 anything, about what was going on there?

3 DS: Not a damn thing.

4 KC: The communist forces in the North—

5 DS: And we didn't care. (laughs) I'm sorry to say that we did not care. Now, we
6 knew the French had been there and got beat and that's all we knew. Now that I've
7 studied it, I taught a course on it for several years and I learned a lot that I didn't know
8 then. You know, I knew the French were there and got beat. That's all we knew. I think
9 that maybe they said something about stopping the spread of communism. But the way
10 we were, we could care less why we were there. It did not matter. We just wanted
11 combat.

12 KC: What were your perceptions of who your enemies would be? What did you
13 think about them? What did you think about the North Vietnamese, or did you think
14 about them at all?

15 DS: We knew there were North Vietnamese and they had come into the war,
16 they're not gonna come in big time until, of course, the Army runs into them down in—
17 and I'll mispronounce this—down in Nha Trang. So we're fighting VC (Viet Cong). To
18 be honest, I didn't give 'em much thought. I didn't like 'em and I didn't dislike 'em.
19 They were just the enemy. They were just the enemy. I really didn't, I did not think of
20 them as human. They were just "its," that's all they were. I did not like Vietnam, I didn't
21 like it at all. I didn't care for the people. That doesn't mean I went through and hit
22 anybody or anything like that, I just knew this is not a place I would not like to be. The
23 whole country stank. Oh, the whole place stunk. But in the Marine Corps and—were you
24 in the Marines or anything?

25 KC: No, sir. I did not.

26 DS: We are brainwashed, that's the best way I could put it. Even in bootcamp you
27 were trained unless you are killing your enemy, you're just not worth shit. In fact, before
28 we went to qualify on the rifle range, we took our M14s into a chapel and we had a
29 chaplain give a special service with our M14s there. We had a sergeant that was in World
30 War II, he wasn't a drill instructor. This was a treat when I was with my platoon. Our
31 seniors said we're so lucky we got this guy down. He'd been in World War II and Korea,

1 had ribbons. He got tears in his eyes how telling us how he hoped and prayed that we
2 would get combat, that we would get field combat someday. It's the greatest—he was
3 crying he was so sentimental. So that's the way we were trained. They didn't say, "You
4 care about your enemy." You just go in there and kill them. It didn't matter who they
5 were, we woulda killed 'em. And so we didn't think anything about it like, you know,
6 like "We're in their country. This is really their land." None of that. I guess the best
7 analogy is like a football player as they go in and knock the crap out of that linebacker,
8 you just go do it. You don't really care about it. But I didn't think much about 'em as
9 anything like that, really didn't. I don't remember hating 'em. Now, we did go on a patrol
10 and we found, believe it or not, up in those jungles, we ran into a basecamp, a VC
11 basecamp. And I swear, if they had been there, I wouldn't be here. I would guarantee you
12 that. We'd ambushed their rearguard, and the vine—the jungle was so thick on the other
13 side of that basecamp, there were eight of 'em sitting around eating rice and we killed
14 them. They didn't hear the firing down there, that's how thick that jungle was. But when
15 we were going through that basecamp—now, I didn't go through it, I was the platoon
16 radio operator, and the squads were searching it real quickly. I remember somebody
17 brought back two things to show—well, three things. Brought back a VC flag and he had
18 found it in one of the hooches down there, and a Lone Star feed sack. I thought, being
19 from Texas, "My god, how'd they get that?" And I swear, starched khaki uniforms,
20 which we knew were North Vietnamese. So we figured they had some North Vietnamese
21 advisors down there at that time. That's what we thought about it. We didn't know they
22 were coming in, we just figured they were North Vietnamese down there at the house, but
23 all I fought were the VC.

24 KC: Okay, okay. Now, do you remember, and you may not be able to do this, but
25 do you remember the first of these missions you went on? The first of the search and
26 destroy?

27 DS: It's hard for me because these things are just all meshed up. I can remember
28 the first time I got shot—I say I got shot at, we weren't in a jungle, we were going
29 through a rice paddy. We were on the dikes and a couple of rounds came by us. Me and
30 about six others all thought they were aiming at us, that's why I say I think I got shot. We
31 all thought they were shooting.

1 KC: Of course.

2 DS: Because it sounded like it was right there. Believe it or not, it hurt my
3 feelings 'cause all I could think about is, "I hadn't done anything to you, and here you are
4 trying to kill me." (both laugh) Hurt my feelings. You don't even know me, you're trying
5 to kill me.

6 KC: What was your response to this?

7 DS: We just fired. But that's just what I thought in my head, you know. It hurt my
8 feelings. You don't even know me and you're trying to kill me. Of course, we returned
9 fire, but where he was, we couldn't have hit him. He was probably some sniper that
10 wasn't very good. We just fired back on the general direction and let it go. The firefights
11 are just all messed up. You know, which ones came first and all that kind of stuff. Yeah,
12 there was one, and I tell this to my students, this is the only thing I tell 'em. You know,
13 I'll answer a question, but I don't do Vietnam now. It's a 1302, and I go in there—I can
14 hopefully go into a little bit more detail than just a textbook, but there's just so much I
15 don't get to Vietnam anymore.

16 KC: Sure.

17 DS: So I get through World War II. One of the things I wanted to do is to
18 appreciate these people that fought that for us. So I tell 'em about Bob Dole, I tell 'em
19 about Jimmy Stuart, you know, stuff like that. I show 'em *Will & Joe Up Front* by Bill
20 Maudlin. I told them, I said, "I know why I read this book when I was in eighth grade. I
21 didn't just look at the cartoons, I read." And I said, but one day in Vietnam, we come out
22 of the jungle, and we heard the pops of mortars, and we knew we were getting mortared. I
23 went on the deck, and I remember when those mortars were coming that I had two
24 thoughts. One was what will my parents think when they find out I'm dead, and the other
25 one was "it's true." And "it's true" referred to a cartoon in *Up Front* by Bill Maudlin,
26 which I show the class. It's Willy and Joe on the ground, hugging the ground, with
27 German machine gun fire over. One of them says to the other one, "I can't get no lower,
28 button's in the way." That's what I remembered when I was hugging that damn ground,
29 that button was in my way. It's true. I swear to god, that's what I remembered. The point
30 I tell my students is this was humor that combat people could see that those that hadn't
31 couldn't see it, because I just thought it was funny—you know, because the button isn't

1 big—until I was on that ground that day and then I realized what they were talking about.
2 That's the two things I remember that day.

3 KC: What was it like for you? You've already talked about this kind of humorous
4 moment, the first thing that came through your mind, but what was it like for you to be in
5 a position of where you were, like you mentioned, you're utterly helpless.

6 DS: You were. You're just totally helpless.

7 KC: What goes through your mind?

8 DS: We lost a couple guys, and some wounded. In fact, one of these guys—and
9 we hear this all the time, “the good ones are the ones that killed.” And it's so damn true.
10 This guy was a kid named Fernandez. He wasn't my best buddy, but I knew him. He was
11 in my platoon. I remember that he didn't drink beer and he didn't go whore around or
12 anything like that, and he didn't cuss. And he got killed that day. I found out from the
13 corpsman the only cuss word he ever said was the next to the last word he ever said. He
14 said his first cuss word when he was dying. Isn't that something?

15 KC: Amazing.

16 DS: Yup. And what had happened is, the corpsman was telling him to hang on,
17 the choppers were coming. And he said, “eff you,” and died right there.

18 KC: Wow.

19 DS: Yeah, and of course I didn't know that. All I do is tell what I saw when I was
20 there, and people say, you know, well, they're getting killed in front of me. Well, they're
21 getting killed close to me, but I wasn't seeing that stuff. I learned that later on from a
22 corpsman. I know when the mortars were hitting, I could hear people screaming and stuff
23 like that. It didn't last long, and then we started hearing, “Corpsman! Corpsman!
24 Corpsman.” And then you hear “Vega's hit! Vega's hit!” So that's how I'd learned stuff.
25 And we didn't rush over there to look at anybody like that. We had to set up the
26 perimeter and stuff like that, and then they brought the choppers in and we saw them put
27 the wounded and the dead on the choppers, but you know, it wasn't like I watched him
28 die or anything. He was just a few feet away from me, I guess. So that's the way I saw it.
29 That's the way it was. You know, you just hear stuff like that, “Corpsman! Corpsman!
30 “Vega's hit! Vega's hit.” That just scared the hell out of you. And then we had to move
31 from there to the LZ after we medevac'ed him and the wounded out.

1 KC: Now you're there in-country in combat very, very early on (inaudible)

2 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yes, very early.

3 KC: Did you have any sort of sense that, "we don't really know what we're
4 getting ourselves into. We've been through all this training and don't know what we're
5 doing."

6 DS: (speaking at the same time) No, I didn't think like that. But I knew that when
7 we went in there with these two battalions to guard that airbase, and I think it was *Stars*
8 *and Stripes* that we got. I noticed that there's a whole lot of other guys coming in real
9 quickly. You know, pretty soon they're bringing in the Army and it would go up to thirty-
10 five thousand, fifty-thousand troops in. I do remember saying there's a lot of us over here
11 now. Or no, I didn't have any long-range picture or anything like that. I mean, I cannot—
12 it's just what was going on today, that was all we worried about. That's just day to day.
13 And we didn't—nobody talked about that. You know, like "what are we getting into." I
14 think these kids in Iraq and Afghanistan know more about the situation than what we did.
15 I can see them talking about it more than we did, but we didn't. We didn't talk about it at
16 all. We didn't know when we were coming out either. Like later on, because they went to
17 the rotation system. You know, you go in and you knew what day you were coming out.
18 We knew that we had I believe it was fourteen months overseas. But we had already been
19 in Okinawa for a while before we went to Vietnam. Then what we were worried about
20 while we were in-country is, "are we gonna have to do fourteen months in Vietnam, or
21 are they gonna count this as part of our overseas?" What they did is they counted it as
22 part of the overseas. That's why we left in September. I was only there nine months
23 compared to the other guys.

24 KC: Okay.

25 DS: But when we left, we thought we were gonna go back to Pendleton and get
26 replacements and come right back over, and that's what they had planned for us until—
27 we learned this by a guy named Roger Warren who's like a battalion historian. Actually,
28 we went from Vietnam to Okinawa, and from Okinawa back to the states. The only way
29 back to the states, they changed that. That's when I went to 2nd Marine Division, and
30 some stayed in 1st Division. A few guys went back. We had a few guys extend in
31 Vietnam, which we tried to talk 'em out of that. When it was getting close to the time we

1 was gonna come home, they said that you could extend for six months. If I remember
2 correctly, they said they're not gonna send you to a grunt unit. The reason these guys
3 were doing it was because they were trying to calculate your chance of survival. If it's a
4 fourteen-month tour, that's what I remember, whether it was a year or not. I remember it
5 being fourteen. If they could do six months added to the fourteen they already had—and
6 then there was a rumor, I don't know if I was true or not, that you had to be in the states
7 six months before they could ship you back. So they would tack you at six months on, six
8 months in the states, and if they didn't have enough time left in the Corps to come back,
9 it was better to extend six months then than come back for fourteen. That make sense?

10 KC: Yeah, I see.

11 DS: We told 'em, "Don't do it." And they did it. Some of my best friends got
12 killed doing that. They put 'em right back in a grunt unit. But anyway, some of those
13 stayed over there. A few guys went back, and I did. I went 2nd Division, and then I went
14 to the drill field, and that's where I stayed 'til I got out.

15 KC: Let me take you back here to Vietnam early in your assignment. You
16 mentioned these operations that you would go on, these search and destroy. I assume
17 you're probably setting up ambushes here or there as well. Can you take me on what
18 would be a typical search and destroy, or a typical ambush, that you might have been
19 involved in?

20 DS: Well normally, yeah, these things were very typical. At least they seem to be.
21 The night before, if I remember right, the lieutenant would call the squad leaders up.
22 Because I was his radio operator, I'm right up there with the lieutenant. I carried a PRC-
23 10 and an M14. The lieutenant made me carry an M14 rather than a .45. So he would
24 brief the squad leaders. He'd have a map— and I didn't pay any attention to it because it
25 didn't matter whether I wanted to go, it didn't matter at all. Then he would tell 'em that
26 we need to get up at four o' clock or five o' clock, and when they get in the six bys, they
27 were gonna take it down to the LZ. Then we'd leave, you know, just about daylight. Then
28 he would put on the map, he'd say, "This is where we're gonna land here." You know,
29 near some village or something like that. Then we'd start moving and he'd name the
30 villages. "We're gonna search these villages." And moving all the time, all the time like
31 that. As soon as it started getting dark, we would move in and set an ambush. The way

1 you did that—you know, we practiced all this. We were good. We were very good. When
2 you're getting ready to set an ambush, you stop because you're not gonna move into the
3 ambush area until it's dark. Nobody's gonna see you go in there. So we'd stop nearby.
4 Like I said, we'd done this in training, we knew exactly what to do. The lieutenant might
5 say, "When we go in, I want 1st, 2nd, and 3rd squad like that." Then he says, "It's already
6 really getting dark." Then you would knock your safeties off, and you go in at a single
7 file. Then if it's gonna be along a creek or something like that, then the first Marine
8 there—it may have been a squad leader or something. Then he would stop and just turn to
9 the left to look at where the killing zone is gonna be. Everybody just stopped and lay
10 down. Nobody ever say a word. Then that would be the killing zone down in that area
11 there. You already knew beforehand who was gonna take first watch and who was gonna
12 sleep. You never say a word. And so, you know, you've done that while you were
13 smoking to get ready to go in there and everything. And I don't remember, it may have
14 been two hour watches or something. So while you were sleeping, when it was your turn,
15 then he would just put his hand on your shoulder, and you'd wake up, you knew what it
16 was for. And he'd go to sleep, and then you do that like that. You sprang an ambush, and
17 if you're lucky enough and Charlie's coming through, depending which way he's
18 coming, then if he's coming, say from left to right, then you'd let him get all the way
19 down, and the last Marine on the right's the one that's gonna trigger the ambush. You
20 want as many of them in the killing zone as you can get in there. In many case it might be
21 an M60 man, or something like. Depending on the terrain, it might be like an "L," where
22 there'd be an M60 down there, and although I wasn't on the ambush, I was told that the
23 M60 guy on that particular ambush, he waited till the VC was so close to him that when
24 he killed the first one, he fell right on his M60. Then when they came in, they would just
25 trigger the ambush like that, and he'd just fire for a few seconds. It didn't take long. Do a
26 quick search of the bodies, maybe, and then get out of there. Because once you did an
27 ambush, you wanted to get out of there.

28 KC: Right.

29 DS: And then go somewhere else. Most of the time we didn't hit anybody.
30 Nobody came into our ambushes. I don't know if they knew what the ambush area was
31 and they avoided them, which would have been smart. You know, it's a trail, it's a ford

1 of a river, or something like that. So we didn't ambush 'em many times. We got in more
2 firefights about, I won't say they ambushed us, but they normally initiated the firefights
3 that we were in. Now, we did catch them a few times, but most of the time they initiated
4 the firefight. Now I don't feel like we ran. I don't know what it was, but, you know,
5 they'd open up on us and we'd just start returning fire.

6 KC: Now, would just be, say, on just a kind of a (inaudible)

7 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, I don't know that we—I don't know, I
8 didn't think that we'd walk in an ambush or what, or whether we ran into each other. But
9 yeah, they would initiate the fire and then we'd return it. That's the way I remember most
10 of 'em like that.

11 KC: What kind of characteristics would you give to the Viet Cong enemy? What
12 kind of (inaudible)

13 DS: (speaking at the same time) Tough. Tough, tough. Yeah, we went out one
14 morning, and it was one of these VC villes. They knew there were VC there. So my
15 platoon, I don't think it was a company, I think it was a platoon. We went out there, got
16 lost out in that—it got so dark we got lost. Somehow, we made it to the ville and we
17 surrounded it. Now, of course when you're surrounded, you've gotta wait till they get
18 outside that circle or you're gonna kill your own people. Then at daylight, they sent a
19 fireteam or squad through to try to flush the VC out of the ville. I remember one of 'em,
20 he took off and went under the fire, he breaks the circle. Because we don't wanna hit one
21 of our own people. We were sitting there just kind of drinking C-ration coffee, and we
22 saw this guy running and they waited till he broke the circle. This guy with an M60 just
23 stood up and just shot him. I remember the guts just going everywhere and he went down.
24 Then there may have been another one, because a little bit later on that day we had to
25 shift our lines a little bit for some reason. One of the Marines in my platoon, I don't
26 remember who it was, all of a sudden, he just screamed. We ran over there, a couple of
27 guys, and he was literally scared to death holding an M14 on this VC. He'd sat down next
28 to him. He sat down next to this guy, was in a little jungle area someplace where there's a
29 lot of foliage and he didn't know the guy was there. That guy was holding his guts in
30 with both hands. It may be that one that the M60 guy got. He was literally holding his
31 guts in with both hands. Didn't make a sound. That's why my Marine buddy didn't know

1 he was there; he didn't see him. Then finally, he just moaned. I think what he decided to
2 do was he was gonna go and try to give up. My buddy was so scared, 'cause we said,
3 "Why don't you just kill him?" "I was so scared I couldn't pull the trigger. It had the
4 safety on." And that guy was tough. I feel sorry for the guy, I'm sure the South
5 Vietnamese killed him. But he sat there just for some time not making a sound holding
6 his damn guts in like that.

7 KC: Wow.

8 DS: Isn't that something?

9 KC: That's, like you say, that's tough.

10 DS: That's tough, that is. They could Chieu Hoi, you know, and he didn't Chieu
11 Hoi or anything. And I don't know why he didn't—who knows why he didn't kill my
12 buddy or anything, but I think he decided that he was sitting there trying to decide
13 whether he was gonna kill the guy, die, or just going to take his chances and surrender. I
14 think that's when he moaned because he knew then that guy was gonna see him. That's
15 tough.

16 KC: What would you say about their tactics? The way they were fighting you in
17 the jungle.

18 DS: Oh, I think they were good.

19 KC: What sort of things would they do?

20 DS: Well, actually, most of the time we just had the ambushes and stuff. I learned
21 more about their tactics when I started reading some books about them long after the war
22 and stuff like that. They were tough. You couldn't see 'em, you couldn't see 'em. They
23 dragged themselves off, the wounded would drag themselves off. They didn't—the body
24 counts—I sent up there, Kelly, just for the heck of it. We had a little—I'd forgotten we
25 had a little battalion newsletter, and there's only one copy of it. I believe that was the first
26 one that came out. It had some funny stuff in there. You know, about monsoons and the
27 rain, and all the gear that washed out of your foxhole and stuff. But it also had the list of
28 the confirmed kills at that time, you know, company by company and stuff like that.
29 Well, our confirmed kills had to be confirmed. Later on that got to be—the body count
30 got to be a joke and stuff, but our confirmed kills had to be confirmed. They had to be
31 dead right there. There were those guys that you'd hit 'em and you'd never find their

1 bodies. They'd find a hole to drag themselves off into and die somewhere. The reason I
2 think they're doing that is demoralizing. If you lost some people and you didn't have
3 anything to show for it or something. But I knew they were tough. But yeah, don't get
4 me—I wasn't doing a whole lot of thinking about this. I knew that we'd walk into an
5 area, like say they would initiate a firefight. Most of the time we didn't see 'em. We're
6 just firing back to wherever the fire's coming from. Very rarely did we actually see them
7 in a firefight. It was just a few times. The ones I remember seeing when we would be up
8 on this god awful hill, and if I remember correctly, the hill was supposedly so high it was
9 just covered with triple canopy jungle that the choppers couldn't get up on top of 'em.
10 There's LZ up there or something so we landed close, I guess to the base, and started up.
11 We were going on this trail, and we came to a place that had two poles over the trail, and
12 a C-ration carton, a piece of a C-ration carton. We knew what that was. Written in broken
13 English was, "VC country: we kill all who enter," and had a skull and crossbones drawn
14 on that thing. We walked through that thing and, you know, we felt like, yeah, these
15 people are serious. That's the only ones I saw were in those little firefights there like that.
16 Most of the time, if I saw one it would be like maybe in the ville, off a hundred yards or
17 something like that. That's that type of firefights we were in. So a lot of times we didn't
18 have any bodies to show for it because they'd pull 'em off or something like that. That's
19 most of the firefights. Like I say, we weren't thinking about their strategy or anything
20 like that.

21 KC: Sure.

22 DS: Just, they're firing at us and we're firing back.

23 KC: Now you were the RTO (radio telephone operator), you're following—I
24 guess it would be the lieutenant of that particular platoon.

25 DS: Yes, yes.

26 KC: Now once you would set up an ambush, once a firefight would commence,
27 what would you do? You're not on point.

28 DS: Oh, I'd fire. Yeah anytime there's a firefight, I'd fire.

29 KC: Okay, you're dropping down, you're firing your M14.

30 DS: Yes, yeah. And all that I would do is, you know, during firefighting, unless
31 somebody called me—you know, the Delta Company company commander called me, I

1 didn't have to do anything with the radio. Unless the lieutenant wanted me to
2 communicate traffic or something. So most of the time I guess I was just on standby just
3 in case somebody called me. I didn't do a lot of communicating. It depends on—like at
4 that time when I was in 3rd platoon, so I was Delta Three. So if they called “Delta Three,”
5 and I'd answer, “Three Delta, this is Three,” and they wanted to talk to the lieutenant,
6 they'd request “Three Actual.” So I'd tell the lieutenant they wanted to talk to him. But
7 most of the time I would just relay a message to the lieutenant, something like that. I
8 didn't do a lot of communicating. I just had to carry it all the time in case I needed to.

9 KC: Right, right.

10 DS: Yeah. And sometimes a squad would have PRC-10s—I mean 6's, which the
11 people called walkie-talkies.” Not all the time. Then I had to communicate with them too,
12 you know, like “1st Squad, you need to move faster,” or something like that.

13 KC: Right, a little coordination.

14 DS: Yeah, mostly. I didn't do a lot of talking on it. I just had to be able—ready to
15 in case I needed to. Yeah.

16 KC: Okay, what sort of things would you carry with you out in the field? What
17 would be in your (inaudible)

18 DS: (speaking at the same time) I'll tell you exactly what I carried. Sometimes if
19 we were going out specifically to ambush, we might not wear helmets, but most of the
20 time we did. So you got your helmet, I got the PRC-10, just on a packboard. I got one
21 battery in it, it's a pretty large battery, two or maybe three other extra batteries, because
22 that battery may or may not last. One hundred and forty rounds of M14 ammunition on
23 my belt, two canteens, a first-aid kit, a bayonet, and my K-bar. And then had the M14, C-
24 rations. When you're getting ready to go out, they would bring C-rat—the squad leader
25 would bring C-rations over, and in the Marines, there are fourteen guys to a squad—
26 although we didn't have that many, we were understrength. The C-rations are set up to
27 feed fourteen people. So they'd just bring up a box that would have fourteen. A squad
28 leader'd bring a box with fourteen C-rations, we called 'em C-rats. Well, with only nine
29 guys in a squad, then you got to pick. Nobody, as I remember, carried any extra. We were
30 very seldom hungry because it was just too hot over there. We didn't carry, again as I—
31 anything that you didn't absolutely need. We didn't carry 'em in these little boxes, we'd

1 take 'em out. And we had the thing called the heavy. This is like your main meal. That'd
2 be one can, and you'd put that in your pocket. You might have a dessert. If you were
3 lucky enough to get peaches, you'd put that in your pocket. And you have a plastic
4 spoon, and you put that up in your shirt or something. The C-ration can opener, it came
5 with each one of those, and eventually everybody had his own, and we'd wear 'em on our
6 dog tags, open those C-rations and everything. If I remember correctly, if we were gonna
7 be out, we wouldn't carry maybe more than one or two meals a day. We didn't carry a lot
8 of that stuff. That's one reason we lost so much weight. That's the way we'd get our C-
9 rations, so that's what I'd carry: a few C-rations, the two canteens, the ammunition, and
10 sometimes the lieutenant would have me carry his map, which I thought was awfully
11 cheap of him because he was just carrying a .45 and I couldn't say anything. And I liked
12 my lieutenant, don't get me wrong. I thought, "my god, can't you carry the map? It's just
13 a little bitty thing." Now, are you familiar with the way the infantry in the Marine Corps
14 would set up a platoon? You've got three rifle platoons and then a weapons platoon in a
15 company?

16 KC: Right.

17 DS: Okay, that's what we were. I was in a rifle platoon, and most of the time we'd
18 leave we'd take one squad of weapon with us. You probably know how that works. Three
19 squads to a platoon, so 1st Squad weapons would go to the 1st Platoon, the 2nd Squad
20 weapons would go to 2nd Platoon, 3rd Squad weapons would go with the 3rd Platoon. And
21 the weapons, of course the M60s and 3.5 rocket launchers, they were the weapons people.
22 So that's what I would carry out on patrol. They wouldn't let you take letters. You didn't
23 take letters or anything like that. I've heard about people taping their dog tags, I don't
24 remember taping 'em. I don't know if we did or not. I don't remember because the way
25 the dog tags fit down in my shirt; they didn't rattle anyway. They weren't touching each
26 other. We sweated so much it's like they'd stick to you. So I don't remember that
27 anybody said tape 'em up or anything. If I ever did, I don't remember that. We didn't
28 have any problems with the thing. Then you had to carry at all times this little thing that's
29 in a—they sealed this stuff in plastic, and it was our Geneva Convention card. Had to
30 carry that in your pocket in case you got captured.

31 KC: What did you think about that Geneva Convention card?

1 DS: (laughs) It's a joke. We knew that it wasn't gonna do any good, but we had to
2 carry it, yeah. And I had it for years and I've lost it. I guess it was the heat, but it looks
3 like that plastic—you know how you save a letter—what's the word for it when you seal
4 it in this plastic? The plastic looked like it had been melted. I mean, you could read it, but
5 it was shriveled up and everything. That had to be just from the heat and everything in
6 Vietnam. 'Cause I didn't ever put it next to heat, but it was definitely anything but new. I
7 wish I'd have kept that. I mean, well I did. I accidently lost it. I don't know where it is.

8 KC: Now, you've mentioned this a couple times, you've talked about the heat,
9 and of course this is obviously a tropical environment. But can you explain to me in your
10 words what it was like: the weather, the terrain. You had an awful lot of weight on you,
11 let alone being in a combat situation. What was the environment like on you and your
12 mindset?

13 DS: Oh, it was just hotter than hell. I'm surprised we didn't have people die from
14 heatstroke and stuff. And there was—I don't know. I wouldn't say you get used to it, but
15 it's just the way—it was just there. I was with a—I've been divorced twice, and my
16 second wife, she taught up here and we were walking somewhere in the summer and she
17 said, "it's hot." And I said, "You're bitchin'." I mean, how did I put it? I said, "Do you
18 know the difference between bitching and complaining?" She said no. I said,
19 "Complaining is when you say you're hot, bitching is when you say it's hot." Because
20 we bitched in Vietnam. And it was blankety blank hot, but nobody ever said, "I'm hot,"
21 like, you know, we're not? That's when I realized it's different between bitching and
22 complaining. Nobody complained, we just bitched all the time. (both laugh) Oh my gosh,
23 and your eyes and all that kind of stuff, you know, I'm sure it was much worse than I—I
24 don't think about that a whole lot. And your shirt, my gosh it's just like somebody poured
25 water all over ya. And there was no place to get cool. If you got cool it'd be because it
26 rained and it was nighttime or something. It might be a little chilly or something like that.
27 I don't know why we didn't have people die from heatstroke and all. I don't remember a
28 lot of breaks like, "Do you guys need a break?" Maybe they did, but I don't remember
29 'em. I remember we was going up this hill—and in my platoon, in my company, it
30 seemed like the little guys carried the big weapons like the M60s and everything.
31 Somebody said it's 'cause they make smaller targets. The M60 people are fanatic about

1 that weapon. They just would not let anybody else touch that damn weapon. And I
2 remember we was going up a hill and this young Marine that carried that M60 on his
3 shoulder, and I swear to god I thought he was gonna pass out. This other Marine said,
4 “Do you want me to hump your sixty for you?” And I thought that sixty guy was gonna
5 kill him. You’re not gonna touch this damn thing. I’d die before I let you touch one of
6 these things.” I never will forget that.

7 KC: Why do you think that was? Why the loyalty?

8 DS: I don’t know. It was their gun and by god—in fact, when we were mounting
9 out to go to Vietnam, I asked a gunner, M60 guy, I said, “Can I get a picture of me
10 holding that M60?” And he said, “No.” (both laugh) He said, “You’re gonna send it to
11 your girlfriend and tell her your big bad machine gunner, aren’t you?” I said, “No, I just
12 want hold that damn M60.” Well, they finally let me do it under the condition they stood
13 on each side of me in case I screwed it up some way. They didn’t know if I knew how to
14 hold a damn M60, so they’re standing there to make sure I didn’t hurt their little baby or
15 anything. But yeah, they were proud of being M60 guys. But yeah, they wouldn’t let you
16 touch it. That was their damn gun, and they’d die before they’d let somebody else hump
17 it for ‘em. But it’s hard to explain, I think about this today as hot as it is now and all the
18 heat warnings and all. It just makes me laugh because of what we went through over
19 there. I’m not saying they shouldn’t do it, but then I think about what we did and the
20 physical part of it. You know, take away the booby traps and all that stuff, just doing the
21 physical part of it, it’s just unbelievable what we did. Because we were out in that heat
22 24/7. Nobody felt sorry for you because we was all in the same damn thing. Run out of
23 water quick. Water discipline’s a bull. You got two canteens in the heat that seems like
24 it’s over one hundred degrees with all the humidity and you’re moving all the time. I tell
25 you what, those two canteens were gone. That one when we went up that that basecamp,
26 that’s the thirstiest I’ve ever been. We ran out of water quickly. They don’t just bring you
27 water and ammunition just ‘cause you ran out. They don’t do that. But that water
28 discipline was a joke. So most of the time we’re thirsty, and I don’t remember, we ran out
29 early that day and we didn’t—we were up high up on the mountain where there was no
30 water up there. And we moved all night because when we went through that VC
31 basecamp, we didn’t know where the rest of ‘em were. We estimated there were hundreds

1 of those guys. They must have been out on raids somewhere. That's why I say if they had
2 been there, I wouldn't have been here. So the lieutenant then was a stop. And then we
3 ambushed another group of 'em, and I guess rear guards sitting around eating that rice
4 just after we left that place. So we're trying to get the hell out of there, so we never stop.
5 And in the night, we couldn't see in front of you. I told my students, I said, "That's when
6 I realized that you can go to sleep walking." But I would start dreaming and I'd wake up
7 when I hit that damn floor of that jungle. And I could hear these other Marines dropping
8 like that, too. We just moved all that night, and then sometime the next day we came to
9 the first water. And I got a picture. I have a little display of not only Vietnam, but Civil
10 War stuff by these rooms here, and it's this Marine—you can see that jungle right next to
11 him and he's got his canteen in that water and he's looking right down that river. He's not
12 looking at that water or anything. That's the first water we got. I remember seeing a
13 snake when I was filling my canteens swim by. I said, "If you don't bother me, I ain't
14 gonna bother you." That was the biggest problem with being thirsty all the time. On the
15 heat, just all the time.

16 KC: Well, how do you deal with that? You've only got two canteens. You're in
17 this incredible heat with all this work and all this weight—

18 DS: I don't know. And I could say that that's the longest, I think, we went without
19 water. That's the longest we went without water. I've got a picture over here of a friend
20 of mine just before he got killed. It's up on my wall, it's framed. It's got the rubbing of
21 his name from the wall underneath. He's a 3.5 guy, he's got their ammo on his backpack.
22 And what they're doing is they are at this ville, this hooch, and it looks like they're
23 getting water out of one of the containers—the Vietnamese containers. So I'm sure we
24 get some of that, but you put those tablets in there to purify it and everything. But yeah, a
25 lot of times I don't know how we did it. Now, when we were gonna be out for three days
26 they'd bring water out there. You weren't out there the whole time, but you had certain
27 times that you had to be in an LZ to get resupplied with water and ammo. So it wasn't
28 like, "Well, go ahead and drink it up because in about an hour we'll get more water," or
29 anything. Yeah, you just had to watch it, I guess. If you ran out, you ran out because I
30 don't think anybody gave you sympathy for water. I don't remember that (both laughing).

31 KC: I'd be surprised.

1 DS: I just don't. We may love each other, but you ain't getting this damn water.
2 At least I don't remember that and, of course, if somebody got wounded, that was
3 different. So these are things that don't make any sense, you know. And, of course, if you
4 drink too much it hurts your stomach. But yeah, you only have two canteens of water
5 until you got resupplied. I don't remember, it might be that afternoon, but I guarantee ya
6 it wasn't just whenever you wanted it. That's what the lieutenant would explain. We had
7 to leave a firefight once because we couldn't miss the drop at the LZ. It was not anything
8 serious, but it was big old—and they was firing at us, and we was a pretty good ways off.
9 We had to break it off because we had to get to the LZ, 'cause if you're not at the LZ they
10 don't wait on you. We had to pick up ammo and water there. That was all part of these
11 patrols and everything, that you were scheduled to be at a certain LZ at a certain time and
12 you'd better be there 'cause they didn't wait on you.

13 KC: If you can, tell me about this. Like you say, it wasn't maybe necessarily an
14 intense fight that y'all were in, but nonetheless you broke away to make this LZ.

15 DS: Yeah.

16 KC: Tell me about that if you can. That whole (inaudible)

17 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah, because the way—see, we didn't have
18 enough choppers for everybody and so when they scheduled, you better be at this LZ for
19 ammo and water. You better be there right then 'cause they're not gonna wait on you. So
20 that one particular time the lieutenant said, "We gotta go. We gotta get to that LZ or there
21 not gonna be anything there." Then you didn't get any more until the next time you were
22 scheduled. So it was just too important. Maybe you were delayed by a firefight, that
23 would be a little bit different, but it was serious enough that you'd better be there. If you
24 wanted ammo and water, you better be there.

25 KC: But what about this firefight that you had to pull back from?

26 DS: That wasn't anything big. Like I said, I remember it was maybe 150 yards off
27 and it was a ville. I think we were going past it and some Charlies fired at us and so we
28 just returned fire, we weren't moving into the ville or anything like that, we just started
29 returning fire. I think we got one guy hit but I can't remember. We fired at it for a little
30 while, and not a long time, just maybe three or four minutes and the lieutenant said, "We
31 gotta go. We gotta move out of here." So we didn't go the 'ville, we just moved out." I

1 think waved goodbye (laughs) or something like that, and we had to break it off to go to
2 that LZ. I distinctly remember that. Because like I say, that when those choppers would—
3 you better be there, or you don't get the food or the water. It would be like missing a bus,
4 you know. You gotta wait till the next one comes. Of course, it would be somewhere else,
5 but that's what I remember. Now like I say, I wasn't taking notes on all this stuff. But I
6 do distinctly remember breaking off that firefight because we had to get to that LZ.

7 KC: Okay, now you've talked about the heat, you've talked about the lack of
8 water. What about things about the geography? What about things like the foliage you
9 came across? How was this effecting you as you're trying to hump your way through?

10 DS: Oh my god the jungle was thick as anything you've ever seen. You could not
11 see in front of you. I mean, people say you couldn't see a foot—in some cases you
12 couldn't see the Marine in front of you. These people that exercise by climbing steps,
13 you're doing that all the time, you're climbing. In the jungles they had what we'd call the
14 "wait a minute vines" that would get all over you. It was like it took a lot of energy just to
15 go anywhere in that jungle. Out in the rice paddies that was easier, we'd be walking on
16 the dikes most of the time. Maybe it would just be the heat. It'd be like walking out in the
17 fields here. The hills and the mountains were the worst terrain. I mean anybody that goes
18 mountain climbing—well, not like mountain climbing, but you goin' up an incline and
19 it's not made to be going up and stuff like that, carrying all that stuff. One of my favorite
20 scenes in the movie *Platoon*, if you remember that first one, they went out and they're
21 trying to get up that hill and they're helping each other come up. That's what I remember,
22 stuff like that. Not quite as bad as that, but that was more realistic than anything I've
23 seen. A guy was dropped down and maybe— well, I don't think we slid any, but we'd be
24 walking like that all the time. There was no easy walking unless it was in the rice paddies
25 or something, not in the paddy, but on the dike. That would be the easiest walking. I
26 don't remember if we were in jungles more. I don't remember. I know we were in a lot of
27 jungles and we were in a lot of rice paddies. Sometimes we were in both at the same time,
28 like in that time we got mortared we were coming out of the jungle and got out to the
29 patties there and that's when they hit us. The terrain was just tough. I found out that I
30 Corps, which is where we were—it's got the Roman numeral for one, you know?

31 KC: Right.

1 DS: That that was the roughest terrain in Vietnam. I didn't know that until I was
2 reading years later. Westmoreland wanted the Marines out there because it was tough
3 terrain. Mainly it was the jungles and the mountains and stuff like that. I know there were
4 some tough places elsewhere, but I didn't see 'em.

5 KC: Well, you mentioned this time where you're coming out of this, out of these
6 hills out of the jungle into more of a flat kind of (inaudible)

7 DS: (speaking at the same time) In the opening area, yeah.

8 KC: Yeah, in an opening, and then getting mortared. Can you take me through
9 that time?

10 DS: Well, we was just coming out, and believe it or not we killed a couple of VC.
11 We were supposed to bring this Viet Cong back. We had him tied on a damn pole, and
12 the reason was—it wasn't to confirm the kill. Now this, I hadn't hand it to the lieutenant
13 or something, this is what we were told. But they had some Vietnamese down somewhere
14 and they were gonna look at him and try to see if it was a local VC or if he was from the
15 North or something, so we had him tied on there like damn deer. And we were coming
16 out of the jungle and just got into the clearing when we heard those pops. And I sure
17 thought I was carrying—doing my turn of carrying that guy. I was on the back. I know I
18 took my turn because the dead VC—one of his legs, I forget which one it was, but just
19 barely hanging, just by a little bit of skin. While we were walking, he was bouncing up
20 and down and I thought, “if that leg breaks, it's gonna hit me right in the damn face.”
21 Then when we heard the pops, I remem—I think I know who was on the other front of
22 that pole, and we threw him one way and that's when we jumped to the ground. And
23 there's like I told you, they mortared us about, oh maybe just a minute or so. And that's
24 when Vega got hit, got killed. No, Vega, that's another Marine, he got wounded up in
25 that other place. That's when Fernandez got killed and a couple of other people. We
26 didn't pick—it just happened real quick like that. And it was scary, because like I said,
27 you were completely helpless with those mortars coming in on top of you like that.

28 KC: Well what do you guys do in response to this?

29 DS: We were firing back, but we didn't do it right away. 'Cause most of the time
30 we'd just hit the ground and we didn't return fire. It was hard to tell, we couldn't tell
31 from the pops exactly where they were. It was like an area where you hear sound, but you

1 can't tell what direction it came from. It was like that. But we saw some hills that we
2 thought maybe that's where they were, so we returned some fire. Called in the medevacs;
3 and then after they loaded the dead and the wounded, then we still had to get to the LZ. I
4 remember my radio had gone out. I don't know why, but I asked the lieutenant if I could
5 walk point. I guess 'cause I had seen too many movies. Ended up—because my radio was
6 gone. I don't remember if it was out of batteries or what, it was just no communication.
7 He said "okay." But he said, "Watch it, because I'm sure they're gonna ambush us before
8 we get to the LZ." I wish he hadn't said that. I never walked point again after that.

9 KC: What was walking point like for you?

10 DS: It was scary. Oh my god, if he had said that I think it'd been all right.
11 Because I had to watch out for them, and what am I looking for? You're moving and all
12 that. The lieutenant was pretty close to me, so it wasn't like I'd get lost. He said, "Go
13 more left," or something like that. But it was just the responsibility and all that, that's all
14 it was for me. I never asked to walk point again. I thought it was some big, bad, neat
15 thing you could do, and it wasn't. Not as far as I was concerned.

16 KC: Now were you guys ambushed while you were on point?

17 DS: No, we weren't, but we thought we might be. Just that suggestion reminded
18 me that we could. No, we weren't. So it turned out to be okay, but I didn't walk point
19 anymore after that.

20 KC: You mentioned—

21 DS: We did have one guy that liked to walk point. We called him the nickname
22 the "Point Man." At that reunion I asked him why, and he said because he couldn't trust
23 anybody else. So that's why he always liked to walk point. And the way you did it, you
24 know, and you've probably interviewed others and know that there's really—in my
25 platoon there's nothing random. You know, 1st squad, which fireteam, 3rd fireteam, 2nd
26 fireteam, 1st fireteam. And so you rotate the point every now and then, and so when I say
27 he liked to walk the point, it depends on whether his platoon or his squad would be in that
28 position. It wasn't like he did it everyday. But he seemed to—we called him Point Man to
29 this day. I only did it once, and I didn't care for it. (both laugh)

30 KC: I can understand why.

31 DS: I didn't care for it.

1 KC: During this episode where you were being hit by these mortars, how do you
2 know when it's okay to get up? How do you know when it's okay to call in the medevac?

3 DS: Well, you called 'em in anyway. Now, I didn't call it in. We may have been
4 on the company because I didn't call in the medevac although I was a radio operator. It
5 may have been a company size, that would be the only reason I wouldn't have done it.
6 Once the mortars stopped, that's when we started calling 'em in. And like I say, they
7 could have opened up on us again too, but they just didn't do it.

8 KC: May have packed up and gone.

9 DS: There may have been some firing, I don't know any were firing where the
10 mortars were coming in, but I think everybody was just down on ground. And then after
11 it we were trying to figure out where they were. That's why I remember we couldn't
12 really tell, but there was an area where we thought there were, so some guys that just put
13 some fire up there. Wasn't much we could do. We thought we knew where they were,
14 and then I know some guys—I don't know if we put any mortars up there, but I know
15 some of them fired up there, but there wasn't a whole lot we could do. We figured they'd
16 bugged out by then. We figured they had a few rounds, they fired 'em at us, they bugged
17 out. It's what we figured.

18 KC: Oftentimes the way worked, is my understanding.

19 DS: Yep.

20 KC: You mentioned a little while ago, you were talking about the M60 and the
21 loyalty that your buddies had, the guys in your squad had with the M60. Can you tell me
22 a little bit about the weapons that you would have in your platoon, the ones you liked, the
23 ones you didn't like, what you would have liked to have had. Tell me about the weapons.

24 DS: Well the weapons we had—now, we were still using M14s, and were very
25 fortunate. That was a good weapon.

26 KC: Why did—that's always the case. People who use the M14 like them. Why
27 did you like the M14?

28 DS: It never misfired, it never jammed on you, it would knock a man down, it was
29 a killing weapon. There was some VC that we killed with them. As I remember, it was
30 like you took a meat cleaver and just took chunks of the guy off. It wasn't like the
31 movies. I've never seen anything like that. But the main thing is that it never jammed on

1 us, it never misfired, and it would kill a man. I mean, it was a deadly, deadly round. You
2 did have to—we kept it as clean as you could. But in the infantry, you can't keep it clean,
3 especially out in the bush like that. So the squad—we went over what we called TO,
4 Table of Organization, fourteen to a squad. We never had that. But in each squad in a
5 platoon, in a rifle platoon, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, I was 3rd platoon. You had three rifle squads,
6 supposedly fourteen each. You had a squad leader, you carried an M14. Next to him is a
7 grenadier with an M79, a grenade launcher. I thought that was neat. And then you had
8 three fireteams, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The fireteam would have the fireteam leader with an M14
9 automatic rifle. That's the M14, an automatic. He carries more ammo. He's the only one
10 who's got it on him. Then a scout or an assistant AR, and a scout. And you had three
11 fireteams to a squad. So we had three automatic rifles to each squad. Back to our rifle
12 platoon: and then the weapons was M60s and 3.5's. People call it the Bazooka, that was
13 the weapons. People say, "Well, how come all of ya'll didn't want automatics?" First off,
14 they're not gonna let you do that. You can't change 'em. I didn't use an M16. I don't
15 know if they could change 'em semi-automatic to automatic. We couldn't. You had to go
16 to an armory. But we didn't do that because you'd run out of ammunition. We had to
17 have fire discipline. I don't remember anyone that didn't have an automatic M14 that
18 wanted it on automatic. I mean, just pulling the trigger was fast enough for us. But yeah,
19 we had, except the M60s and everything, our rifles were all M14s, except the ones that
20 were on automatic; the three AR's in each squad.

21 KC: Did you eventually get the M16?

22 DS: Oh yeah, that was in the weapons—no, no, no, no. Oh no, sir. We never did.

23 KC: Okay, you never did.

24 DS: I'm glad. I think just judging from some film and stuff that I've seen and
25 some of the pictures, it must have been about November or December of '66 by the time
26 that Marines started getting those M16s. Because I had a friend in college that was in a
27 place called The Rockpile over there and he got wounded three times. He got, oh man, all
28 messed up. And he was still using M14's. I've got a *Life* magazine and it has some
29 pictures from—it's 1966. It's the one that's got the wounded black Marine on the cover
30 and everything. I'm sure you've got it there.

31 KC: Yes.

1 DS: And those are M14's. So it had to have been sometime after that. But I never
2 saw an M14—I mean M16. I never used one.

3 KC: You also mentioned a moment ago, you said something about running into
4 booby traps on one of these patrols. What sort of booby traps did you encounter?

5 DS: Oh my gosh, some of them were Bouncing Betties. I had a friend killed—in
6 fact, the guy whose picture's up on the wall, he was killed by that and some type of
7 explosive. He accidentally hit a—well what had happened is there was a firefight, and he
8 was a 3.5 man. The lieutenant thought they saw a target and he called that fireteam up.
9 While he was jogging up there, he hit an empty C-ration can, which was a trigger for that
10 Bouncing Betty. It came up about waist high and just exploded. That was one of the type
11 of 'em. There were punji traps. That didn't bother us too much, believe it or not. We'd
12 find some of 'em. Some of 'em were pretty large, but I don't remember anybody in my
13 platoon that ever fell into one of 'em or anything like that. Some of them were just hand
14 grenades, where you would just have a wire and pull the pin and trip it, and they'd have
15 the pin out. It had the spoon—have it wedged in between some vines or something like
16 that. And that's the most of the ones we ran into. We were pretty lucky though. We didn't
17 have a lot of that. We had some, but not much. Rhodes got killed by one. And again, this
18 is just in my platoon. Guys are getting hit with the other stuff, but I didn't see them. And
19 the other companies and stuff liked that.

20 KC: As you're moving through on one of these sweeps, one of these search and
21 destroy missions, you mentioned occasionally that you will come across a ville. You'll
22 come across a group of huts of these Vietnamese hooches. Take me through the process
23 by which your fireteam, which your squad and platoon would work its way through, or to
24 and through one of these villes.

25 DS: Yeah, the way we'd go through 'em—and again, because as radio operator I
26 don't remember if guys were told to go in and search 'em. A lot of times we were just
27 moving through the ville to go somewhere. I remember that we knew whether there was
28 VC in the area or not, because if you went into the ville and they came out and they were
29 laughing and the kids are asking for cigarettes or candy and stuff like that and they're
30 saying, "Marine number one, VC number ten," there's no Charlies around there. When
31 we go in a ville and they don't come out and they stay in those hooches—in those

1 hooches and they don't come out, then VC are around there somewhere. We didn't do
2 any My Lais or anything like that. Now, if we'd gotten fire from one of 'em that'd have
3 been a different story. But this is just going through a ville like that. There was one—we
4 went through one like that and we got hit on the other side. Now whether they knew there
5 was Charlies over there or not, I don't know. At least I don't remember whether they
6 were inside. They may have been inside, and we got hit on the other side. But that's what
7 we did. And if anybody was going through to search the thing, it would have been in
8 squads and I wasn't doing that. But I don't remember guys in my platoon going into the
9 hooches and pulling things out and anything like that. We were just moving through the
10 ville. I don't recall actually searching it. We were just searching for Charlie; we weren't
11 searching the hooches or anything.

12 KC: Did you ever suspect that the villes would be friendly to the VC? That maybe
13 (inaudible)

14 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah. Yeah, we knew even when they were
15 being friendly to us, just a show. Oh yeah, we figured they were VC. Like I say, we
16 didn't waste 'em or anything like that. But when they came out and said, "Marine number
17 one" and all, we'd just laugh at 'em. You know, *dien cai dao* (crazy), and all that kind of
18 stuff. We did think about it a lot, but we pretty well knew they weren't on it. They could
19 care less about us.

20 KC: Well you say you didn't think about it much, but I would have to think that
21 as you approach a village and you strongly suspect that it is a very VC friendly village or
22 just flat out a VC village, you would have to—I would think, anyway, consider that the
23 children there could be dangerous to you.

24 DS: Oh yeah.

25 KC: That the women and the old men could be dangerous to you. How do handle
26 a situation like that in your mind?

27 DS: Well the way we did it is if they weren't trying to kill you, we just left 'em
28 alone. And you'd watch them. I mean, it wasn't like you didn't watch them or anything
29 like that, 'cause we knew if they had a hand grenade or something like that. It's kinda
30 hard to explain. You know, they were out there being friendly we didn't bother them. If
31 they weren't out there, they were in the hooches and we didn't go looking for 'em or

1 anything like that. And I know in the firefights, we didn't care. I mean we didn't care
2 whether it was—if we were in a firefight, anybody that was firing at you was VC. We
3 didn't think about what they call "collateral damage." We didn't think about that. If they
4 were firing at us, we'd kill 'em all. But if they weren't firing at us, we didn't do it. And I
5 don't remember thinking a whole lot about whether they—I pretty well felt they weren't
6 on our side or anything, but then we were told, you know, "Yeah they are." So I didn't
7 think a lot about it. If they weren't trying to hurt us, we didn't bother them.

8 KC: Okay.

9 DS: Yeah.

10 KC: What kind of interaction did you have with Vietnamese civilians?

11 DS: Very little. Very little. They'd come out, even those kids would bum a smoke
12 off of you. I think candy, we didn't have any candy. Chocolate would have melted over
13 there. We may have given 'em—but I can't see 'em giving 'em—maybe somebody gave
14 them a C-ration or something. Mainly what they wanted was cigarettes. They'd come up,
15 and "Marine number one, VC number ten," and stuff like that. We just, "Yeah, yeah,
16 yeah. *Dien cai dao*." And, yeah, *dien cai dao*, (laughs) you know, stuff like that. I don't
17 remember any—and people say, "I bet you hate rice." I never ate any of that food. I
18 didn't eat any rice or anything. I wasn't about to. I ate C-rations. Because in one of those
19 villes man, you know, filthy. My god, they were filthy. I know we saw 'em picking lice
20 out of hair and eating it and stuff like that. And the stink. I don't know what they're
21 eating, but the last thing I wanted to do is eat anything they had in those pots. Yeah, its
22 amazing people, people say, "I bet you like that"—I guess they thought we went to
23 Vietnamese restaurants or something like that (both laughing). You know, they're
24 shocked that you didn't eat rice and take in the local cuisine. No, we didn't do that.

25 KC: (laughing) Yeah, that certainly wasn't in your mission.

26 DS: No it wasn't. We didn't eat any of that junk, no. But yeah, it's just kind of
27 amazing and a lot of it, which—I think the best way to do it is right now is the only time
28 that you worry about, right this second. You didn't think about one hour from now or
29 anything. At least we didn't, you know. If they weren't trying to kill us, we're not gonna
30 kill them. And we didn't talk to 'em a whole lot. At least I don't remember anybody
31 carrying on conversations. Every now and then we'd take an ARVN (Army of the

1 Republic of Vietnam) out for a translator, but we didn't do that very often. He might ask
2 'em something, but I don't—and I'd been with the lieutenant, but there wouldn't have
3 been a whole lot that I remembered. I don't remember a whole lot. We took some ARVN
4 out, it could have been VC. And they had these dogs; I guess German shepherds are
5 supposed to find where they hid the ammo and all that stuff. This dog was going crazy,
6 and we found out that they didn't feed this poor dog. He was hungry as everything. Every
7 time we came to our little cave or something, he was just going crazy. They turned out to
8 be worthless. Oh, I will say this. We took a few of the South Vietnamese out with us, and
9 there was this one kid—and we took breaks, I know we did. I mean, it can't be as bad as I
10 thought, you know. I remember sitting out there—and we're out on a patrol somewhere.
11 He looked like he's maybe eighteen years old. I guess he knew some English, not very
12 much, but he knew some English. He was an enlisted man, too. He found out I was from
13 Texas, my nickname was "Tex." Oh, it just thrilled him. He pulled his wallet out. He'd
14 been to Da Nang or Saigon and got his picture made riding a stick horse with his chaps
15 and his cowboy hat and his cowboy shirt. He looked at me and he showed me that picture
16 and he said, "Do I look like a real cowboy?" And I said, "Yes sir, you do. You look like a
17 real"—and it was the silliest looking thing. It was those old, like those sheep-haired chaps
18 and everything. That's what he had on. He was on a stick horse. He says, "Cowboy,
19 cowboy. This like a real cowboy." And I said, "That's exactly what a cowboy looks like."
20 That made him feel good.

21 KC: Oh, I bet you made his day.

22 DS: Oh, it made him feel real good, because I was from Texas and all that kind of
23 stuff. I asked him, I said, "When are you getting out of the Army?" He looked at me like I
24 was crazy. Says, "I'm not." He said, "Unless I get killed, or I get maimed, I'm in here to
25 stay." You know, I realized we was pretty lucky. We was gettin' out of there someday
26 and I felt sorry for the kid. Of course, you know how they were treated; nobody's gonna
27 help them. You talk about helping us; they didn't help them at all if they got hurt. So I
28 felt sorry for the little guy. And, you know, I always wondered what happened to the boy.
29 That's the one time I do remember. I mean, he had that picture of him. I guess he was in
30 Da Nang, he went to a photo studio or something. Oh, and Elvis. He had his hair like
31 Elvis Presley.

1 KC: (laughs) The best of American Culture.

2 DS: Oh yeah, Elvis and cowboys. Yeah, he had those duck tails and everything
3 under his helmet. Oh yeah, I remember that. Elvis was the man, yup.

4 KC: Why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Stroud?

Interview with David Stroud

Session [2] of [2]

Date: July 15, 2009

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. David
2 Stroud. Today is 15 July of 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Stroud is joining me
3 from Kilgore, Texas. Off the record a moment ago, Mr. Stroud, you were talking about a
4 few different issues that you would like to discuss. One had to do with someone in your
5 company winning the Navy Cross. Why don't you, if you would please talk about that a
6 little bit. Explain what you know about that, and who this gentleman was.

7 DS: Okay. I didn't really know him; he was in my battalion. He was in Company
8 A, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, and his act was 11 July 1965. His name was Brian J.
9 Gauthier, G-A-U-T-H-I-E-R. Basically, they went out on operation and I mean, came
10 under intense enemy gunfire. Virtually everyone was wounded. And although he was
11 mortally wounded, he refused evacuation. He gave encouragement for firing, and it was
12 several hours. He finally died from his wounds and everything. That's the only Marine in
13 my battalion with that award, but that's the highest award in the battalion. We had one or
14 two Silver Star recipients, a few Bronze Star recipients and a lot of Purple Hearts and
15 stuff like that, Navy Commendations. The other thing I mentioned was killing that VC
16 courier and having his document translated. And basically what it said was, "Tell us how
17 to fight these US Marines. They do not scare, they go anywhere, they have faces like mad
18 dogs. Tell us how to fight these US Marines." And I think that's because our battalion
19 had trained so well. That we were really pretty good. Sergeant Colby from *Rumor of War*,
20 he had said that ours was the best battalion he'd ever served with. And he did at least two
21 tours in Vietnam, the one before that as an advisor before he joined us, and he had also
22 served in the Korean War. That was basically what I was talking about, and then got off
23 on all these ribbons and everything. Oh, you know, they got overboard on those things.

24 KC: Let me interrupt you for just a moment on each of these things. Now, the
25 medal, or excuse me, the Navy Cross winner, in this particular firefight, this particular
26 battle, was your company, was D Company involved in that?

27 DS: No, nuh-uh.

28 KC: Okay.

1 DS: That's why I didn't even know about it. But he was in our battalion and it
2 was probably a company exercise or something. We weren't involved in that.

3 KC: Okay.

4 DS: We may have been—I know we were doing something else, but I don't know
5 what it was. One thing about *Rumor or War*, you may know this. He left our battalion
6 about March, and that's when we really started going out into the bush and everything. It
7 was about when Caputo left our battalion.

8 KC: Is that right?

9 DS: Yeah.

10 KC: Now, did you know him at all?

11 DS: I think I saw him once, but he was an officer in Charlie Company. When a
12 unit would go out, we'd have to stretch our lines to cover the gap that they created in
13 their lines. I was radio operator with my lieutenant, and we went over to Charlie
14 Company, and because lieutenants can't talk to us the way they talk to each other, you
15 know, it's a whole different thing. I remember going up there with him being his radio
16 operator, and all those platoon commanders from Charlie Company were there. I know
17 one of them had to be Caputo. One of them saw me—and I'll tell you this, I'm not
18 making this up. My lieutenant's name was Yax, Y-A-X. He asked Lieutenant Yax, he
19 said, "I want to trade radio operators with you." And Lieutenant Yax said, "Why do you
20 want him?" He said, "he's got killer eyes." (both laugh) I like to think that was Caputo.

21 KC: Even if it's not it makes a good story, doesn't it?

22 DS: Yeah, oh yeah. And I mean whoever it was, that's what he said, and my
23 lieutenant said, "Nope, nope. Not gonna do that." That made me feel good even then.

24 KC: You know, the things that you've talked about here so far briefly today all
25 bring me back to a general point that I think that you might be in a good position to make
26 about the VC's impression of your outfit of the Marines of the 1st/3rd, of course you're in
27 D-Company. You talk about, you know the impression that this officer, whether it's
28 Caputo or not, had of you, and of course this Navy Cross winner. What was it about your
29 unit that you think made your group so effective as a fighting force? What are the
30 ingredients that made that happen?

1 DS: I think one was we had trained together. I was thinking about this the other
2 day. That after bootcamp, I joined that particular unit in—gosh, when was it? Oh, it was
3 in the summer out at 1st Marine Division. Let's see, I got out of bootcamp in January—
4 February, March, April, May—about June. We started training there and then we went
5 over to Okinawa and we don't go to Vietnam until January. Well, we were training all the
6 time, up in the jungles and everything. We knew what we were doing. And unlike the
7 other units where they had the replacements coming in and all that kind of stuff, we had a
8 camaraderie that was just unbelievable. Unbelievable. And we didn't even know it. That
9 brotherhood, amazingly, is not that we liked everybody in the unit. But we didn't realize
10 how close we were. We could trust every man in that unit. You never had to worry about
11 him going to sleep on watch, you never had to worry about him covering your back. You
12 could trust every one of those people. And I think that was something maybe that we
13 could do a bit different. I think a lot of our training—and I'll tell you something else with
14 those killer eyes, which I didn't realize I had. My momma said I had nice eyes (both
15 laugh). But in my first battalion reunion I was up there visiting, drinking beer, and
16 cracking jokes. One of the guys in that battalion looked at me and he said, "Why are you
17 cracking jokes?" I said, "Well, I always have." He said, "You never any funny thing in
18 Vietnam." He said, "I never saw you smile." And I don't believe, I can't think of ever
19 cracking one joke or smiling the whole time we were in Vietnam.

20 KC: Is that right?

21 DS: Yeah.

22 KC: Why do you suppose that was?

23 DS: I think we'd gotten into a thought of mind where if—I've told people, you
24 know, when we're visiting and stuff—we were as close to being an animal as you could
25 be and be a human. Like when we killed people, it was no more bothersome than killing a
26 bug. It didn't bother anybody, we wanted to kill them. It was as close to being an animal
27 as you could be. And that's the way it was in Vietnam, and I felt like that about it. We
28 didn't talk about it, but just thinking back that's just the way it was.

29 KC: Let me ask you to expand on that a little bit. Now, obviously you're living in
30 the bush, you are facing life and death circumstances all the time, you're with a bunch of
31 other men which can have a decivilizing (inaudible)—

1 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yes. Oh yeah, you're just dehumanized. Yup.

2 KC: What sort of specific examples can you give me about this kind of behavior
3 or this kind of mindset? And what does that do to you as an individual?

4 DS: Well, you know I was seeing something on the news yesterday about having
5 problems with these combat veterans committing murder when they come back. I don't
6 know if you saw that. There's also some drugs in there too, and all of that. I don't know
7 about—that didn't bother me. I mean, once I got out of combat, I didn't have any
8 problems. I didn't bring any of that stuff home or anything like that. I don't know of
9 anyone else in my unit that did. The only one I know that went to prison didn't go to
10 prison for killing anybody, he went to prison for drugs. But there was something about
11 that. I mean, you were in the filth all the time. You were hot. You were sweaty. I only
12 remember taking one shower, and as I say, I don't say I only took one, I can only
13 remember taking one. And that wasn't a shower like here. That was in a little makeshift
14 shower that had a bucket—I mean a pan that had holes in it. One Marine would pour five
15 gallons of water in, and that's what you used to soap up; and another five gallons to rinse
16 off. There were no doors or anything on it, but the reason we didn't do it is you're just
17 gonna go back and get filthy again. I mean, there was no sense in doing it. You stunk.
18 Everybody stunk. You were filthy all the time, didn't sleep under a roof at night. We had
19 tents in the daytime that we could go up there and lounge around, but at night, we were
20 back in our bunkers, or back to our fox—or we were on patrol. And you lived out in the
21 rain, you lived out in the heat, and everything. I mean, you were as close to being an
22 animal as you humanly could be. And as far as killing, I did not know one Marine over
23 there in my unit there were ever bothered by that one little bit. Not one bit. Nobody
24 fussed. They just didn't do it. It was a rout—it wasn't even routine. I don't know how to
25 explain it, it was just a non-thing that you did.

26 KC: It seems like it would be just a part of life.

27 DS: It was, yeah. It's hard to explain the attitude that you had. Even to this day I
28 don't know anybody that's ever gotten bothered by that stuff. But anyway, that's just—
29 we were as close to being an animal as you could be. Now there'd be some joking and
30 stuff, but it wasn't, it wasn't a whole lot of it. A lot of the joking had to do with killing
31 people. You know, like blowing his damn guts out and stuff like that. I didn't think about

1 that too until years later about how close to an animal we were. I don't any other way to
2 describe it. And it was the living conditions and all that. I don't know. We just, we lived
3 out there so much. That's just the way it was.

4 KC: Well now, this is a little out of our chronology here, but it's something that I
5 think is important to mention. You were also talking about the awarding of medals in
6 Vietnam and how you were somewhat disappointed with the way they were, of course,
7 with the way were awarded. Can you talk about that a little? Give me your impressions
8 about that.

9 DS: Well, at the time I wasn't, but like I was telling you that—I think you had to
10 do a little bit more to get a medal at that time when we were over there, like with one
11 Navy Cross and all of that. The only reason I say that is because as the years went by, I
12 went over to a museum in Long View and there was a Bronze Star citation for a soldier in
13 the museum, and so I read it. What he got that for was being a company commander for
14 six months in tanks, and as far as I know, he never even got shot at. Well, that's not what
15 you got Bronze Stars for in 1st Battalion 3rd Marines, I guarantee you that. And I started
16 seeing what some of these other citations were and I started thinking, "We didn't get
17 anything like that." So it seemed like it got a little bit more generous in handing out the
18 medals and stuff as they went further on. We were told later on that because the
19 casualties did start increasing to try to boost morale, they got more generous with that
20 stuff. But that's about all—I guess that's about all I have to say about that. And I think
21 they've really gone overboard now, I really do.

22 KC: What do you think that does to the value of—?

23 DS: Oh, that's the thing. It just decreases the value. It's an inflation that's—how
24 can you appreciate anything if you have so many of them? And the people that don't
25 know what they represent, if they were to see a Medal of Honor recipient, I don't think
26 they'd recognize it. Especially if they didn't have it around his neck if he just had a
27 ribbon on. I don't know, it just gives the wrong impression of these guys. And everybody
28 that's in the Army now, and I'm sure the Marine Corps, you know, they get three or four
29 rows of ribbons by doing one tour or something like that. I don't know, I just think
30 they've gotten too generous with them. And people in the service that I've talked to,

1 some of them would tell you the same thing. That they'll laugh at what they get those
2 ribbons for now.

3 KC: Why do you think that came about? You talked about morale, but do you
4 think that was the only thing?

5 DS: It may, I don't know. I think it's whoever it is that comes up with all these
6 different things, I think they thought it was gonna do some good. I don't know why, but I
7 mean some of the ribbons that we got retroactive that—well, we got one that we'd been
8 in combat. Well, that's okay. I'm kind of proud of that, but we didn't have that when I
9 was in, that's retroactive. It's called a Combat Action Ribbon.

10 KC: When did you receive that?

11 DS: Oh, I didn't get that. I got it framed up here. It was about five years ago.

12 KC: Oh, really?

13 DS: Yeah. It's not done by the—it's something when they made it, they came up
14 with it, it's retroactive back through Vietnam. And then I had to send proof of service that
15 I'd been in combat off to the Commandant. It's a Marine Corps ribbon, not even a medal.
16 And then they look to make sure you've been in combat, and then they awarded it. And
17 it's called the Combat Action [Ribbon]. They didn't have that during Vietnam. When I
18 was in the Marines, when I got out, I had the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam
19 Campaign Medal, the National Defense [Service Medal], and Good Conduct [Medal].
20 That's all I had. Now I've got, oh, about three rows of ribbons. (laughs)

21 KC: That have come to you since you left the Marine Corps?

22 DS: Yeah, uh-huh. I got one for being a drill instructor of all things.

23 KC: Wow.

24 DS: Yeah, that was unheard of. I got a ribbon for being a drill instructor. I got a
25 Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for nothing. You tell someone you got a Vietnamese
26 Cross of Gallantry; they'd think you're a hero. I didn't do a thing for that. So anyways,
27 that type of stuff.

28 KC: Right.

29 DS: Yeah, one called the Civic Action [Medal]. Going out there and helping
30 Vietnamese civilians. I don't think we ever helped any Vietnamese civilians.

31 KC: So your unit wasn't involved in civic issues?

1 DS: Some of them were. Like in that Da Nang four holer, I think it mentioned
2 somebody down there helping somebody, yeah. But its ribbons like that, that I don't
3 think, to me, aren't really necessary.

4 KC: You weren't involved personally any civic action? Cleaning wells or
5 anything?

6 DS: No, nuh-uh. No, we were just combat. I can probably think of some more. I
7 haven't looked at them or thought about them for a long time. But a lot of them, like I
8 say—I took 'em. I rated retroactive, I took 'em, but they don't mean anything. The
9 Vietnam Service and the Combat Action are the only two I care about.

10 KC: What about the officers?

11 DS: They tend to get medals a little bit quicker. Oh yeah.

12 KC: Sure.

13 DS: I don't know a single officer that was in Vietnam that didn't get out at least a
14 captain and get the Navy Commendation with Combat "V." Every one of them. Every
15 one of them got that. It's like checking out the door, here are your captain bars, and
16 here's your personal decoration. I heard the colonels—and I got this, I believe in *About*
17 *Face*, [memoir by David W. Hackworth]—oh, what was the name of that guy? I can't
18 think of his name. Everybody's read it. Army guy. I'll think of it in a minute. But in the
19 Army a colonel could fly over a firefight and get a Silver Star? You fly over a firefight
20 and get a Silver Star? I'll think of his name in a minute. And the guy that he replaced, his
21 battalion commander had lost a lot of people and had not one single dead VC. He got
22 promoted and a Silver Star for outstanding duty over there.

23 KC: Amazing.

24 DS: Yeah! Oh, *About Face*, I'll think of his name. He died not long ago. It'll
25 come to me. Great book about Vietnam. But yeah, officers, they always got 'em a lot
26 easier. I hate to say this too, but I have a book on all the Medal of Honor recipients from
27 Civil War through Vietnam. And now that the—boy I hate to say this. There was an
28 officer Medal of Honor recipient and I read his citation compared to these privates, and
29 my opinion's not quite the same.

30 KC: How so?

1 DS: It just didn't seem—well, of course I even hate to say this because I don't
2 want to criticize a Medal of Honor, he didn't ask for it or anything like that. It just didn't
3 seem like it was in the Medal of Honor vocabulary. And it may have been, I wasn't there
4 or anything like that. I'm sorry I brought it up, but I just couldn't help it, it just wasn't
5 what these privates were doing. Like in World War II, you know, MacArthur getting a
6 Medal of Honor. For leaving Bataan [Bataan death march] of all things, you know?
7 (Laughing).

8 KC: Well with McArthur, you either are a fan or you're not a fan.

9 DS: And I'm not a fan.

10 KC: And there's no in between for Douglas MacArthur.

11 DS: No. "Dugout" Doug.

12 KC: Well, that brings up another good area here. What about your officers? What
13 was your opinion of (inaudible)

14 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh, I will tell you, ours were good. I didn't know
15 many higher up. We could answer the name of the battalion commander and stuff, hardly
16 ever saw him. Now, we had a captain. The only reason I'm gonna tell you this is because
17 it's in *Rumor of War*. And he's passed away now, but it's in *Rumor of War*. He didn't
18 name him. He didn't name him, but he told who he was. Now, he gone out with us on an
19 operation and we got mortared; and he ran. I mean, he ran big time. Never went back out
20 in the bush again. He gets a Bronze Star. (laughs) He got a Bronze Star.

21 KC: What about the leadership of your officers? Whether it's platoon leader or
22 (inaudible)

23 DS: (speaking at the same time) Now other than that captain—and we said—and
24 I'm gonna tell you what we said. The only thing wrong with him he was in the Army
25 before he came in the Marine Corps. We did. That's what wrong with him. He got too
26 much Army in him. But my Lieutenant, my platoon commander was Lt. Vernon Yax, and
27 I'll tell you, that was one heck of a good officer. I used to teach about Vietnam, and I
28 don't anymore. I would give an example. Lieutenant Yax was not a career Marine, and
29 we got to 327. He called the platoon around and he said, "I'm not a career Marine. I'm
30 not looking for medals or anything like that." And he said, "I'm not gonna sacrifice any
31 of you to get a good Fitness Report." [Officer's periodic performance evaluation] But he

1 said, “We’re Marines and we’re gonna do our damn job.” And we did. And I’ll give you
2 one example of what he did. When we were up on that mountain looking for that VC
3 basecamp that we finally found by stumbling into it and had that firefight, where Vega
4 got wounded.

5 KC: Right.

6 DS: Well, we’re out in the middle of this triple canopy jungle and we had to get a
7 medevac in. And you look at a map and the only way to know where you are is by key
8 terrain features. Well, you can’t see key terrain features in the middle of a jungle. And so
9 what the lieutenant did was this: he got on the radio, he looked at his map, and he picked
10 out our coordinates. He doesn’t have a clue whether that’s where we are or not, but if you
11 look at the chance, chances are we’re not there. Then he called in an artillery strike for
12 that coordinates and he told us to listen to the artillery. And when we could hear the
13 shells exploding, he walked it over so he could get close enough to us that he knew what
14 coordinates to call the medevac in.

15 KC: Wow.

16 DS: Now these are the lieutenants that all the movies portray as being stupid. If
17 any sergeant ever told Lieutenant Yax what to do, it wasn’t while I was with him.
18 Nobody ever had to tell Lieutenant Yax what to do. And like I say, he wasn’t career or
19 anything, that was just—and so the officer we had, except for that captain, I thought were
20 good. I didn’t like all of them. Of course, Lieutenant Yax is the one I saw all the time, but
21 he was my platoon commander.

22 KC: Now you were with him as the RTO.

23 DS: Yeah, with him 24/7, yeah. The XO (executive officer) and the captains and
24 other platoon commanders, I never was with them. But I didn’t hear anyone complain
25 about ‘em. I just think they were good. I think especially the Marine Corps officers were
26 good.

27 KC: What makes a good officer in general?

28 DS: I think just knowing his stuff. Knowing his stuff, not wanting to sacrifice
29 anybody for a ribbon or a medal or anything like that. That when he tell you to do
30 something, you know that he knows what he’s talking about. You don’t have to question
31 it. You know, I’ve heard since then about other units like an Army unit that was told to

1 go down this road and they said they're not gonna go down that road because that's a
2 trap, that's an ambush. The reason they had to go down that road is because they was
3 calling in a B-52 strike and they didn't have time to go back any other way. But they had
4 to sit there and explain it to those people before they'd go down that road. Where in the
5 Marine Corps they didn't need any explaining, you just went down the road. And if they
6 told you to do that, you went. At least with the ones that I had. They didn't get close to
7 you. An enlisted man would talk to an officer, even my lieutenant, in third person. He
8 never said "you" or anything like that. And the reason is, of course, he doesn't want to
9 get—we're not pals. We're not buddies. We're not acquaintance. He's a lieutenant and I
10 was a lance corporal. That was a relationship. And that kept that distance and, like I say,
11 just mainly knowing he knew what he was talking about. I don't remember anybody ever
12 questioning him or not doing anything he said. He was just a good officer. He knew what
13 he was doing, and he did it. I assume he cared about us, he said he did. And he's the one
14 guy at my battalion reunion I wanted to see, and I saw him last summer. I was sure glad
15 to see him. I told him he was a great lieutenant. So other than that, I don't know. You
16 know, they know what they're doing, and they do it. And you could tell they knew what
17 they were doing. Other than that, I don't know. Now also, I don't know who all—I'm
18 sure you've interviewed a lot of them, and this isn't necessarily for in the bush, but
19 another thing in the Marine Corps, it's like on payday and in the chow line, you eat in
20 reverse order of rank. The privates go first, the PFC's, lance corporals, and all of that.
21 Officers are always the last. And I think that's important, too. You take care of your
22 people before you take care of yourself.

23 KC: Was that pretty common in the Marine Corps when you were in it?

24 DS: Oh yeah, that's the way it was, yeah. Yeah, that wasn't an individual choice.
25 It was like that as far as I know, every unit. And that would be like hot chow. Over there
26 we got paid every two weeks and we'd get MPC, Military Pay Certificate. But most of
27 the time we just left it on the books. We didn't have anything to do with the money
28 anyway. But even then, you went in reverse order of rank. Privates first, PFCs, and all
29 that stuff, yeah.

30 KC: There's a common held way a lot of people remember a lot of their officers
31 in Vietnam was that they were, indeed, there to give their ticket punched.

1 DS: Yes. And that's especially the Army, and that's another—I wish I could think
2 of that guy's name. It'll come to me in a minute. That's another difference between the
3 Marines or the Army: they serve six months, got the ticket punched, and moved up. The
4 Marines didn't do that. They were there the whole tour. The same lieutenant, if he didn't
5 get killed or wounded, he was there the whole tour. They didn't ticket punch.

6 KC: Was Lieutenant Yax with your platoon the entire time then?

7 DS: Yes, he was. And I found out that was true of all the Marines. That was
8 different from the Army.

9 KC: Well let me shift gears here a little bit and talk about some of the, oh, some
10 people would probably call it more mundane issues. But as an individual in a combat
11 zone, I don't know that they would be all that mundane. It might be the thing you really
12 looked forward to the most. But what about life when you would go back to basecamp?
13 What sort of things would you do? How often would you come back and what would you
14 do?

15 DS: Well the base, we didn't have that. It's different from later on. We were on
16 Hill 327, and that was what we'd call "the front lines" and we went out from there. So we
17 came back to Hill 327. So it wasn't like—and I used the movie *Platoon*, which I thought
18 was a good movie. They didn't come back to rear echelon where they did dope and all
19 that stuff. We didn't have that. We came back to Hill 327, and that's where we came back
20 to. Every now and then a member of the squad get on a six by truck and they take them
21 down to Da Nang for the PX (Post Exchange). He had a shopping list of things to get for
22 you. But we didn't get any delivery into town or anything like that. A few of us did get
23 R&R, and the way we did that was the lieutenant put our names in a helmet and he drew
24 names. I happened to get my name drawn and I got to go to Bangkok for two nights and
25 three days, but not everybody got to do that.

26 KC: Now how long had you been in country when you got this first R&R?

27 DS: Oh gosh, eight months maybe.

28 KC: Eight months?

29 DS: Yeah.

30 KC: What did R&R mean to you after eight months in the bush?

1 DS: Oh my gosh, all we did was drink and sleep with them gals. We never went
2 to that hotel room, that's all we did. It was a real nice hotel that we checked into and we
3 left our uniforms there. And the way I remember it, we didn't come back for three days to
4 pick the uniforms up to go and get back on the C-130 to go back to Vietnam. All we did
5 was drink and stay with them women. That's all we did.

6 KC: The whole time?

7 DS: The whole time. No sightseeing or anything like that, yep. We had these
8 Thais, these kids, they were like bellhops at this hotel. They'd take us around and they'd
9 help us to keep us from getting cheated and stuff like that. And when we were leaving,
10 there were three of us that I remember. They gave each of us what I call a Buddhist Saint
11 Christopher. And they said, "If you wear this, you won't ever get killed." I wore that on
12 my dog tags. (laughs)

13 KC: Is that right?

14 DS: I still got it.

15 KC: Now this was a small Buddha that you'd hang from your neck, I guess?

16 DS: Yeah, and I've had Asians look at it, and they don't know which Buddha it is.
17 I mean, they can't identify it because if you could it—but yeah, it was one of these
18 Buddhist medals that you'd wear. And so I wore that on my dog tags and I've still got
19 that thing. But yeah, that's all we did was drink and stay with them women. That's all we
20 did. Yup.

21 KC: Well, after eight months in the bush, you get your first R &R, and only R&R
22 I assume.

23 DS: Only one, yup.

24 KC: Okay. You look forward to this. You do everything that you can that you
25 want to do while you're on R&R. Now when your time is up in Bangkok, you've gotta go
26 back up the (inaudible). You have to go back to work.

27 DS: Yup.

28 KS: When you headed into country you didn't necessarily know what to expect,
29 but when you're on R&R, you're on a brief break from all of that. And now you've gotta
30 head back, and you know exactly what to expect. What was it like for you to leave
31 Bangkok and go back to the action?

1 DS: Honestly, it wasn't all that bad. I mean, we knew we were gonna be there for
2 three days and the camaraderie of that unit, I mean, it's just one of those things like,
3 "Well, I gotta go back." And being a platoon operator I took a lot of pride in that. "If my
4 platoon needs me back up there"—and I don't remember dreading like, you know, "oh
5 my god, I might get killed or something." I don't remember that. None of us did. There
6 were three of us and it was just kind of a matter of fact thing. We got back—and I got a
7 picture this guy took of us on that air strip in Da Nang. I went down—and I was about
8 130 pounds at time. And I went in the Marines at, oh, around 210. I got out of bootcamp,
9 175. Went into Vietnam about—I was down to about 128 pounds. It is unbelievable. And
10 we're all like that. But no, I don't remember having any real big problems with it or
11 anything like that. It's just something we had to do, and we were glad we did it. That's
12 all.

13 KC: Was anyone resentful that you three got to go and no one else did?

14 DS: No, I don't remember that. Even if they were, they didn't say that. We didn't
15 have enough R&R so that everybody got to go, and so I know not everybody got to go.
16 But I don't remember that. Even when I got back—and we didn't know for a long time. I
17 mean, it wasn't like you know what day you're leaving two months ahead of time. It was
18 sort of like last of the minute type of thing. And so it wasn't like I knew for weeks ahead
19 of time I was going. It was almost like instantly. At least that's the way I remember it.
20 But no, I don't remember any resentment or anything. If there was, I didn't recognize
21 any.

22 KC: In the brief times that you were down, when you're not in the bush, when
23 you go back to the Hill, what sort of things do you and the other Marines talk about?
24 What do you do to relate to one another? What sort of things did you have going on with
25 each other?

26 DS: Okay, when we weren't—well, even then at the bunker where you're
27 standing watch and everything, you could visit down there. But we'd go up to tents and
28 we talk about girls, girlfriends. One of the big things is what kind of car you're gonna get
29 when you get home.

30 KC: What'd you want?

1 DS: Oh, I wanted a '57 Chevy because I hadn't gotten one. Even then, that was
2 such a classic and everything. I never did get a '57 Chevy. I was into drag racing. Not big
3 time, I had a '60 Impala that I drag raced unofficially out on the highway. But some of
4 those guys, of course, they're really into the engines and everything and so they wanted
5 Thunderbirds and stuff like that. But what kind of car are you gonna get, what were you
6 gonna do? I made up my mind I was gonna go to college and everything. But a lot of
7 what are you gonna do when you get out, you know, and what kind of car are you gonna
8 get and stuff like that. That's what we talked about. We really didn't talk about Vietnam
9 or anything like that. But mainly girls and what we're gonna do when we got out. Yeah,
10 that's mainly what we talked about. And I don't remember anything else. Oh, and we'd
11 let each people read our love letters (laughing).

12 KC: So you're writing letters?

13 DS: Yeah, if you got a girlfriend, you know, you got you a letter, you share it,
14 make sure you let everybody read it. Yeah, you had to share that kind of stuff (laughing).
15 Yeah, show pictures, stuff like that.

16 KC: Right. Now were you corresponding with folks back home? Did you have a
17 girlfriend back home?

18 DS: Yeah, but she didn't stay with me very long. Of course, you know we
19 couldn't be married and get into the Marine Corps in those days. Which I think is really
20 good, especially for the privates. You know, when you enlisted in those days you could
21 not be married. As I recall we had to ship over [reenlist] and get company commander's
22 permission and the corporals. So we didn't have any wives to worry about, we just had
23 girlfriends and stuff like that. But yeah, I had a girl from high school that I wrote to and
24 she kept writing to me, but I think it's just because she felt like she had to. I wanted her to
25 be my girlfriend. I don't think she was. And then there was another one, this beautiful
26 twirler. I didn't know where she was. I knew she's University of Texas, so it felt like
27 Forrest Gump. I just wrote to the University of Texas. (laughs) About a month later I got
28 it back, you know, of course undeliverable. It needed a little bit more address than that.
29 Yeah, but we talked about girls. We didn't drink—well, we couldn't. The Vietnamese
30 would come up on our lines, these little Vietnamese kids, and they'd sell us this beer. I
31 believe it was a nickel. We called it Tiger Beer and never seen an ice cube. And so we get

1 a couple Tiger Beers, but, you know, we got to keep that from the officers and
2 everything. We never got drunk, but we'd get a couple Tiger Beers. Oh, another thing,
3 too. When we went out on patrol, if you killed a VC and it was confirmed, of course, then
4 when we came back you were given all the—and I think Caputo had this in his book, too.
5 That you were given beer and time to drink a couple of those things. That was your
6 reward for killing somebody, was a beer. And it would be American beer, too. It'd be
7 Budweiser or something like that.

8 KC: Right.

9 DS: Yeah, the problem was most of the time you couldn't get a confirm because
10 of the way the jungles were and everything.

11 KC: Right, and like you say the VC hauled their dead and wounded.

12 DS: Yeah, oh yeah. A confirmed kill was difficult. I mean, there were a few of
13 them. There were a few of them, but vast majority weren't or anything like that.

14 KC: What about you? Did you get any?

15 DS: Yeah, well I'm gonna tell you this, and I don't know about—I maybe told
16 one person. It wasn't confirmed, but I know I killed one—and the only reason I'm doing
17 this is because we are interviewing about what went on. It was that time we found that
18 basecamp up in that jungle. The way I remember it we were in single file and we had a
19 fireteam ahead of us. And all of a sudden there's a lot of gunfire, and that's when Vega
20 got hit. Lieutenant Yax was motioning for everybody to get up there where the gunfire
21 was. Now, this is amazing, but what I remember we were single file and on the near edge
22 of this giant mountain. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of 'em running. Just
23 running. And I just shoot him, and it took him out right there. And I remembered firing. I
24 knew it was empty when it didn't recoil anymore, and a guy went down. I didn't tell the
25 lieutenant that. Now this is where it sounds like BS. And I didn't tell anybody that. Now
26 I'm gonna tell you why I didn't. Because I didn't wanna make somebody—it wouldn't
27 have been me—to go over there and try to find that dead VC to get a confirmed kill. You
28 know, to call in or anything. So I just didn't tell anybody about it. And that's the only one
29 that I killed. I didn't tell anybody about it then because I didn't want anybody to have to
30 go over there and try to find that guy. And I'm pretty sure I killed him. If I didn't, I sure
31 hit him. That's the only one.

1 KC: Now, you talk about these confirmed kills and body counts and things like
2 that. What was your opinion of trying to measure progress in the world in terms of enemy
3 (inaudible)—

4 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, and again, that was later on. We didn't do
5 that. Now it was good to get kills, but we had to have 'em in front of us and stuff like
6 that. When I say a confirmed kill, that's a confirmed kill for the unit was a dead VC. It
7 didn't matter who killed him. A confirmed kill for the individual, it was just kind of like,
8 "Well you've got him, and somebody saw you shoot," and all that kind of stuff. There
9 were cases where two guys would be shooting at one and they'd get in an argument about
10 who killed him. The reason was if you killed a guy, you got any souvenirs that were on
11 him. And that was the reason. Plus it was macho. You didn't get anything extra for it or
12 anything like that. Yeah, later on when I was reading about the importance of body count
13 and everything, you know, and they started inflating it, you know, two plus two equal
14 eight and all that kind of stuff. It just didn't do any good. I mean, it's just trying to put a
15 good picture on a bad situation. But that's another thing in '65 with us, we didn't inflate
16 the body count or anything like that. They had to be there. We had to know they were
17 dead. At Da Nang four holer they had the list of the confirmed kills and everything. And
18 there weren't many of 'em because they were hard to get. But a lot of that stuff I didn't
19 know about, we were so early over there. A lot of this stuff develops after we leave. After
20 I left, I didn't read about Vietnam or anything like that for what, twenty, twenty-five
21 years. That's when I decided to teach a course, so I'd learn something about it, make
22 myself learn about it. So I started reading a little bit about it then. That's when I started
23 learned about the inflated body counts and all that kind of stuff. Hackworth, Colonel
24 Hackworth, that's the guy.

25 KC: Okay. Right, right, right, right, right.

26 DS: Now I just thought of his name, yeah. That when I got out—well, when I was
27 a drill instructor, of course, you did that. We'd hear what was going on in Vietnam, but
28 didn't—what were we gonna think about it? Nothing. We're just training our platoons.

29 KC: Right.

30 DS: Of course, then we didn't know—we were military, we thought we were
31 winning and all that. Then I went to college. Every now and then I would pay attention

1 'cause I went to college. I got to SFA just when Tet Offensive hit. So I was watching that
2 on the news. Well, I knew it was bad, bad, bad of the Tet Offensive. But I didn't think we
3 were gonna lose. I didn't think about it that much or anything. My roommates were both
4 Marine Vietnam vets. I don't know if I told you that last time, Pat Burke, boy, he got shot
5 to pieces over there. Well, we never talked about the war or anything like that. Not a bit.
6 Just asked what unit you were with and that was about the end of that.

7 KC: Right

8 DS: Yeah.

9 KC: Well, when you were back at the Hill, whether you're in a bunker or standing
10 guard or whatever. You're a Marine and you were of the West Coast Marines, as it were.

11 DS: Yeah, Hollywood Marines they called it.

12 KC: Yeah, who else was with you? Did you have—you're obviously from Texas.
13 Who else was with you? Guys from California, guys from—

14 DS: Oh yeah, California, Boston, New York City. My lieutenants from New York
15 City. Indiana, Ohio, all over, all over. We had Mexicans, we had blacks, and we had
16 Italians. Oh man, we had 'em from all over the place.

17 KC: Now that must have been quite a change of pace from someone who is
18 somewhat isolated in East Texas growing up. What was it like to live with these guys?

19 DS: Well, I kind of got introduced to that in bootcamp. Although it was so much
20 different from East Texas, especially back then, I really didn't think that much of it. We
21 had a corporal that talked with that Boston accent, so I kept trying to—I'd tell him to say
22 "garage." I'd never heard anybody say garage like that (both laughing). Then he had me
23 describe a date in Henderson, Texas. He'd never heard of anything like that either. You
24 know, and I'd ham it up a little bit, you know. Like take 'em to the Strand Theater and
25 then go to the Dairy Queen and buy 'em a cherry coke, you know. Oh, he'd just laugh his
26 ass off. My mother sent the *Henderson Daily* newspaper over there, which was all of four
27 pages. Lieutenant Yax was describing in the *New York Times*, and when he saw that
28 Henderson Newspaper fall out of that mail sack, he could not believe it. Then you read
29 some of the news in there, you know, "Cow Got Loose." (both laugh) Yeah, and I don't
30 know. I just didn't think that much of it. It was interesting because my best buddies,
31 neither one of them were from Texas, they were from Ohio. Never thought anything

1 about it. I knew a few Texas, but to me it wasn't a big deal about Texan. I was one of 'em
2 too. One of the Texans was Hispanic, and I think one was an Anglo like me. But there
3 was no reason to be especially good friends with a Texan. Because we were from
4 different places too. I mean, it wasn't like somebody from my hometown or anything like
5 that.

6 KC: Right.

7 DS: I mean, these guys were—I think they're good guys, but they weren't the
8 type you take home to meet mother, either. I mean, some of 'em were pretty rough
9 characters. Yeah, but the two guys I was with, one was Ohio—I think both of them were
10 from Ohio. They were just good people, and most of them were. I guess most of them
11 were.

12 KC: Now, you mentioned earlier that—

13 DS: Oh, let me say something, but I don't know what other people tell you. This,
14 again, is just my platoon. These nicknames. You know, everybody's uncle's seen Forrest
15 Gump. That guy was a Vietnam vet that wrote that and all that. A lot of it is just humor,
16 but when Forrest Gump says that Tex's his nickname and he's from Oklahoma and all
17 this kind of stuff. Well, that's not the way we got nicknames. I'll say this, but as far as
18 camaraderie and all that stuff among our platoons, you never called another Marine by
19 his first name. Ever. I don't care how close you were; you never called him by his first
20 name. You always used his last name or his nickname. Never called him buy his first
21 name. Nicknames seemed to be assigned. If they called you something and you didn't
22 like it, that's your nickname. You're stuck with it. (both laughing) Like Wop, Wet Back,
23 you're stuck with it. Then some would of 'em just be—my nickname was Tex for
24 obvious reasons and stuff like that. Not everybody had a nickname, but that's the way
25 you got 'em. If one of 'em called you something and you didn't like it, you're stuck with
26 that damn name the whole time. There are guys in my battalion, even when I go to the
27 reunions, I know their nickname, but I ain't got a clue what their real names are.

28 KC: Is that right? Still till to this day.

29 DS: Yeah, to this day. Or I may know his last name and I won't have a clue what
30 his first name is. That's just the way it was. You just didn't call their first name at all.
31 Last name or nickname and that was it. Yep.

1 KC: You mentioned a little bit ago that some of these guys were a little rough.

2 DS: Yeah.

3 KC: You didn't necessarily like all the guys.

4 DS: No, you didn't. And that's the strange thing about the camaraderie; we didn't
5 realize what we had until you lose it. I think that's true of a lot of things because some of
6 these guys had been in trouble, and the way I understood it, if you got in trouble and you
7 went to the recruiting office and they did this background check, they'd just misspell
8 your name. Put two E's in it instead of one or something like that. Some of the guys from
9 the cities, they were pretty tough guys. So I didn't necessarily like every one of them, but
10 after we left, and especially after I got out of the Marine Corps, is when I realized how
11 close we actually had been. I had never had friends like that ever again. Ever, ever, ever.
12 Again, it was something that you had but you didn't even recognize it when you had it.
13 Again, it's something you didn't know you had until you lost it. Once it was gone, you
14 never had anything like that again.

15 KC: What was it like to lose some of this, this camaraderie?

16 DS: It was devastating. It wasn't like I know I'm losing it, it's when you start
17 thinking back. That when I went to that first reunion and I saw those guys for the first
18 time after twenty years, it was like coming home. I'd never felt like that with any other
19 group. It was unbelievable. I think it's because they saw you in pretty tough times, and I
20 was nervous about going. I found out some of the others were. Because you wanna make
21 sure that you did okay over there with, we was all worried, you know. But we did okay.
22 But when I saw—the first one I saw was Sergeant Colby, and it was just like coming
23 home after twenty damn years or something. Virtually nobody talked war stories. We got
24 drunk. God almighty, we got drunk. We just talked. We we visited, we talked if you had
25 wives and stuff. But it was just unbelievable what a relief it was. I just can't describe
26 what a feeling it was with those guys. That's when I really realized what we had over
27 there. I've told my brother this and he agreed. I said, "I was closer to those guys than I've
28 ever been to you." And that's because of the situation we were in. We did things together
29 that my brother and I have never done together. And it not only was it combat, it was
30 going to these places in Okinawa and stuff like that. We did everything together. And you
31 live together. That's just where it came from. You trusted those guys. You didn't have to

1 worry about—they had your back. They took care of you as best as they could. There’s
2 never been anything like that again. Ever. I’m sure that’s the way these units feel today.
3 They don’t realize it until they get home; and they realize it then that that’s something
4 else. I don’t know any other way to get it.

5 KC: Were there any instances of trouble? Of people just not liking one another to
6 the point where there was hostility within the unit?

7 DS: Not that I know of. But again, you know, this memory and all. I do not
8 remember that anybody was trying to kill anybody else. I don’t remember any big
9 fistfights or anything like that. Even back on Okinawa—I just don’t remember it. I mean
10 they’d cuss each other out and stuff like that, but I don’t remember anything like that. Not
11 in my platoon. They’d just kind of leave each other alone or something like that. I don’t
12 remember one single fistfight like that. That doesn’t mean there wasn’t one, but I surely
13 don’t remember one like that. The things they’d do, they say some of this stuff I don’t
14 know whether to tell you or not, but we had this one guy that fell in love with one of
15 these Okinawan prostitutes. He was just madly in love with her. So he’d never do
16 anything with her, but everybody else would. Well, his buddy came back and went over
17 to his rack and woke him up and told that he had been with her. And boy, that guy came
18 out of that—now, there was one fistfight, but it was just funny as hell. But no, I don’t
19 remember anything like that. I just really don’t. Not from my platoon.

20 KC: What about issues of race? You said there were African Americans, that
21 there were Hispanics, and whites.

22 DS: Yeah. There was probably a little tension, but nothing that spilled over like
23 the race problems that are gonna come about later, you know. Of course the blacks were
24 proud of being blacks and stuff like that, but I don’t think anybody ever rubbed it in. I
25 just don’t remember anything. To be honest, you know what, my best friends were
26 whites, and the blacks went off with the blacks. Even in a platoon, you know. If they
27 wanted to come with us, they could have, but I don’t know. But yeah, there was a little bit
28 of tension, but nothing that erupted into any fights or anything like that that I know of. I
29 know when we was getting ready to leave I told this one black Marine that if he ever got
30 into Henderson to come by and I’d buy him a good hamburger. He looked at me and he
31 said, “You can’t do that, Tex.” He said, “They don’t serve niggers in Henderson, Texas.”

1 You know, they didn't in those days. That's when I realized, no, I couldn't do it. We
2 couldn't even go into Henderson hamburger joints together.

3 KC: Well, what was that like for you? You've grown (inaudible)

4 DS: (speaking at the same time) It was strange. I mean, we've been over fighting
5 together and that was true then. There were places in Henderson, Texas I could not have
6 taken him. And, yeah, that was kind of strange. Yep. And you know what, I told him,
7 "Well, I'll bring it out to you." (both laugh)

8 KC: How'd he react to that?

9 DS: Yeah, he just laughed. He just laughed. "After this place there's a car hop,
10 we'll just order from the car then. So I'll just bring it out to you." But I don't remember
11 much. I know it got worse a little bit later on, and it probably got worse among guys that
12 weren't in the combat area. You know, I just can't see doing that in combat. You know,
13 back in the rear, that'd be different. But I don't really remember much. Although there
14 was a little, you know, because I wasn't with blacks when I was growing up or anything
15 like that. But we seemed to tolerate each other pretty good. You know, I've forgotten a
16 lot of this stuff, too.

17 KC: Sure, sure.

18 DS: You know, I have forgotten a lot of it. You know, stuff that went on
19 everyday, but nothing so outstanding like someone almost killing another guy or anything
20 like that. Of course, some of the guys in there, like I said, with these nicknames and
21 everything. I mean, they would be just the type that would pick on somebody. I don't
22 remember anything that bad or anything like that.

23 KC: Well, what about when you're getting short, when your time to come home is
24 starting to draw near? What sort of things are you thinking about?

25 DS: Well, I was mainly thinking about what was gonna do. Now, I wasn't getting
26 out of the Corps, so I knew I had a couple more years. We weren't, you know, I think I
27 told you last time, we thought we were gonna go to Pendleton and then come back to
28 Vietnam. We were gonna just—I wasn't worried, that's just the way it was. It wasn't
29 anything to think about. Well, we'd mainly talk about what we was gonna do when we
30 got home on leave and stuff like that. Then when they—I don't remember if they told us
31 they were gonna break us up, or we just got orders and found out that we were broken up.

1 But I don't remember saying goodbye to anybody except—I guess then because when we
2 got back to the states, we got orders of where we were gonna go after our thirty days
3 leave, and that's when we knew we'd been broken up. But I was gonna go to the 2nd
4 Marine Division and my best buddy was gonna go there too, so that was okay. You
5 know, what company are you in, but that was about it. Mainly what we were gonna do on
6 leave and stuff like that. Get drunk, go out with the girls and that kind of stuff.

7 KC: When did you leave Vietnam?

8 DS: I left Vietnam in September of '65. Went to Okinawa. We did a—they took
9 us to the Philippines to—the ship did. We went Manila for a day or so, got drunk over
10 there. Then went to Hong Kong for two days, back to Okinawa. And we were there about
11 three weeks doing whatever it took to get us ready to come back to the states. Then was
12 another thirty-five days or so on that troop ship before we got back to the states. When
13 we were coming in that's when we found out there were thou—as I remember, thousands
14 of protesters there to greet our ship when we got in.

15 KC: In '65, this was in?

16 DS: In '65. It'd been in the newspaper that we were coming in. The way I
17 remember it when we got off that ship there was a line of police officers from San Diego,
18 and we had to go between them—running—between them to get on this Marine Corps
19 bus.

20 KC: As early as 1965?

21 DS: Sixty-five, yes sir. And they were screaming. I won't say they were spitting,
22 but boy they had the signs and everything. In '65.

23 KC: What was your reaction to that? That must have been very strange, I would
24 think.

25 DS: It was. Again, it's amazing, you know, I just thought "this is stupid" and all
26 that kind of stuff. It's kind of hard because—I don't know. I just thought it was weird and
27 everything and got on the bus. I was so glad to be getting home and all and my buddies
28 said, "You know, if they give us those M14s back we wouldn't need any policemen over
29 there."

30 KC: Which is why you didn't have the M14s.

1 DS: Yeah. And then a lot of people—some of these people think that they give
2 ‘em to you and you just bring ‘em home. You can’t do that. They loan them to you; they
3 want ‘em back.

4 KC: They want them well used, but they do want them back.

5 DS: Yeah, they want them used, but boy, they want them back. So when we were
6 coming back to the states, we didn’t have any weapons on ‘em, and even when we were
7 going over, they would’ve ‘em down in the cargo hold and everything. But yeah, we had
8 San Diego policemen there and what we called the “cattle car” is what we were getting
9 on. And it’s a truck, like an eighteen-wheeler with a big thing in the back that they carry
10 passengers and everything in. But yeah, we were met by protesters. Yep. It didn’t bother
11 me too much then, and when I got home to Henderson, I’ll tell you what, I found out that
12 there were people that were calling my parents at three o’clock in the morning telling ‘em
13 I’ve been killed over there.

14 KC: Really?

15 DS: Momma told me that. I bought a ’62 Chevy. Had a Marine Corps emblem on
16 it. They came by and egged that damn car. They egged it. One of the reasons I mentioned
17 it was so long out of country until I got back home, my mother told me years later; she
18 said, “Even after all that time.” She said, “You were wound up tighter than a drum.” And
19 she said, “When somebody came to the door, I prayed they weren’t coming to see you.”
20 And I did not realize that. I was still wound up from all of that, and that was after over a
21 month out of country.

22 KC: Now, you say that you were wound up.

23 DS: Yeah.

24 KC: You mean in terms of just your general attitude (inaudible) combat?

25 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, general attitude. And again, I didn’t realize
26 that until my mother told me years later. I thought I was just a good ole guy, but she
27 apparently said I was wound tight as a drum. She was literally scared if someone was
28 coming over to see me. And I didn’t realize that. And even to this day, I mean like to be
29 honest, when I talk about Vietnam like this, I won’t sleep tonight. I won’t do it. You can’t
30 explain why, you just won’t do it. And there’s no reason for it. There’s absolutely no
31 reason for it. There it is, so I guess that’s what it was. Where we’ve been and what these

1 people were like over here, my god. It was more important about who won the damn high
2 school football game. We'd see guys get—we had guys killed and everything. And that
3 got me more than anything. Then I went down to SFA to see my brother, he was enrolled
4 down there. Those students just shoot me the damn finger because I had that Marine
5 Corps uniform on. Of course, not right up close or anything like that. That was kind of
6 hurting. And then a little bit later on, I'd been in cafes and stuff where they literally had
7 signs "No dogs or Marines served in here."

8 KC: Is that right?

9 DS: Yes, sir.

10 KC: In the Henderson area?

11 DS: Well, not in Henderson. This was up in the—not around Camp Lejeune or
12 Parris Island, but kind of off in the area. Not all of them, but I've seen that. I was in the
13 café once with a uniform and nobody would come wait on me. So I asked a waitress and
14 she said, "We don't serve dogs and Marines." I just got up and left. Did I tell you about
15 the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) that slammed a door in my face?

16 KC: No, you didn't. Is this when you just came back?

17 DS: Oh, it's in South Carolina.

18 KC: Okay.

19 DS: A couple of buddies of mine, we had our uniforms on—or maybe we didn't.
20 We had the short haircut and we decided to go the VFW there to get some beer and
21 knocked on the door and they opened it. We may have had or uniforms on, I don't know.
22 This guy said, "What do you want, boys?" We said, "Well, we wanna come in and get a
23 beer." He said, "You been in a war?" We said, "Yeah, we was in Vietnam." And he said,
24 "No, you had to be in a real war to come in this place." He slammed the damn door in our
25 face.

26 KC: Now, I would assume this would be a World War II era veteran?

27 DS: Yes, World War II. "Had to be in a real war to come in here, boy."

28 KC: How's that make you feel?

29 DS: Oh, mad as hell. I had people here at college, twenty years later, in the faculty
30 lounge where we used to go. He was an 82nd Airborne, and when he found out I had been

1 to Vietnam he got up so mad, cussing me out. He left that damn lounge. He said, “At
2 least we won our damn war.”

3 KC: Wow.

4 DS: And I thought, “What about these guys sitting with me that weren’t even in
5 the service? You’re not mad at them. It’s just me you’re mad at.” And he was, mad at us.
6 And it wasn’t just here, it was on vacation. I had it quite a bit. I had a Vietnam vet shirt
7 on, Marine Corps, and this guy out in damn New Mexico somewhere in an antique
8 dealer, he said, “Were you in the Marines?” “Yes sir.” “Were you in Vietnam?” “Yes,
9 sir.” He said, “We didn’t have no damn parade when I came home.” I said, “I didn’t have
10 no damn parade either.” You just wonder what—it just bother you. Shut up, man. We
11 didn’t have no—my god. Yeah, they still—now they don’t do it quite like they did, but it
12 was a long, long time that they just wouldn’t let you forget that they were in the real war,
13 you weren’t.

14 KC: So it sounds to me that you got it from both sides.

15 DS: You did. You got it from everybody. You were damned if you did and
16 damned if you didn’t. Yup. And I mean it was—it got—it hurt—upset me a little bit, you
17 know? It stayed with you a long time.

18 KC: Did you become bitter because of it?

19 DS: Yeah, damn bitter. Yeah, because like I wanted to say to that guy, “Why
20 don’t you chew these people out that weren’t even in the service?” “No, they were okay,
21 just you for being in Vietnam.” And I don’t know about some of these civilians around
22 here. I don’t tell them I was in Vietnam or anything like that. I don’t know what their
23 attitude would have been. And this was amazing long time after the Vietnam War had
24 ended, too. Because I didn’t come to Kilgore until 1977, when I came. That was a few
25 years after Vietnam. And that’s another thing about that reunion because I started
26 realizing that at that time there was—everybody I know at Kilgore College—who I know
27 of, the faculty and all, there’s only two of us that Marine Corps Vietnam. Only two of us.
28 It was very rare to find somebody who had been in the service. That’s when I started
29 realizing about those guys that I’d been with and all. But anyway, that’s kind of the way
30 it is. I don’t talk about it anymore. I didn’t even talk about it then much. But it stays with
31 you, you never forget it.

1 KC: Let me take you back to coming back to the United States. You've seen the
2 protesters. You're making your way back to Henderson. You've got thirty days leave,
3 right?

4 DS: Uh-huh.

5 KC: And what sort of things were you doing over these thirty days?

6 DS: Oh, drinking. Doing a lot of drinking. Of course, I had to be with my parents
7 and stuff, so even though I was a Marine and all that, that's still mom and dad. (laughs)

8 KC: Did you know where you were going once your thirty days was up?

9 DS: Yeah, I was going to 2nd Marine Division at Lejeune, back to an infantry unit.
10 And from there is where I went to be a drill instructor, was from there.

11 KC: Now, why were you chosen (inaudible)

12 DS: (speaking at the same time) Okay, I'm gonna tell you why I was chosen. And
13 again, I may have explained this last time, but when I meet a Marine and tell him that—
14 because when I was in the Corps, to be a drill instructor you had to ship over, reenlist for
15 DI school. So we had to have four in the Corps and ship over. Well, I went to the drill
16 field after only two years. The reason was, and this is what we heard, they waived that
17 four in the Corps. That if you were twenty-one, a corporal, and done two years in the
18 Corps, you could go to drill instructor school. They wanted Vietnam vets on the drill field
19 real quick, what they called the yellow ribbons. They wanted yellow ribbons down there
20 right now. And I wasn't the only one. I got a picture of the guys that were with me in that
21 class, and about a third of us were first tour, first enlistment Marines that were corporals.
22 The way I got it is I was a squad leader in the 6th Marines, and apparently, I had given
23 some class or something about throwing a damn hand grenade or something. The first
24 sergeant called me in the office, and he said he liked the way I did that, had I ever
25 thought about being a drill instructor? I said, "No! Heavens no." He told me they had
26 waived that four in the Corps. I had my two in, I was a corporal, and they wanted
27 Vietnam vets down there. He said there was some officers or somebody coming by for
28 prospective washbacks to go to DI school, and that I ought to go over there and see them.
29 I said, "I can't be a drill instructor. One tenth, one percent of Marines are drill
30 instructors." He said, "Stroud, the class don't start for a couple of weeks. You get ten

1 days home on leave and then you go.” He said, “If you don’t make it, you’re coming right
2 back here. You ain’t got a damn thing to lose.” Well, I hadn’t thought about that.

3 KC: Now did being a drill instructor appeal to you in any way?

4 DS: Not really, except getting out of the infantry did. (both laugh) I promise you
5 that. Yeah, it didn’t really appeal to me and I didn’t think I could make it. Well, like he
6 said if you don’t make it, you’re coming back here, and you get ten days home on leave
7 anyway. We had to go before this board. There were some officers and I guess some
8 sergeants. The only question they asked me is if I made it as a drill instructor and a black
9 recruit spit in my face, what would I do? And I was smart enough to know how to answer
10 it.

11 KC: What’d you say?

12 DS: I said, “Sir, when I’m a drill instructor I will know limits of punishment, and
13 I will punish him within the limits, sir.” That may have gotten me into DI school.
14 Because that was the question and that was about the answer that I gave him. And the
15 next thing I know I had orders for DI school.

16 KC: Tell me about DI school. Where was it?

17 DS: It was at Parris Island.

18 KC: Okay.

19 DS: East of the Mississippi is Parris Island and west of Mississippi is San Diego.
20 It’s one of the toughest schools I’ve ever been to. We went in in that first day, I don’t
21 remember how many were there, maybe seventy. This sergeant major came out and he
22 said “if you have difficulty finding a desk in here today, in two weeks they’re gonna be
23 plenty of empty damn desks. If we don’t wipe out fifty percent of you, we’re not doing
24 our job.” And I guarantee you he did his job. He got rid of fifty percent of them.

25 KC: What was it like? What were the classes like?

26 DS: We went through this—now they reduced bootcamp from three months to, I
27 believe, eight weeks because of Vietnam. They did that during World War II also. And
28 like the sergeant major at DI school said that “with three months we turned out Cadillacs,
29 with eight weeks we turn out Fords. They’ll both will get us where we’re going.” What
30 was tough about it was this, we had to go through and do everything physically that our
31 recruits had to do. Now we’d done that in bootcamp, but you know, that’s been a while.

1 We had to learn how to teach everything. Everything. It was things like how to stand at
2 attention, right shoulder arms, left shoulder arms, forward march. The way you did it is
3 they gave you these notebooks with all this stuff typed out, and like in the position of
4 attention, there's seven steps to the position of attention. So you had to know them. We
5 had attention, parade rest, and stuff like that. Movements without weapons, without arms.
6 Then we had a movement with arms like left shoulder arms, present arms, and all that.
7 Then we had platoon marching. So this is what they'd do is after we learned all the
8 movements without arms, without weapons, then they would take each one of these
9 movements and put them in a drill instructor hat, one of the instructors would. You drew
10 one and you had to teach that. That instructor was standing there with a clipboard and
11 every time you didn't say something you're supposed to, he took points off. If you were
12 not talking loud enough to be heard by eighty recruits clearly on a windy day, he divided
13 your score by half. When you lost two hundred points you were out of DI school. You
14 lost points at inspection, that when they inspected you if—and going in we all knew this,
15 but the tip of the Marine Corps belt buckle can be no closer to the buckle than two inches,
16 no farther than four inches. So when they measure that, if it's over you lose points like
17 that. We ran all the time, but mainly it was taking these tests and having to teach these
18 movements and everything. That was the hardest part. But I got good at memorizing that
19 because I didn't seem to have any trouble with that. I think that helped me in college and
20 even in teaching and everything. That was the hardest part was remembering. Because I
21 couldn't even begin to tell you how much of that stuff we had to know. It's every single
22 thing a recruit has to know.

23 KC: Who were you going to teach this to?

24 DS: Recruits. Oh, who do we do it for?

25 KC: Yes.

26 DS: In the school we just did it to the rest of them. Like they'd be standing there
27 and then we would pretend they were our recruits and there'd be an instructor who had
28 been a former drill instructor. So he's the one grading you on that stuff. So you'd be
29 teaching it to your classmates.

30 KC: Are you using the same kind of language, the same kind of approach you
31 would to recruits to these guys?

1 DS: No, no. We didn't cuss in the school. That never came up, but we did cuss on
2 the drill field. Yeah, we did do that. Because even in teaching you might cuss 'em every
3 now and then, but basically, we just had to know how to teach right shoulder arms, left
4 shoulder arms. We just had to know how to do that, what to say. So that wasn't anybody
5 thinking about using any cuss words or anything. But yeah, that was probably the hardest
6 part because I mean this was a thick notebook. There was a whole lot of stuff that I can't
7 even think of. It's every single thing recruits gotta know. I mean, Marine Corps history,
8 bayonet fighting, marksmanship, I mean everything. First-aid, all of this. Of course, being
9 a drill instructor you don't use notes, you'd better know it all. So that was the hardest part
10 of it. But we practiced and we got it done, those of us that graduated.

11 KC: Now, how long was this? Was the DI school also eight weeks?

12 DS: Eight weeks, yeah.

13 KC: Okay, all right.

14 DS: It was exactly how long bootcamp was. And unfortunately the recruits would
15 run three miles, we're running five miles. We did everything, bayonet fighting, we did
16 everything a recruit had to do.

17 KC: What gave you the most trouble other than the memorization and doing these
18 kinds of things? Was there anything physically that gave you a hard time?

19 DS: No, we were in such good shape, no. Those five mile runs were nothing. It
20 wasn't just—now, some of these—some the older ones it was. They'd had some soft duty
21 stations and stuff, but I'd just come from the infantry. That was no big deal. But some of
22 these guys had maybe been a recruiting duty somewhere. Yeah, that running and physical
23 could get to them, but not the guys that just came from the infantry.

24 KC: Now, when do you graduate from DI school?

25 DS: I've got the book right over there. It would be in 1966.

26 KC: Nineteen sixty-six, okay.

27 DS: I believe in March, March 13th, I think, 1966. I did that till I got out of the
28 Corps in January of '68.

29 KC: Where were you stationed? Were you stationed there at Parris?

30 DS: Parris Island. At Parris Island, South Carolina.

31 KC: Okay, at Parris Island. And you got out in '68, you say?

1 DS: Yeah in January to go to college. I got out ten days early.

2 KC: As a Vietnam veteran, did they give you any special insight into your role as
3 a drill instructor? Or was it just Vietnam didn't even enter into it as you were drilling?

4 DS: What they told us is "every one of you know how to be a drill instructor
5 because you had drill instructors. That what most of you are gonna do is you imitate your
6 drill instructor." They didn't tell us what to do as drill instructors except the basic stuff.
7 Vietnam entered into that bootcamp every day.

8 KC: How so?

9 DS: Every day.

10 KC: Tell me how.

11 DS: They knew where they were going. They were going as infantry, they were
12 going to Vietnam, and we were trying to save their lives. Everyday we told them that.
13 Now, people today think that it was legal to hit those recruits, if you see *Full Metal*
14 *Jacket*. It was never legal to hit those recruits, never. But we did it. The way we did it—I
15 wrote a paper on this in college, "The Role Analysis of the Marine Corps Drill
16 Instructor." I wish I still had that. If you didn't go in there the first day you had to get 'em
17 loyal to you. I mean, there's a method to this, two assistant drill instructors and a senior.
18 That didn't mean you're nice to 'em. I mean, you were cussing these people up one end
19 and down the other. You're scaring the daylights out of 'em. But the reason we would hit
20 'em is we would tell them that "you're going to Vietnam and you make one mistake,
21 Charlie's gonna kill you. He's gonna kill you. We're trying to save your life, and if you
22 can turn us in any day you want to. We cannot touch you. You can get us court martialed,
23 you can have our stripes, but we're willing to sacrifice our stripes to try to save you in
24 Vietnam." And boy that did it. When I had a recruit, one of the worst things I could do to
25 recruits is tell them "I'm not gonna touch you, because you're not worth my stripes." I
26 had 'em beg me to knock the shit out of 'em, believe it or not. They took pride in it and
27 we had to tell 'em, "When you go in the mess hall you don't talk. But you darn sure don't
28 tell some other platoon, don't brag." Because they were proud about that. But yeah, they
29 weren't supposed to, but we did it. We'd hit 'em, we'd choke 'em, just like in *Full Metal*
30 *Jacket*, stuff like that. But we constantly let 'em know, "we don't have time to explain to
31 you what you did wrong, and when you get to Vietnam, they're not gonna explain to you,

1 you're just gonna be dead." And they appreciated that because they knew they were
2 going to Vietnam, too. We didn't tell them war stories or anything like that. We didn't do
3 that. We just constantly reminded them where they were going, you were going as
4 infantry. And that what we were trying to do was save their lives over there. Although
5 what we did didn't have much to do with combat. That was Infantry Training Regiment.
6 But what we did do was we instilled a discipline in them that they were gonna need.
7 That's what we were doing. We told them, "If you can't take this, you can't take
8 Vietnam." And that's what that was for.

9 KC: But they were going anyway?

10 DS: They're going, yeah. Unless they get psyched out, you know, you go crazy.
11 Yeah, you were going unless you go crazy here. And if you're gonna go crazy, we're
12 gonna drive you crazy. We want to try to drive you crazy here before you go to Vietnam.

13 KC: Now, as a Vietnam era drill instructor, and you've brought up the movie *Full*
14 *Metal Jacket* a couple of times. Of course, probably the most—maybe entertaining is not
15 the word to say, but it is damn entertaining.

16 DS: Yeah, it is.

17 KC: In the movie it's R. Lee Ermey and his—of course, he was a drill instructor
18 at the time.

19 DS: He was. Now I'm gonna tell you something.

20 KC: How accurate was he?

21 DS: He was accurate. He and I were DIs at the same time.

22 KC: Is that right?

23 DS: I didn't know him. I didn't know him until he got famous and I read a little
24 biography in the Marine Corps magazine. He was in 2nd Battalion when I was at 1st
25 Battalion at Parris Island. He was as accurate as you could be for Hollywood on that
26 screen.

27 KC: Now, you say for Hollywood?

28 DS: Well, for being on Hollywood, yeah.

29 KC: Okay.

30 DS: Now, this is where—this is the inaccuracy, and it's not much. It's hardly
31 worth mentioning. But he was the senior drill instructor; he had the black belt on. You

1 see the assistants standing behind him at parade rest? That's bull. All three of 'em are
2 doing what he was doing. And the ones that were the meanest were the two assistants, not
3 the senior.

4 KC: Is that right? Now were you a senior or were you assistant?

5 DS: I was assistant.

6 KC: Okay.

7 DS: A senior would have been a staff sergeant or a gunny. So it was the assistant
8 DIs, which originally, we called junior DIs, but they didn't like that, so they changed it.
9 We were the ones that they say were tightening their asses. We were the badasses.
10 Although the senior was not much nicer than what he was in that movie, that was nice
11 compared to the two juniors.

12 KC: Is that right?

13 DS: Yeah.

14 KC: How were you worse and why?

15 DS: Well, we PTed 'em more, we hit 'em more, we cussed 'em more, we did all
16 of that. It was like the senior was the one that was their daddy, and we were the asshole
17 brother-in-laws (laughing). It was just relative. And it was kind of planned out that way.
18 They didn't get much needed breaks and stuff, but a lot of times it would be the senior
19 that would do that. You know, what little kindness they got it would be the senior, not the
20 assistants doing that stuff.

21 KC: Well, I can see why that would be the case. You want to build a loyalty to a
22 certain figure of authority, well then that makes perfect sense.

23 DS: Yeah, and so that's the way it was. And that's the biggest fault, was the
24 assistants in the movie were just standing there at parade rest. No, they were the ones
25 doing everything. And the senior would be too, but mainly it was the two assistants that
26 were doing that.

27 KC: Now, did you have any cases of problems with discipline? Did you have
28 anyone challenge your authority as a drill instructor?

29 DS: Nope.

30 KC: For two years?

1 DS: They were scared to death. Scared to death. No sir. And I've had people that
2 weren't in the service say, "They hit me"—you have no clue what you're gonna do until
3 that drill instructor starts screaming at you. You people don't have a clue what that's like.
4 Because you get all these tough guys, "Well, they wouldn't touch me." "Well, okay. You
5 don't need to go then." Because I mean, from when we picked them up, started off, I
6 mean, these guys are scared to death. I heard that they did an analysis, and these people
7 are literally in a mild stage of shock for like three days.

8 KC: Wow.

9 DS: They can't even remember their first day. Yeah. And most people—and the
10 reason I think that was, and I didn't hear about it. If it happened, it hardly ever happened
11 that anybody would do that. I think there's a reason that most people went in the Marine
12 Corps because they knew about the Marine Corps from people that had been in the
13 Marine Corps. And they knew what bootcamp was like before they ever got off that bus.
14 And that's what they wanted, that's why they were there. So I don't think it's like "I
15 thought this was a Boy Scout camp." They knew exactly what they were getting into.
16 And these drill instructors—and with me, a lot of it's just an act. They're given an image
17 that, "I don't care whether you challenge me or not, I'm gonna kill you." You know, "it'd
18 be better for your life if you just keep your damn mouth shut." That's the image that we
19 were giving. And I mean, it apparently works. Because they never challenged our
20 authority to do a damn thing, not any platoons that I had or anything. No sir. I will tell
21 you this, I can still get like that today. I don't do it, but I will tell you they were putting
22 on a play here called *A Few Good Men*, and when they did it years ago, and the director
23 just saw me the other day, they asked me—she had me come over and treat them like
24 recruits for five minutes.

25 KC: That must have been a treat.

26 DS: I got up there and I asked her, I said, "Can I hit them?" and she said, "No." I
27 said, "Can I cuss them?" "Yes." I did just like I did as a drill instructor for five minutes
28 and I promise you, boys were crying. When they left, I heard horror stories about what
29 they were telling each other. It was five minutes compared to eight weeks. Yeah, I can
30 still do it. Yeah, I can still do it. And until you're there in that atmosphere and that man is
31 doing that to you, people don't have a clue what they're talking about. All that stuff,

1 “They wouldn’t talk to me that way.” Yeah. But no, nobody ever did that, and I mean we
2 were tough. Mean, if you wanna call it mean. We were tough, tough, tough on those
3 guys. And I’ll tell you another thing about those guys. I don’t tell anything except for
4 killing that VC, I can’t back that up. That’s just me. But being a drill instructor, I’ve got a
5 photograph they used in the Marine Corps literature of me as a drill instructor. I didn’t
6 even know about it for twenty years. But I have something else too, that when our
7 recruits were getting ready to leave, we would have them write a letter to the drill
8 instructor, telling what they thought of each one of us in bootcamp. We told them don’t
9 sign it, and we won’t read it until after you leave, and then we’re gonna burn them. Well,
10 with this particular set there’s about thirty-five of these letters. I was coming home on
11 leave for ten days and the senior drill instructor—we were terrified about these letters. It
12 was court martial material and everything. He told me, he said, “Take them to the piney
13 woods of East Texas and burn them.” And I was out in the piney woods of East Texas
14 with a match and I didn’t burn them, I’ve still got those things.

15 KC: Is that right?

16 DS: Yes, sir.

17 KC: Why did you keep them?

18 DS: I don’t know, but I bet you they’re the only surviving set of what we call love
19 letters from the Vietnam era. They don’t do that anymore. And there’s my name with the
20 other drill instructors and everything they thought about us. And I guarantee you that
21 when I say I was bad son of a bitch; I got the letters to back it up.

22 KC: What sort of things did they say?

23 DS: Oh, they said that I was crazy—crazy, wanted to kill them. I would look like
24 a mad dog and all this kind of stuff. I’ve got them right over here. I mean, if you want to
25 see cuss words misspelled, these letters would do it. I will guarantee you’ve never seen
26 cuss words as misspelled as these letters. Oh my god. (both laughing) Oh yeah, crazy,
27 crazy. One of them said they thought I was crazy the first day and he never changed. That
28 I was the meanest goddamn Marine he’d ever seen. Oh, yeah. Well, maybe I can make
29 some copies and send a few of them up there to you.

30 KC: Well, we’ll have to talk about that. That’s some pretty good stuff.

1 DS: Yeah, well let me get them real quick. I think they're over here somewhere.
2 The one I can share with people is one of the recruits said that he would sooner be a
3 woodpecker and peck his way to hell than go through bootcamp again. (both laugh). I
4 was gonna do an article on them for *Vietnam Magazine*, and I wrote them and told them
5 about it and they said, yeah they'd like to have that article, but I couldn't have any
6 profanity.

7 KC: Oh, for crying out loud.

8 DS: If you take profanity out of those letters you've got nothing. But it's all there,
9 people. I mean, it is all there. I will tell you, you read those letters, I was the baddest one
10 of those three drill instructors.

11 KC: Yup.

12 DS: So yeah, I'd be glad to make, if I could, make a copy and let you at least look
13 at them or something.

14 KC: Absolutely, that'd be pretty hard to pass up.

15 DS: Yeah, I've got them over here in this file cabinet somewhere, and I'm glad I
16 kept them. I don't know what to do with them, but you know it's—I can tell you what
17 platoon it was and everything, it was 196—and these guys were the ones that hit Tet
18 Offensive. That's about the time they got over there. And the only reason I know is
19 although we told 'em not to sign their names, some of them did. So I knew from that
20 platoon—I knew what platoon it was.

21 KC: How many groups did you go through there at Parris?

22 DS: Ah, seven or eight? We have a book they would give us photographs of our
23 platoon. When they got ready to graduate, they'd have their photograph made, so I've got
24 all of those over in a book over here. I think it was seven platoons or something like that,
25 maybe eight. I'd have to count 'em. There was one—enlistment picked up very quickly
26 when colleges turned in their grades, these kids flunking out of college. There was one
27 time where I had to work two platoons, where you're getting ready to graduate one and
28 you pick up another one at the same time. You had to split time between the two of 'em. I
29 only had to do that once though, but they were coming in that fast after the fall semester,
30 about Christmas time or something like that. Yeah, there's about seven platoons I put
31 through. Sometimes it would be back to back, and sometimes you might be off for two or

1 three weeks waiting for another platoon to form. That's about how many, about seven at
2 the most, I think.

3 KC: Now you did this until when in 1968?

4 DS: I got out in January of '68, and I think I was working a platoon when I got
5 out, like January the 12th. As you know in those days the fall semester you came back
6 after Christmas and did your finals. So it was gonna be the spring semester that I got
7 started down at SFA. So it was sometime in January. But they let me out like on January
8 the 12th or something like that.

9 KC: You said they let you out a little early because (inaudible)

10 DS: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, it's on my DD 214, "Ten days early out to
11 go to college."

12 KC: Okay. Now, what did you want to do when you went to college?

13 DS: History teacher. That's all. I never had to worry about anything. I knew I
14 loved history. At least I thought I—I did love it, but I didn't know much. I mean, I
15 thought I did, I didn't know much. Being a drill instructor is when I realized I wanted to
16 be a teacher. Because I did, as different as it is, that's when I liked it. I loved doing that.
17 Not to be mean, but just teaching those kids stuff and seeing what they were like on
18 graduation day compared to that first day. So that's when I decided I wanted to be a
19 teacher. And the only thing I liked was history, so I was gonna be a history teacher. So
20 that's why I went to SFA. I wouldn't have gotten into A&M. I wouldn't have gone to
21 A&M, because it was all cadets in those days, and there's no way I could have gotten
22 accepted to any college. I got into SFA on scholastic probation like it was. And it was
23 close enough to home that I could come see my parents if I wanted to.

24 KC: Sure.

25 DS: Sixty miles from Henderson, or whatever it is, and yet I didn't have to live at
26 home. So there was no other place I wanted to go. Like I say, I couldn't have gotten into
27 UT or anything like that. I was just glad to get into SFA. That's where I went. I had some
28 trouble. I had two Marines for roommates. That was important. My first roommate was
29 an eighteen year old named Pig, they called him Pig. He said he was gonna go in the Air
30 Force Reserve, but his mother cried so he decided not to go. But I met these other two
31 Marines and we got off campus, and that helped. But we also had an ex-GI fraternity, and

1 ninety-nine percent of those guys were Vietnam vets. There weren't many of us, but that
2 helped also. So I got to be around some Vietnam vets and just some other service guys,
3 too. In fact, SFA started that again, and they had me go down and talk to them, oh about a
4 year and a half ago, because they were amazed that they—they knew about that one from
5 the '60s, but they didn't know—and they found out I was there. The guy that was a
6 former student of mine asked me to come down there and talk to 'em. But that did help.
7 And like I say, we didn't talk about war, we got drunk together, we had beer busts
8 together and stuff like that. But just being around another vet was an important thing.
9 That was the important thing is that they knew where you were coming from. That was
10 the important thing, and that helped that way.

11 KC: Now you said you got into some trouble one time?

12 DS: Let's see, when I got in trouble? Remind me of that.

13 KC: I may have misheard you. I thought you said that you got in a little bit of
14 trouble while you were there at SFA, maybe with these other Marines as roommates. I
15 may have misheard you.

16 DS: No, no, I didn't get into trouble with them, no.

17 KC: All right, now how much time did you spend there at Stephen F. Austin?

18 DS: How much time? How long did I spend there?

19 KC: Yes.

20 DS: Four years. I got my bachelor there, I got that in '72 and then I taught four
21 years at West Rusk, but I was going back and got my masters at SFA, too. I spent four
22 years and probably a few months. I had to go to summer school a few times. Make up a
23 few bad grades and stuff.

24 KC: Now did you teach secondary education? Did you teach high school initially?

25 DS: I taught eighth graders.

26 KC: Eighth graders, okay.

27 DS: Eighth graders, yeah. At West Rusk, which used to be Gaston in New
28 London. Then from there I got my masters and I got on over here to Kilgore.

29 KC: Now when did you go to Kilgore?

30 DS: Nineteen seventy- seven.

31 KC: So you've been there for a very long time then?

1 DS: Oh yeah. Over thirty years, yeah.

2 KC: Wow, wow. What have you seen change over those years in terms of
3 students and the (inaudible)

4 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh, it's hard to say, because people ask me that
5 and I don't remember the students being any worse than they were when I came. I
6 remember when I first got here, I gave 'em basically a test that I had given to my eighth
7 graders, but I will have to say this, that I worked my eighth graders more. Had essay on
8 there. So with my eighth graders, we spent time—"this is what you're gonna write on this
9 essay," and stuff. Well, with this group I just didn't do that. I mean hardly anybody
10 passed that damn thing. So I don't know, I can't tell that they've really gotten less
11 quality. I wasn't paying any attention to it. I can't tell. The things that I think have
12 changed, and this might just be selective memories is I just got an e-mail today, "Want an
13 'A' in the class, want an 'A' in the class. It drives me crazy. Everybody wants a damn
14 "A," you know?

15 KC: I can relate to that.

16 DS: You know? I always wanna walk in on the first day and say, "How many
17 want an 'A,' raise your hand. Don't ever tell me that again." You know, "That's the end
18 of that." I think grade inflation—and it might be because I didn't come to a community
19 college, I didn't have to worry about transferring anything. I didn't have to worry about
20 grants, scholarships because I was on the GI Bill. So it may be more, but, you know, it's
21 this grade inflation from high school and everything, so many of them expect to get 'A's.
22 And they're just not gonna do it. That might be a little bit different, but again, it might be
23 selective memory. It seems to be more recently that I hear more about, "I gotta have an
24 'A'" than when I first got over here. I've been lucky, I've always had good deans; good
25 heads of departments that didn't bother me. They let us do what we needed to do and that
26 was the end of it. Of course, we all know this, but I don't think we had a single part timer
27 when I first came. And of course now we've got 'em all over the place.

28 KC: Right.

29 DS: So there were things like that, but I can't tell from the students. They seem to
30 be no different than they were. At least I don't remember that they're any different.

1 KC: How did your time as a drill instructor affect the way you approached
2 teaching?

3 DS: All right, I'm gonna tell you. As I tell people, you know you can't hit 'em,
4 you can't choke 'em, you can't do any of that. When I taught eighth graders, I used to tell
5 this in the faculty lounge that we'd have a lot less discipline problems if on the first day
6 after we called roll, we just killed one of 'em. (interviewer laughs) We'd have some nice
7 eighth grade scholars, you know? Just for the hell of it. Well I don't care whether they—
8 just kill one of 'em (both laugh).

9 KC: Well, I'm pretty sure they wouldn't allow that either.

10 DS: No, they won't. They frown on that stuff. But that was the Marine Corps
11 attitude. You know, just shoot one of 'em to get it started and you won't have to worry
12 about it. So, you know, "no, I can't do that." When I was a DI, as soon as I left that
13 platoon, I wasn't—I didn't take it anywhere with me or anything like that. I knew it was
14 an act, I knew that. But I will tell you what it did do—I'm gonna tell you this, remember
15 when I said as a DI you don't use notes? I didn't use notes from day one. Ever. When I
16 was student teaching, I don't care what it was, I never used notes. If it was something I
17 didn't know much about, because there were a lot of things like that—because like I said,
18 I thought I knew history until I got into there and heard those professors and everything.
19 Then after I got my bachelors and got the job at West Rusk, I was terrified. I don't
20 remember any of these things. You know, I took the test and forgot it and went to the
21 next course. So what I started doing is whatever I was teaching I would buy books on. So
22 I'm up at three o'clock at night reading what I'm gonna be lecturing on the next day from
23 the textbook. So when there was maybe one paragraph in the textbook, I've read two
24 hundred pages on it.

25 KC: Right.

26 DS: And I'm telling stories. So that's the way I did it. But I never used any notes,
27 never used it. I was just not gonna do that. It had to be that Marine Corps drill instructor
28 stuff. Because as I tell people, if I had to use notes to teach it, then you can use notes to
29 take the test. I don't use notes. And that's the one main thing. The other thing is teaching
30 not exactly the same thing every year, but you've still got 1301, 130—you've still got
31 that. They let us change it up just a little bit. Well how do you keep the enthusiasm?

1 Because I have students to this day, you know—"your enthusiasm" and all that. And yet
2 I've taught this for so long and I learned this, I think, from being a drill instructor. I don't
3 care how many times I've taught what I'm teaching in that class today, it's the first time
4 they've heard it.

5 KC: Right.

6 DS: And that's where my enthusiasm comes. You do the best you can for those
7 people in front of you right there. Just like each one of these platoons. I think those were
8 the two biggest things. You don't use notes; you know your stuff before you go in there,
9 if you don't, learn it before you go in there. Part of the enthusiasm was a different type.
10 But graduating a platoon and then going back to square one, you had to start all over
11 again, but you kept up the same enthusiasm, and I think that's what it was, that this was
12 their first time for it. Those are the two biggest things being a drill instructor to teaching.

13 KC: Well what about the—you mentioned before that you didn't pay all that
14 much attention to the progress of the war once you came back. But I would think that
15 there are some things that you inevitably would have had to pay attention to. You talked
16 about the TET Offensive—

17 DS: Yeah, Tet Offensive, yeah.

18 KC: What about the Tet Offensive, the fall of Saigon, the way the war was being
19 prosecuted after you left. What were your impressions about that?

20 DS: Really not a whole lot. The Tet Offensive, I knew it was bad, I knew it was
21 bad and all that kind of stuff. Not long after the Tet, we got a guy in our fraternity that
22 had been over there. He was in Tet and I just asked him, I said, "Was it bad?" he said,
23 "Man, it was bad as hell." That's all I said about that. It's really that I wasn't keeping up
24 with how it was being prosecuted, but when Nixon started bringing the troops home and
25 stuff, we pretty well knew it was all over then. If you had any sense about you, you knew
26 we'd thrown in the towel. I graduated when the fall of Saigon took place, and I was
27 working at Henderson Clay before I got my teaching job. I remember I was going out
28 there like five thirty in the morning, had the car radio on. It told about the fall of Saigon
29 and, you know, it got to me a little bit. You know, "my god, what a waste," or something
30 like that, I don't know. But I didn't keep up with it that much. I really didn't. It was just
31 every now and then I'd hear stuff on the news, but, you know, once Nixon started

1 bringing the troops home, I pretty well knew it was all over. I did not believe a word of
2 the Treaty of Paris though about how the North Vietnamese weren't gonna take anymore.
3 I knew that was a bunch of bull. So I pretty well knew what was gonna—but it got to me
4 a little bit, but not much, not like maybe it ought to have.

5 KC: Well, you were on a college campus during the last part of the Vietnam War.
6 Now granted, Stephen F. Austin is not Berkeley, it's not Columbia.

7 DS: Yeah.

8 KC: But what was the environment like as a Marine Vietnam combat veteran on
9 the campus at Stephen F. Austin in the late '60s, early '70s?

10 DS: Well, most time you didn't volunteer that you were a Vietnam veteran. I
11 never denied it, but I never volunteered it because there was still some hostility. There
12 were some people down there, some of the students, that did care a whole lot about it. We
13 had, especially girls, get up and walk off our table when they found out we had been to
14 Vietnam. Just get up and leave. So we didn't hide it, but we didn't advertise it. We
15 wouldn't have put a bumper sticker on or anything like that. As far as being a Marine
16 veteran, I was proud of it, but I was there to learn. I mean, I cannot believe how thrilled I
17 was to be there just like another student. I didn't bring it up to anybody or anything like
18 that. I didn't say, you know, "Well, I was in the Corps," or anything like that. It's
19 unbelievable, but I didn't do anything like that. We had a few war protestors there. The
20 guys down there now found that amusing, you know, that there was war protestors down
21 there. I didn't have any bad feelings about 'em, you know, I really didn't. That was just—
22 you know, "I shouldn't have been over there." But I wasn't—and I remember telling
23 them one time it was raining and if they go inside, they wouldn't get wet. They said,
24 "Well, it wouldn't mean anything if we did that." I thought, well, "I'm sorry, but you're
25 getting wet out here." You know, that's a mad guy. "Man, you're holding the sign out
26 here in the rain, just in the building and hold the sign." "Oh, it wouldn't be the same,
27 man." "Oh, okay." Well, I didn't have any hostility against them or anything like that. I
28 mean, I probably thought, "they don't know what they're talking about" or something,
29 but I didn't go over there and chew 'em out or anything like that. I was—I guess the word
30 "mellow." I was just completely mellowed out. I wasn't there to impress anybody with all

1 that or anything. I was just getting on my—and again, just getting on with my life and
2 just glad to be home.

3 KC: What do you think when you look back on it, and with the perspective of
4 someone who's taught history for forty years, how do you think the Vietnam War and the
5 Vietnam Era shaped what the United States is today?

6 DS: Oh gosh. Well, there's one direct thing now that they're appreciating these
7 veterans in Iraq and Afghanistan, which they certainly didn't do us. You know,
8 welcoming them home in the airports and all that kind of stuff. I think that's directly
9 because of the way they treated us. I think we're not gonna do that again, or something
10 like that. I think we mentioned that last time. I think that personally, as far as our leaders,
11 it's like they never even heard of Vietnam. They didn't learn anything. I talked to my
12 brother about Afghanistan and everything. "Win the hearts and minds," have we not
13 heard this before? I don't know what else to do, but Afghanistan looks so much like
14 Vietnam as far as the small units and going into the towns and stuff like that. I don't see
15 as a nation we've learned a whole lot from it, I really don't. It's just like the mistakes that
16 I think we made in Vietnam; these people don't remember any of that stuff. It just seems
17 like their making the same things over and over again. It's amazing that it seems like, and
18 I know they haven't forgotten Vietnam, but it almost seems like they have. And it's
19 because of what's going on now in Iraq and Afghanistan. But yeah, again, it just doesn't
20 seem like as a nation we learned what happened in Vietnam, because most people don't
21 have a clue what happened in Vietnam. They went and saw some movies and that's all
22 they know. I know my students, if I were to ask them and they were honest, most of them
23 would think we won the Vietnam War.

24 KC: Is that right?

25 DS: Oh, yeah. When I taught the Vietnam class, I found out there were people
26 that were shocked that we didn't win the Vietnam War. You know, what movie showed
27 us losing that war? That's unbelievable. Yeah, they think we—many of them think we
28 won that war, that we ain't ever lost a war. So I think most people don't know enough,
29 and I don't think they've learned—"they" being the government, the people that make
30 decisions. What happened over in Vietnam, what went wrong and all that stuff. Basically,

1 I don't think we should even have been there in the first place. Have you ever read a book
2 called *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How we Did*?

3 KC: No, I have not.

4 DS: Great book. Great book.

5 KC: I'll write that down.

6 DS: I've got it right over there. Send me an e-mail and I'll send you the title and
7 the author and the ISBN and everything.

8 KC: Oh, terrific, terrific.

9 DS: It is a great book. I mean my god. *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't*
10 *Lose and How We Did*, Anon Hackworth, reading his stuff. I don't read personal
11 accounts; I'd read a couple of them early and some of them just sound like too much BS.
12 And that wasn't me. There was this lieutenant that was a Marine over there, and I gave
13 them one of them and when he got through reading it, I said, "Was the guy BS-ing?"
14 "Yeah," we both agreed. He may have been a vet, he may have been over there, and the
15 editor may say, "we wanna sell books." Because he's doing things that just aren't—
16 they're just not realistic. Like he's the only Marine in that platoon that knows how to use
17 an M79 grenade launcher? And he's the only one that knows how to use an M60? And
18 that he had to take time to go over and literally save another platoon, but rather than
19 getting any glory, he just waved to 'em in the battle smoke and went back? That's BS, in
20 my opinion, the only one that knew how to fire an M79. So that's why I say, and it may
21 have been the editor needed something or something. Anyway, I don't read much about
22 what other people did over there. Like I said I used to. Caputo's book, yeah, I read that.
23 That's a great book.

24 KC: Yes, it's excellent.

25 DS: Yeah, it's a great book. Oh, I read—the guy that wrote that *The Things That*
26 *They Carried*. I don't know his name. He was in the Army. I'll think of it in a minute.

27 KC: Tim O' Brian?

28 DS: Yes, Tim O' Brian. I read his book, but that's about it. And then some of
29 these like *The Perfect War* and stuff like that.

1 KC: Well tell me about the war and its effect on you personally. You've talked
2 about how the time as a drill instructor has affected your approach to teaching, killing one
3 student each semester, which is, you know, you can debate the merits of that, I guess.

4 DS: Well yeah, you know, and it doesn't mean you don't like 'em; you just kill
5 one of 'em (both laugh).

6 KC: How does you time in the Vietnam War—

7 DS: Yeah, I didn't even got to know you, I'll just shoot you, you know?

8 KC: How has your time as a Vietnam veteran—how has that affected you
9 personally, Mr. Stroud?

10 DS: I'm sure it has. Again, like I said, even if I talk about it for a few minutes I
11 have trouble sleeping at night. I don't know why. But I know what you're talking about,
12 but I think people don't realize, you know, that I wouldn't ever do it, but how easy it
13 would be to kill one of these people. I'm not gonna do it or anything like that. I know that
14 they don't have a clue what we went through, and that when they think they've had a
15 rough day, they don't have a clue about what a rough day is. And I don't tell them that.
16 I'm gonna tell you why I don't do it. When I was in high school, I wanted to go into the
17 Marine Corps bad. I was reading *Battle Cry*. We had a shop teacher and I'd come in, and
18 the only book I carried was *Battle Cry, Battle Cry, Battle Cry*. I told everybody I was
19 going in the Marine Corps and all that. Well, he knew that and for some reason, I don't
20 know, maybe he'd had a bad night or something, and I came into shop and I had *Battle*
21 *Cry* with my notebook. He came over to me and took that *Battle Cry* book and he waved
22 at my face and he said, "This book is a bunch of bullshit," and walked off. Well now I
23 know what he's talking about. But I wouldn't ever do that to anybody, you know? I just
24 wouldn't do it. It bothers me. You know, another thing, too. When I see these guys
25 walking around in camouflage because they've been deer hunting or something and they
26 got their kids in this camouflage, you people don't have a clue what this camouflage is all
27 about. And I try not to be that way, but I can't help it. I don't say anything to them, but it
28 just gets to me, you know. I don't know whether it's pretend, I don't know what it is. I
29 don't know how to explain it. Sometimes when I see 'em taking tests and everything I
30 think about the dead bodies and stuff that I saw. But basically, and I don't do that. Like, I
31 don't tell anybody, "If you think you've had a rough time, you oughta been in Vietn"—I

1 don't do any of that because I didn't like anybody doing that stuff to me, and I'm just not
2 gonna do it. And although this didn't come up, I don't talk about what's going on to my
3 students. I won't even answer a question about the Iraq War and Afghanistan. If they ask
4 me what I think, I ain't telling them. And the reason is these kids got family over there,
5 some of these guys have been over there, and I'm not gonna stand up there and tell them
6 what I think about it one way or another. That's their war; they have to make that
7 decision. That's basically it. But a lot of times you know, it's like because I'm—when
8 I'm there at Kilgore College I can't think of another Marine Vietnam vet and even an
9 Army vet that was over there. It's just like when I went back to the reunion, the things
10 that we did. That these people don't have a clue about it. And again, these students in
11 there that I'm teaching right now, they haven't got a clue of what I did in Vietnam. Not a
12 clue. And that's kind of the way I want it, I guess. But it's just always there with you and
13 I keep it back in the background, of course. But I don't tell war—I've talked a hundred
14 thousand times more to you than I ever have about this stuff. I just don't do it. But it's
15 always there. It's always there. Yep.

16 KC: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap this interview
17 up?

18 DS: I can't think of anything. I 'm sure there'd be twenty things after it. I'm
19 gonna tell you, you've done a great job; I really appreciate your work.

20 KC: Thank you, thank you very much. It's a real pleasure.

21 DS: I mean it, because I told my brother when I heard about this, "These damn
22 wannabes. This is a feeding frenzy," and all that stuff. That's one thing I do not like are
23 these damn people claiming to be in Vietnam. It just gets me because—and that makes
24 me madder, I think, than anything. These guys that are standing up there and claiming to
25 be in Vietnam and all that kind of stuff. I think the reason is, is because most of them are
26 my age, and when they had a chance to go, they didn't go. And now they're up there
27 claiming that they did. The few people that I know here that I know without a doubt were
28 in Vietnam, you wouldn't know it. You wouldn't know it. They never say anything about
29 it. And one of them is a guy that was in the Army over there, and the reason I know he
30 was over there is because at that time my wife and his wife were good friends. We were
31 going over to his house, and my wife told me, said, "Don't ask Tom anything about

1 Vietnam.” So he was over there. So when we got over there, I asked Tom about Vietnam.
2 (laughs)

3 KC: Of course you did.

4 DS: And what I said was, “Hey Tom, who were you with over there?” He told me
5 he was with the Army, and when he was over there, and he was just a grunt and all that
6 kind of stuff. That’s all it is. That’s all it is. And he’s told me, I’ve seen him a couple
7 times, you know, that he won’t buy his son camouflage shorts or anything like that
8 because of that. And so this one guy that I know, but most people that work with him
9 would never know he’d been to Vietnam. There’s one or two guys like that. But then
10 we’ve got one down there, you know, we’ve got some—I don’t know if I’ve told you,
11 this guy, I think he was in the service—and I shouldn’t even say this. I got introduced to
12 him the first day, and as soon as he shook my hand, he’s telling me war stories. And of
13 course, what’s he in? The 101st Airborne, right?

14 KC: Of course.

15 DS: 101st and he tells me war stories from the days, and he may very well have
16 been there. But the ones that I know that were there, they don’t do that. So I’ve gotten
17 where I’m sus— somebody tells me they’ve been in Vietnam, I just automatically don’t
18 believe ‘em until I can satisfy myself. And sitting there telling me war stories isn’t the
19 way to do it, no. But I don’t know. It’s hard to say, it’s with me every day. People around
20 me don’t know it, they’ll never know it. That’s kind of the way I want to keep it. I don’t
21 know what you think about what I told you, but, you know, it doesn’t sound that bad.
22 Well, when we went through it—like, I could not count how many firefights we were in.
23 I just—we didn’t do that. You know, I remember parts of them and stuff, but no, it
24 affected me. It affected me. Not in a way that I can’t handle it, you know. I held a good
25 job and all that kind of stuff. Most people will never know. And that’s basically it. They
26 just don’t have a clue what we went through. Just the heat and the walking, and talking
27 about how we kept people from getting heat stroke. My god, I don’t know how we did
28 that. You know, in *Rumor of War*, that one kid that got heat stroke or whatever, but it’s
29 just mainly what we went through, and they don’t have a clue what we went through over
30 there. That’s about it.

1 KC: Well, I want to thank you so much, Mr. Stroud, for your time and for your
2 willingness to speak with me at such a length about this, it's (inaudible)

3 DS: (speaking at the same time) Oh, I just appreciate you doing this. Like I say,
4 you've done such a good job, you really have. I mean, because you know what to ask and
5 all that kind of stuff. I didn't have a clue, you know; tell you about a couple things, but
6 yeah, you've done an outstanding job.

7 KC: Well thank you very much.