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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Daniel Storz
Conducted by Jason Stuart
Date 8 September 2009
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 Jason Stuart: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. Daniel Storz. Today is
3 September 8th, 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the
4 campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Storz is joining me by phone from Collierville,
5 Tennessee, is that correct?

6 Daniel Storz: That is correct.

7 JS: Okay. If we can begin, if you could tell me a little bit of biographical
8 information about yourself. First of all, when and where were you born?

9 DS: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on June 20th, 1947.

10 JS: Alright. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents, what were their
11 names and what did they do for a living?

12 DS: My mom and dad's name, Daniel Martin Storz Senior, and my mom was
13 [Maggie] Davis. My mom was a house worker, later worked for Sears Roebuck.

14 JS: Okay.

15 DS: My father was an upholsterer.

16 JS: Alright, could you tell me a little bit about growing up in Memphis. Did you
17 grow up in Memphis?

18 DS: Yes, I did.

19 JS: Okay.

1 DS: The first eighteen years before I joined the Marine Corps. My dad was an
2 alcoholic; my mom basically stayed home with me, a younger brother seven years
3 younger, a younger sister a year and a half younger. I played sports and was pretty much
4 a loner, just with a few friends, and as I grew into sports and everything, I was pretty
5 lucky to be able to be a pretty good athlete. Anyway, I got to be about seventeen and like
6 a lot of young boys just ready to get out of home and go prove myself to be a man and
7 didn't have money for college. I always wanted to be a Marine, so I joined the Marine
8 Corps.

9 JS: Alright, did you have any interest in the Marines as a kid growing up, or was
10 that something that developed as you got closer to the age to join?

11 DS: Actually, watching some of the old war movies and just *The Marine Corps*
12 *Hymn* and [wanting to be a Marine.] My dad and his brothers were all in the Navy and I
13 didn't care a whole lot about water at the time. (Chuckles) I didn't want to join the Navy.
14 Anyway, a couple of my friends had talked about joining the Marines out of high school,
15 so three of us joined together. But I always wanted to be in the Marines, and that was the
16 only choice I'd even thought about.

17 JS: You mentioned the movies being influential. Do you remember any of the
18 specific movies?

19 DS: Yeah, there was one with Randolph Scott called *Gung Ho!* There were a
20 couple of the John Wayne movies, I can't think of their names right off the bat.

21 JS: Sure.

22 DS: It was *Iwo Jima* and a few of those, but anyway, they always kind of caught
23 my attention, especially the Marine Corps song or hymn when it went off, so. I used to
24 like standing and going and [hitting] somebody.

25 JS: Right, sure. Your dad and your uncles that you said were in the military, had
26 they served in World War II?

27 DS: Yeah. Four of them, out of the five served in World War II and all of them
28 were in the Navy. One uncle was on the *Lexington* when it was sunk. My dad was on an
29 LST (Landing Ship, Tank), and they came close on occasion, especially down in Sicily
30 when two torpedoes were heading toward their ship and a destroyer cut in and took both
31 torpedoes and killed every man on the destroyer.

1 JS: Wow.

2 DS: My dad had a lot of memories. Back then, growing up as a kid, you either
3 played army or you played cowboys, so that's the way it was back in those days.

4 JS: Right.

5 DS: We had all kind of [surplus] World War II and Korean stuff, so most of us
6 kids had helmets and cartridge belts and "pretend" rifles and stuff. Back then it was fun
7 to go out and dig a hole in the yard.

8 JS: Right. Before we get to whenever you joined the Marines, talk a little bit
9 about school and about sports. First of all, where'd you go to high school?

10 DS: I went to Oak Haven High School, the new county school at the time.

11 JS: Alright. You mentioned that you played sports. What sports did you play?

12 DS: At that time, I played baseball and football and later I started in basketball,
13 but baseball and football mainly as a kid.

14 JS: Alright, when did you graduate from high school?

15 DS: May of 1965.

16 JS: Okay, alright. During this time when you were growing up, did you pay close
17 attention to what was going on in the world with the Cold War and everything going on?

18 DS: Not really.

19 JS: Okay, alright. So how soon after high school did you decide to join the
20 Marines?

21 DS: Well, actually I did the early thing. I joined, I believe it was in March or
22 April of '65, what they called an "early up" where you could actually join the Marine
23 Corps and you didn't have to report until you were out of high school, but the time
24 counted for your enlistment.

25 JS: Okay, alright. Were there things that you would have to do on the weekend or
26 was there no real commitment?

27 DS: No, there was no real commitment. They were just trying to get a hold of
28 anybody they could, and this early program they had was just designed to get the people
29 joined that were still in high school, just to have a couple months count on their time
30 before they—I think the only specifications was right after high school, you got like
31 thirty days or something that you had to report in.

1 JS: Okay.

2 DS: That was about the only specs I could remember.

3 JS: Right, alright. While in high school, were there recruiters coming to the school
4 and things like that?

5 DS: Yeah, I remember them coming in the junior year, and I believe at that time
6 they came the same day as when some of the college recruiters came in. I'm not even
7 sure they [are] allowed to do that anymore, but I remember that they did back in those
8 days.

9 JS: Right. You mentioned you, with some of your friends, decided to join up
10 about the same time. Were there several students from your class that joined the Marines,
11 or was it just a small group like you and your friends?

12 DS: Well, it's always a small group.

13 JS: Right, sure.

14 DS: Not many people want to join the Marines. Like now, standing up in church
15 on the particular holidays, you got all the Army and Air Force guys stand up, and there's
16 just a couple guys who ever stand up for [the] Marine Corps. There were three of us that
17 joined, and one of them passed away quite a few years back, but we all three made it
18 through Vietnam.

19 JS: Well, what did your family think about your decision to join?

20 DS: Well, my mom was worried, and my dad, you know, he didn't really care. He
21 thought it was something good for me to do. So that was about the extent of it.

22 JS: Alright. You said about thirty days after graduation you were to report?

23 DS: Well, I actually reported three days after graduation.

24 JS: Okay.

25 DS: So, I had three days from school, and I reported around the first of June, the
26 first, second, or third of June, to Parris Island.

27 JS: Okay, and how long was the training at Parris Island?

28 DS: I think it was eleven weeks back then.

29 JS: Okay.

30 DS: It was whatever the original was, before they started cutting it back.

31 JS: Okay.

1 DS: And then you went to Camp Geiger, I think it was four weeks or six weeks,
2 whatever it was, so that we could report home for some time off, and then to your first
3 duty station.

4 JS: Alright, could you talk a little bit about the camp, a little about the training,
5 and kind of your daily routine there?

6 DS: I can talk about it now. I sure couldn't talk about it then.

7 JS: Right.

8 DS: Back in those days it was the first time I'd ever rode an airplane. And I took a
9 flight from Memphis—I believe it was to Raleigh or somewhere like that, I can't
10 remember exactly. It was one of the other big cities and then they had a bus waiting for
11 us, and some guys from the Marine Corps met us at the airport, got us on the bus and we
12 kind of just slept because it was real late that night. And I remember it was about
13 sometime after midnight, one o'clock, when we arrived at [the] Gate to Parris Island. All
14 of a sudden, we just heard somebody hollering for, "All the ladies to get off the bus."
15 And everybody is just standing around, or sleeping, and not paying any attention because
16 there wasn't any ladies, we knew of, on the bus. The next thing we know there's a guy
17 right up in our face, two of them, and they're hollering and talking about us scumbags,
18 and names I'd never even heard of, and so they finally got our attention. We all got off
19 the bus and then they made us go sit at the benches with our feet on the little yellow foot
20 marks and things and sit at 'attention' until somebody came and got us. And so I think we
21 sat there for thirty minutes or an hour or something before a couple trucks came by and
22 picked us up, and they took us that night to a barracks and there's a DI (Drill Instructor)
23 waiting for us. He actually had us write a little letter home, a little post card saying, we'd
24 arrived, and not to worry about us. You might not hear from us for a while. Then they
25 took us back, and what we thought was going to be a good night sleep that lasted about
26 two hours. The next thing we know we're up, and these guys are marching us all over the
27 place and hollering at us. It was like I told some people at church the other night when I
28 was giving my testimony, I went from one abusive father to four abusive drill instructors.

29 JS: Right.

30 DS: It all paid off in the end, so. But Parris Island was one of those fun places.
31 The recruiters tell you about all these wonderful islands you go see, and exotic places,

1 and I guess that was the first island I got to see, and it wasn't so exotic. Anyway, we had
2 three good drill instructors. At that time there were two sergeants and a corporal, cause
3 rank was hard to make back in the Marine Corps, right there in '65. So, I know that
4 corporal had been in like twelve years or something, but he had an engineering MOS
5 (Military Occupational Strategy) and he was kind of mad at the world, and had a black
6 belt also in karate. So he'd like to let everybody know what his moves were. They were
7 popping us every now and then, but back in those days drill instructors were able to kind
8 of hit you and do a lot more things than they're allow to do now. It was to toughen you
9 up and get your attention. Once you get out of there you say, "Hey, I survived it." And
10 you feel good about it. But when you're going through it it's like, "Man, what did I get
11 myself into here?" Back in those days, at Parris Island, you could not speak unless you
12 were asked a question, or talked to by the DI, and if they caught you talking anytime to
13 one of your roommates or guys, you get punished. We spent just about all that time being
14 quiet, and every now and then just trying to get a word or two in when we couldn't see
15 the DI around; like all kids trying to get away with a little something. Every now and then
16 they'd sneak in and catch us. We'd pay for it, but the training was about as tough and
17 vigorous as I could ever imagine. I mean, when you're watching those war movies you
18 sure didn't see all this stuff going on that you went through at boot camp. It turned out
19 that some of the things you did see, it's like, "Wow, I saw them doing this and now I'm
20 doing it."

21 JS: Right.

22 DS: It made you think a little bit. You didn't get to eat much and what you did get
23 to eat you had to eat in a hurry, and there's always something going on from the time you
24 got up to the time you went to sleep. You're always spit shining everything you had and
25 making sure your lock was always closed and fastened on your locker, or somebody that
26 didn't lock up their locker and left it open would cause all of us to have punishment. It
27 was all just trying to tell you, "When I tell you to do something, do it."

28 JS: Right.

29 DS: If one messes up, everybody messes up. It's kind of like life in a way.

30 JS: Right.

1 DS: Again, the training was hard. The drill instructors, they did their part. Of
2 course, at the end of it they'd talk to us about what they were doing, and they all seemed
3 like different people at that time. I got to meet one of them later in Vietnam, and so it was
4 pretty interesting time. Sometimes I think that besides Vietnam, it's probably the hardest
5 thing I've ever done in my life.

6 JS: Alright.

7 DS: A lot of sweat, and a lot of [being] tired bones, and you got rid of a lot of
8 your baby fat, and you were a little more solid when you came home. You walked taller
9 and, you know, you felt good about yourself.

10 JS: Sure.

11 DS: It was tough. Especially getting up early and staying awake and knowing that
12 bed was right there beside you sometimes and you can't even lay down in it. It was
13 different.

14 JS: Alright. Now the drill instructors, were most of these guys veterans by this
15 point? Were they Korean War, Vietnam War?

16 DS: They were all veterans.

17 JS: Okay, alright. What about weapons training? What type of weapons were you
18 training on this point?

19 DS: The first weapon we had was an M-1, and when we went to the rifle range, I
20 believe we had M-14s that we shot on the rifle range. It's been so long ago. I know we
21 started out M-1s and we might have shot M-1s at the rifle range, but I almost think that
22 somewhere in between there they gave us 14s to shoot. That I can't remember off hand.

23 JS: This is skipping ahead a little bit, but would you have the M-14 in Vietnam or
24 M-16?

25 DS: I had the M-16, and most of the time I carried a .45 with me in Vietnam.

26 JS: Okay, so prior to going to Vietnam you guys had not had any training on the
27 M-16s, just the 14?

28 DS: No. One thing we had was the M-1, the M-14, and of course all the other
29 weapons we got to fire at the Camp Geiger.

30 JS: Okay. Well, I guess by the time you were in Vietnam, had the problems been
31 worked out with the M-16 by that point?

1 DS: Most of them. We still had—a lot of times the 16s would still jam on us, or
2 something would mess up. The majority of the time, probably ninety percent of the time,
3 we didn't have too many problems with the 16s by the time I got there.

4 JS: Okay, well as far as the training goes, would you say that it sufficiently
5 prepared you for being a Marine? The training that you got at boot camp.

6 DS: Oh yeah, definitely. I think it was probably the best training you get
7 anywhere at that time. Back in '65 you got what I called the "Old original Marine Corps
8 training." It was just a hardened version.

9 JS: During the training, was there any specific focus or mention of Vietnam at
10 that point?

11 DS: Not really. There was—I hadn't really even heard of Vietnam that much
12 because I didn't care about listening to the news and stuff. We didn't get any news period
13 when we were at Parris Island, so we were kind of no TV, no radio, and no nothing, at
14 that time. You know, there were some inkling— every now and then you'd hear
15 somebody say something about Vietnam or Korea or something, but there wasn't much
16 going on in June and July of '65. That was when things were kind of picking up in
17 Vietnam.

18 JS: Right.

19 DS: When we got to Camp Geiger, you started hearing a little bit more about
20 there could be a chance of everybody was heading to Vietnam or something. At Parris
21 Island, I didn't really know really what was going on, period. I couldn't tell you what was
22 going on with my own guys. You know, I was in the barracks with them; everything was
23 so quiet.

24 JS: Before moving on to advanced training, where there any particular memorable
25 moments or humorous moments, or anything like that from boot camp that stand out in
26 your mind?

27 DS: Well, a lot of times the things that were humorous were people really getting
28 smacked for doing something stupid. They're not so humorous when they're you that are
29 getting hit in the back. Watching the guy not do what he's told, and the drill instructor put
30 the fifty gallon or thirty gallon, or whatever garbage can on top of his head. Everybody
31 has to get around, and he has to start kind of walking, and everybody has to push him

1 back in the circle and hit the can. Of course, we weren't allowed to laugh or anything; but
2 inside it was kind of funny watching somebody walk around with a garbage can on their
3 head, but it was kind of sad too because you know it didn't feel good to get hit every time
4 you got too close to somebody. If you didn't hit them or push them back in there, then the
5 DI would come to you and you would be in the garbage can. Some of the funny things
6 were watching people turn left when they should have turned right, they're probably
7 thinking about home or something, wondering what they got themselves into. Out on the
8 firing range, watching people who couldn't shoot. You've got five DI's over one guy
9 calling him every name there is. The guy had so much pressure on him he was shooting
10 other people's targets. There wasn't a whole lot of fun times, but you can look back and
11 see a few things that happened. Having a couple guys from high school made it a little bit
12 better, even though you couldn't talk to them or do anything. You got a chance, you felt
13 like you still had a piece of home with you.

14 JS: Sure, alright. So overall, did you feel that you were adjusting to the Marine
15 lifestyle pretty well? Or—

16 DS: Toward I guess the last few weeks, I felt better after getting through most of
17 the instruction, and some of the tougher book part of it. But until we finally went out to
18 the rifle range and got back, and started doing some of our tests and things, I started to
19 get more comfortable as it started getting behind me. You're always scared that you're
20 the one that's going to fail and usually if you had—I think back then we started off with
21 sixty or seventy guys and I think we ended up with about forty-five or fifty of us
22 graduating. You tried to do your best not to fall out or go to that other battalion where
23 they would take the guys who were too fat or too slow, or just not making it, and know
24 that you'd have to go back through a lot of that training over again. I was trying to do
25 everything I can to get through it one time.

26 JS: Right.

27 DS: I thought it was good training, it prepared me for later.

28 JS: Alright. So those who failed the first time then they would be just recycled
29 through to another unit, is that what would happen?

30 DS: Yeah, they had their "Motivation Unit", as they called it. If you got too far
31 behind and you couldn't make it past each step, then you were recycled to your

1 motivation battalion, and then that group would take you and recycle you again later.
2 They'd get you to the point where you'd get past what your problems were. If you were
3 overweight and had a problem getting through the obstacle courses, then you went on a
4 diet and they would get you to the point where you could make it through the obstacle
5 courses and stuff. So motivation stuff over there. You never did see anybody once they
6 left, and so I'm sure some of them probably didn't even make it through the Marine
7 Corps. Your percentage of guys that got in there and found out it wasn't what they
8 wanted, and they did everything in the world they could to get discharged, so. But you'd
9 have a few of those guys scattered about too.

10 JS: Right, right. And you said you went to Camp Geiger for AIT (Advanced
11 Infantry Training)?

12 DS: Right.

13 JS: Okay, where's Camp Geiger located?

14 DS: I believe it's right outside of Lejeune, out that way. It's in South Carolina or
15 North Carolina. It's where we went next, and they loaded us up on buses and sent us all
16 over to Camp Geiger. I can't remember if we spent like four weeks there or exactly how
17 many weeks it was, but that's where we learned to be more of an organization. Working
18 patrols, working in company formations, and doing some mock little battles and things so
19 we learned more teamwork within units and things. We got to throw the grenades and fire
20 the different weapons. Most of our live training was there, so that's where it was not as
21 hard as Parris Island, it was a little bit more fun. The things that we were beginning to do,
22 shooting the weapons. But it was still to the point of not like drill instructors, but the guys
23 we had over us still getting us up early and, going to bed late, and in between we're
24 always out moving around and walking information. Just learning the movement of a
25 company, and a platoon and different sizes of units. It was a lot more fun. It was kind of
26 like watching the war movies except people weren't really shooting at you, and you're
27 kind of learning a little bit more about what it was like to stay awake at night. Wherever
28 we were it was cold because it was kind of getting into the winter. I remember one night
29 being on the radio, about to freeze to death. It's like, "Man, I don't know if I'll ever make
30 it through this. Having to stay awake." It was kind of tough to understand that this is for
31 real, you can't just go to sleep here.

1 JS: And you said here there began to be more talk about Vietnam at this point?

2 DS: Yeah. Once we got to Camp Geiger, yeah, we were Marines, and basically
3 the talk was anything and everything then. Of course, I didn't care. It was like I didn't
4 have control over anything, so I didn't really worry about it. I didn't worry about the little
5 things I was hearing about. They were getting ready to send units—Marine units over to
6 'Nam and I'm not sure if the 4th Marines had already landed at that time, that battalion,
7 or if that was later in '65 or about the same time or what. I think it was the 4th Marines
8 had a battalion, I think land in Vietnam there in '65. There was a lot of talk going on
9 about some Marines there now, so the war's going to be over before long. You know a lot
10 of macho talk.

11 JS: Right, I've heard this from other guys, but was that one of the things that guys
12 were talking about, wanting to get there I guess, before it ended? Believing that once they
13 got there it would be over pretty fast, so they wanted to hurry up and get there?

14 DS: Well, you know there's a lot of movies that you see every now and then and
15 what they say is true. Most young guys, they go through the Marine Corps and they're
16 training and everything and all of a sudden, they go from wimps to being "macho guys",
17 so they hear about fighting and war, and that's what they're training for. So they're ready
18 to go to it and get it done and get it over with and come out the victor; not realizing that
19 once you get to war, what really happens. A lot of the guys were ready to go, so. I could
20 care less; I'd go wherever they tell me. So I didn't have a choice, the way I looked at it.

21 JS: Right, sure. Alright. I guess during this point in your training, I guess from
22 what I'm getting, was it more focused in on just the tactics and how to operate in the
23 field?

24 DS: That's exactly right. There were a lot of guys who had different MOS's that
25 wasn't infantry or whatever. Some of them had left to go off to radio training and stuff
26 like that at that time, but the majority of the guys all went through the training and then a
27 lot of them left afterwards to go to their different MOS's.

28 JS: Alright. And did you feel that this training was pretty sufficient, as far as
29 preparing you for Vietnam?

30 DS: I don't think anything prepares you for Vietnam once you get there, but that
31 training, and the training I would later go through over at Pendleton, back in the end of

1 '67, where they had mock Vietnam villages and stuff for us to kind of practice running
2 through and patrolling through, I think that helped us also. But Camp Geiger and Parris
3 Island really got you motivated, got you in condition, got you trained to go face the
4 world, and take orders, and so that part really helped you be prepared.

5 JS: Well, any particular memorable moments or any other moments that stick out
6 in your mind from this training?

7 DS: Well, just throwing the grenades and you know, you have some people that
8 get kind of stupid and kind of let it go in the wrong time, but most of that was pretty
9 straight forward. We had to fire the different weapons, fire the flame thrower, and shoot
10 the bazooka once, throw your grenades. It was all kind of fun, but it was scary too,
11 knowing that this is real. If you made a mistake, you could get hurt or somebody else
12 would get hurt.

13 JS: Right.

14 DS: It was more loose then, since we could talk and chat. So we all felt a whole
15 lot better about ourselves; so we felt like people again.

16 JS: Right. How was discipline enforced here, if there were discipline problems at
17 this point?

18 DS: Well, I can tell you one night everybody got their first little leave to go in
19 town, I think just that night. And I was so tired, I just said I was going to sleep. So I
20 remember I laid down on my bunk and went to sleep. And then at nighttime, everybody's
21 supposed to be back at a certain time and I'm still laying on my bunk asleep and nobody
22 woke me up, and they came in to do the night inspection. All of a sudden, I was on my
23 bunk when they were going through—one guy even tried to wake me up and I got up real
24 quick, but the instructor saw that I just got out the bunk and he was really mad that I
25 wasn't standing at attention. So I had to end up peeling potatoes for the next six hours, I
26 think. I remember that, I was so mad at the guys around me for not waking me up. They
27 were so happy from coming back from leave and half of them were drunk. So I was
28 pretty upset at my guys. I didn't know a lot of them, but the couple I knew I was kind of
29 mad at for not waking me up.

30 JS: Sure.

31 DS: I sure didn't like staying up the rest of the night peeling potatoes.

1 JS: Right, right.

2 DS: It was fun, I enjoyed Camp Geiger.

3 JS: Alright. At that point, when Camp Geiger was finished, was that when you
4 were given your first assignment at that point?

5 DS: Yeah, I received my orders to go to Camp Lejeune and to report to the Echo
6 Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines.

7 JS: Okay.

8 DS: I had leave before then, so I went home on leave. The first time my family
9 got to see me in my uniform. They couldn't come out for graduation. So I ate all the
10 hamburgers and French fries, and tried to get all the fat back I could in the twenty days,
11 and then I left. I took a bus from Memphis to Camp Lejeune and joined Echo Company.
12 Of course, being the new guys, you got all the duties and everything. I stayed out there a
13 few months, and then we received orders to go to Morehead City and get aboard a ship
14 out there and proceed down to Cuba for a four month stay at Cuba. So that's where my
15 first duty station was after we left Lejeune. I wasn't there but a couple months before we
16 went to Cuba and took over guard duty there on that base for four months.

17 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about that, and what that was like for you,
18 being in Cuba? I would assume it was at Guantanamo Bay?

19 DS: Yes, it was.

20 JS: Okay, alright.

21 DS: Best thing I can say about Cuba is, it's another island that the drill instructor
22 promised me.

23 JS: Right.

24 DS: I'm two for two, Parris Island and now Cuba. Anyway, we get to Cuba and
25 we're over on—I think it's what they call the leeward side, that's the far side of the bay.
26 So we weren't around where the ships were, and they had one company that they kept on
27 the leeward side, and that just happened to be our company. All we did was pull guard
28 duty and there were towers all around the fence there, and the Cubans had towers on their
29 side of the fence. There were mine fields in between, on our side and their side, and there
30 was one road on our side and one road on their side. We just stood there and looked at
31 each other twenty-four hours a day. Sometimes we would walk patrols down on the roads

1 and stuff, but most of the time, with all the mine fields and stuff around there, we would
2 be assigned to a tower and that's where we would stay until we were relieved. We had a
3 barracks, we had a little movie theater, and we had a little club, and that's all we had on
4 the leeward side. Again, to a place where there's no women and I didn't drink. To me it
5 was like the worst duty a Marine could ever imagine. I kept thinking, "This Marine Corps
6 is not getting any better here." But anyway, we spent that time, just like I said, the patrols
7 and the towers and running drills up in the hills and the mountains. Every now and then
8 we'd hear stories about the Cubans trying to sneak across the fence or something, and
9 nobody ever found anybody. That was before that guy finally got shot. One of the guys
10 shot him, he fell back on the Cuban side. There was kind of a big stink about that. They
11 were mad because they didn't wait and get the guy when he got on our side, but that was
12 about it. It was probably the duller duty I ever had in my life. I know it was definitely
13 boring. There's no women, no girls and. You know, all you could do is drink if you liked
14 to drink and go to a movie and sit around. I guess it was better than being at Vietnam at
15 the time, but it was still like—I don't understand this Marine Corps. Hopefully things are
16 going to get better.

17 JS: Right.

18 DS: Then we loaded ship and headed back to Camp Lejeune and got there and as
19 we all debarked, most of us were given new orders and most of the guys after we got
20 back to Cuba, [the men of the] 8th Marines were given orders to Vietnam.

21 JS: Okay.

22 DS: I, for some reason, was given duty at Marine Barracks, Fort Campbell,
23 Kentucky, and it was at Clarksville Base. Clarksville Base was one of those top-secret
24 places at the time, and I had to get a top secret clearance and final top secret clearance. I
25 was like, "What in the world is the Marines doing in an Army base at Fort Campbell,
26 Kentucky?" I thought it was getting better.

27 JS: Sure. What was your job there?

28 DS: I was a guard there. I remember going to Fort Campbell, pulling up on the
29 bus there, whatever that little town was in Tennessee right there on the border. Taking a
30 cab out to the gates of Fort Campbell, and I was still surprised because here I am in
31 Marine uniform and I got hundreds and thousands of Army guys walking by me all over

1 the place; and I was beginning to think that somebody messed up on my orders. I told this
2 guy when I got there, I said, "I'm reporting in to Clarksville Base." And he told me, "Just
3 go over and sit down." He was going to have a jeep pick me up in a little while. So I sit
4 down for about an hour and finally a jeep came by and picked me up. All of a sudden we
5 started driving toward this place that looked like a prison and I said, "My god, what have
6 I got myself into now? I'm on prison duty or something." Back then that was one of the
7 most top-secret places in the United States and it's where they used to—one of the two
8 places they used to have nuclear warheads at the time.

9 JS: Okay.

10 DS: So our job was to guard the nuclear warheads, and they had a very interesting
11 place, but it was like five fences spread out and the middle fence was electrified, and
12 there was lights all around the whole base. The whole place was electrified around it. Our
13 job was to pull either stationary guard duty at the two bridges or the gate, or at some of
14 the mandatory locations. We rode around in gray pickup trucks. Two men, or one man to
15 a truck twenty-four hours a day, making sure that the facility was always safe and
16 guarded. We were stationed there with a detachment of Navy Seabees and as far as our
17 job, the Navy Seabees took care of the nuclear warheads and our job was to make sure
18 that all the—kind of like bunkers are built into the mountains where the nuclear warheads
19 are stored, and several underground buildings were all protected. We went around
20 making sure that the seals were on them all the time, and just making sure that the bridges
21 that had a little creek or river that ran through the base was always secure. The gates were
22 always open, and ours closed. That's what we did, but we went around with live
23 ammunition, and it was our job to make sure that nobody ever got on our side of the base.
24 Even the Army were not allowed to walk on our side of the base, and a lot of times we'd
25 have to go outside the base and remind them that they needed to get back on the other
26 side of the street. Army didn't like us being there at all. There was a "no fly" area over
27 the base and so it was pretty interesting duty. We were told, you know, not to look like
28 Marines, and let our hair grow long. So that part was good.

29 JS: Right.

30 DS: When I went home, I was only about three hours from Memphis because it
31 was up close toward Nashville toward the Kentucky line there, on the Kentucky line. So

1 when I went home everybody was saying, “You’re not in the Marines anymore?” Just
2 because my hair was long.

3 JS: Right.

4 DS: They didn’t want us to look like Marines when we went to town. If there’s
5 any spies or anybody out there that would look at us and would start a conversation up
6 with us or something. Back then we were strict orders that we couldn’t talk about the
7 base, what was inside the base. All that’s been turned over to the Army and pretty well
8 changed now.

9 JS: Right. When you weren’t on duty here, how would you spend your free time?

10 DS: We worked three days on, three days off, so when I was off I would either
11 sleep or hang out with some of the guys, we’d go to town. Most of the time I would head
12 back to Memphis, and I was usually in Memphis two or three times a month, for two or
13 three days each time. It was nice having a duty station close to home.

14 JS: Right, sure.

15 DS: Most of my time I’d get off duty and get a little sleep, and just head back
16 home. Hang out with my friends and eat, and different things.

17 JS: Right, alright.

18 DS: But that’s where I’d end up making corporal real fast, while I was there. So
19 within two years I was already an E-4 and so rank was really moving at that time.

20 JS: Alright. How long were you there in this duty?

21 DS: I was there probably about a year and a half.

22 JS: Okay.

23 DS: It was supposed to have been a two-year duty assignment, I was told. But
24 after I made corporal, Vietnam [were] having a hard time filling slots for NCOs (Non-
25 Commanding Officers). So I got redlined as soon as I made corporal. I guess, probably
26 about four months later—as a matter of fact, it was right before thanksgiving of ’67, they
27 called me in and told me I had orders, and I said, “Oh great, man. You know I loved this
28 place.” And I couldn’t imagine because by then we had guys coming to the barracks that
29 were coming back from Vietnam. So we’re starting to hear the war stories about what
30 was going on over there. Most of us knew that when we got orders it wasn’t good. You
31 know, that they would be heading us over to Vietnam. So as soon as I got it, I kind of

1 cringed and I knew that was where I was going to end up. So I went home on leave on
2 Thanksgiving, and told my parents, and I'd gotten married a couple months before.

3 JS: Okay.

4 DS: I told her I had to leave and then I came home for twenty days leave at
5 Christmas, and my orders basically said for me to report to Camp Pendleton. I forgot
6 what the name of the unit was, but it was kind of a fill-in unit to prepare for Vietnam. I
7 had to be over there; I think the third of January. I went home on leave and then I kissed
8 everybody goodbye, and I caught a plane and went out to Pendleton. They put me in a
9 little unit just preparing us for the next thirty days—four weeks, to go to Vietnam.

10 JS: Alright. So this was some extra training right at the end before going to get
11 you ready for Vietnam?

12 DS: Yeah, it was what they call "jungle-warfare training."

13 JS: Okay.

14 DS: So they had [us] walk [through a village with] people acting like Vietnamese.
15 They would run us through mine training that we really hadn't before. What to do if you
16 found a mine with booby traps, what to look out for, how to sweep a village, what to look
17 out for in booby traps and ambushes, you know. They got us back into the physical
18 training more than we were in at the Marine barracks. We did a lot of running up and
19 down the hills over there. Then they finally, every so often, would pick a couple guys out
20 and tell us we were on our way to Vietnam, and report over to El Toro and get our
21 instructions there. I finally got my orders, and I went over there and later that afternoon
22 they put me on a flight heading toward Vietnam. I think it was me and about a hundred
23 and fifty other guys or something. It was a Pan Am flight. The last time I saw some nice,
24 round-eyed women, the stewardesses on there, and we flew into Da Nang.

25 JS: Alright. What was the mood like on the plane among the guys? Was there any
26 talk about Vietnam?

27 DS: Nah, there wasn't a whole lot. There was a few guys who were gung ho still,
28 by then though a lot of people had already heard the war stories and saw what happens
29 with scars, and the guys coming back. A lot of people just took time and they read, and
30 they were quiet. Other guys just chatted about home and stuff. Until you're really there,

1 even people telling you something about it, you really can't imagine the horror that
2 you're fixing to see.

3 JS: Right.

4 DS: I know I just kind of laid back and slept, and enjoyed our stay. We flew into
5 Guam at night and refueled. I remember we got off the plane, they told us to go into the
6 terminal. You couldn't go anywhere; of course, if you've ever been to Guam there's
7 nowhere to go anyway. The thing that was interesting to me is when we got off the plane
8 in Guam, between us and the terminal, they had guards posted so you had to walk
9 between the guards all the way to the terminal. Once you were in the room in the terminal
10 you couldn't go anywhere because those doors were locked, there were guards there.
11 When it was time to get back on the plane, you had to walk back through the guards. So
12 apparently, they'd had some people that went AWOL (Absence Without Official Leave)
13 or something in the past, and they were making sure no one was going AWOL this time.

14 JS: Right.

15 DS: So the guards all wait to make sure that we did what we were told and we got
16 back on the plane. I thought that was kind of interesting when I first saw it. It was like,
17 "Man, they want to make sure we get there."

18 JS: Right.

19 DS: I remember flying into Da Nang, and the pilot coming on saying, "Ladies and
20 gentlemen, welcome to the Republic of Vietnam. We will be approaching Da Nang here
21 shortly, so take your seats." I just remember saying a little prayer. Saying, "Lord, let us
22 pray that you get as many men home as I can possibly get." Many years later I said, "You
23 know, I forgot to even pray for myself." I was praying for men, and at that time I didn't
24 even know I'd have any men or not.

25 JS: Right.

26 DS: It was just kind of strange when I look back at it and saw how it turned out.

27 JS: Right. Well, what was your first impression of Vietnam?

28 DS: I would take Cuba any day. It was morning when we got there; it was still hot
29 and sweaty. As soon as you walked outside it was like just feeling the heat, and you just
30 wanted to go into the air conditioner somewhere. We walked down the stairs and out to
31 where these guys were standing, and they took us over to this one area. The anticipation

1 was kind of scary because all around you, you saw this activity going on at Da Nang, and
2 you saw the coffin boxes, you know, stacked up kind of to the right of us as we were
3 walking toward were going, the tent we were going to. And it was like, "Are those just
4 empty boxes or are people in them?" It kind of got your mind thinking about it and then
5 you [are] started seeing the Vietnamese guys walking around that were supposed to be on
6 our side, and said, "That's what they look like." And then you see all these grungy guys,
7 and then you see some spit and shiny guys, and say, "Man, I wonder what we got
8 ourselves into here." Then they took us over to this tent and got us in line by our
9 alphabet, and so we went through that. As we went up there and rattled off our name,
10 they gave us our orders of where we'd be going to from there. In my case I was assigned
11 to the 7th Marines. Again, it was Echo Company, 2nd battalion, kind of like the 8th
12 Marines. Anyway, they told me I was going to a rifle outfit. When I left the States,
13 because I had the final top-secret clearance, they said, "Well, you got it made. Don't
14 worry about it; you'll be back in the rear since you have a final top-secret clearance. You
15 know, they won't let you out on the field." When I got there, they used my original MOS
16 0311, and they sent me to a rifle outfit, and I said, "Well, you know I got a final top-
17 secret clearance?" They said, "Well, it doesn't matter, these are your orders." I said,
18 "Alright." Anyway, I was kind of surprised, but they told me that I couldn't go out to my
19 outfit until the next day, and there'd be three of us that would be going out. Another guy
20 pointed to a tent, told us to go over there and find a cot, go find some chow, and just stay
21 right there within that area, the mess hall, and that we'd be picked up the next morning.
22 They told us to be ready by ten o'clock. So I went over there, didn't know who the other
23 two guys were at the time, so I found me a cot and laid down. It was too hot, so I got up
24 and went to find me the mess hall and stayed over there for a while. Then I came back
25 and just started talking to some of the guys starting to float in. Then, that night they
26 rocketed Da Nang, so we all had to get out and go to these underground bunkers. I was
27 just watching these rockets, like, "Man, this is cool." Then I started realizing that if one
28 of those hit anywhere close, I could be dead. I started thinking about what death meant at
29 the time. Never really seen too many people dead before. Anyway, the next morning I got
30 up, ate chow, came back, in our green utilities and black boots, and a guy pulled up and
31 said, "Anybody for Echo 27? The ride is over here." And so me and two other guys fell

1 out, a guy named Jones, a guy named Music. We got on that jeep, rode out to a hill, Hill
2 190, and that's where Echo company was at, at the moment, and they just came in from
3 the Esso plant and from Tet, up by Hue. So [I] went and joined them on this hill and it
4 had a CAC (Combined Action Program) unit down below them. Saw a bunch of bombed
5 out vehicles between Da Nang and going out to Hill 190. So we got there and the country
6 looked real pretty, and the rice [paddies] were kind of like Arkansas in a way. I kind of
7 used to the rice fields and stuff, but just the people we passed were looking different. You
8 started thinking, you know, "I've got thirteen months here and this is only the first day."

9 JS: Right.

10 DS: Anyway, we got to 190. They told us to leave our bags right there when the
11 jeep pulled up, and we went up to meet the captain. So I went up to the CO
12 (Commanding Officer) and he welcomed us to Echo Company, told us a little bit about
13 the outfit. They had just gotten back from Tet, and they were just settling in on 190 right
14 now, and they were short of a lot of personnel. I was the only NCO, the other two guys I
15 think were either private or lance corporal. A couple lieutenants started coming in, and
16 they told us just to sit over there while they try to decide what was the best platoon, or
17 where we were supposed to go. About thirty, forty minutes later a lieutenant named
18 Lieutenant Phippen walked in and the captain introduced me to him and said, "Lieutenant
19 Phippen, Corporal Storz is going to be assigned to you, and he's been a corporal for so
20 long, and everything. So he's actually the senior corporal that you got in your platoon."
21 So I asked him what slot, what he wanted to do with me and he said right now they'd put
22 me in as a right guide. It's been a long time, so I remembered what a right guide was. I
23 started thinking, "Well, I guess I can always ask the left guide what that is."

24 JS: Right.

25 DS: Of course, there ain't no left guide. I had no idea what I had just became.

26 JS: Right.

27 DS: So anyway, they take me back to this little bunker and the guys are already
28 out on guard duty, the ones that are supposed to be. So I go in there and I meet the staff
29 sergeant, who's a platoon sergeant and the lieutenant says, "Corporal Storz here is our
30 senior corporal, so we're going to give him the temporary slot of right-guide." So I
31 finally asked, I said, "You know, it's been awhile, I've been at a Marine barracks. What's

1 my duty as the right guide?" He said, "Well, you're third in command." I said, "Third in
2 command? I just got here and I'm only a corporal."

3 JS: Right.

4 DS: And something didn't sound right. Anyway, as the senior corporal I became
5 the right guide, [and] the 3rd in command of the platoon. After the lieutenant and staff
6 sergeant, and he was getting ready to rotate home in about a month and so I figure, well,
7 this won't last long. They told me my duties, that I'd be in charge of making sure of
8 supplies. We took care of the men all the time, and I kind of did all the dirty duty, you
9 know, the lieutenant and staff sergeant didn't have to do. [Like] getting the squad leaders
10 and the radio guys. I remember that night, they said, "Well, just stay here in the hooch
11 tonight since we already got everybody out posted. We'll get you meeting [with]
12 everybody. That night, somebody shot and the whole line opened up. Finally, it's like,
13 "What in the world do I do?" I haven't even received my rifle or anything at that time. So
14 I just kind of went to the closest bunker and got in it. Finally, [I was told] one of the guys
15 on the line had shot himself in the foot. They found out it wasn't by accident and so he
16 was later court martialed, but I had to go take his place that night and took his rifle and
17 everything. So next morning, you know, the sun comes up and the other guys had already
18 told me they'd pulled their duties, so I kind of got zapped on that. I had to stay up, you
19 know, rest of the night. So the next morning they introduced me to the guys and told me I
20 was going to be the temporary right guide. So I start getting to know everybody, got my
21 gear and everything assigned to me. Got some jungle utilities and jungle boots. So they
22 gave me an M-16, and so that night I went on my first patrol and had one guy hit a booby
23 trap, lost his leg. I remember a chopper came in and I found his foot, it was still inside the
24 boot. So I picked it up and put it on the chopper beside the guy, and said, "Boy, I sure
25 don't like these booby traps." So for the next month we ran patrols and things of 190, and
26 up [into] Elephant Valley at the river there in Amtrak's. That's about all we ran into for
27 that first month, just booby traps and things. I started getting to know the men and got
28 used to my right guide position. We got word that we were going on a "float", that we'd
29 probably go to the Philippines and regroup. By then, we started getting into some
30 operations, and started getting hit pretty hard, los[t] a lot of guys. I remember we went to
31 the Philippines and picked up a whole bunch of lieutenants, and my lieutenant went over

1 [his stay in the field], he'd already had his six months in the field. So Lieutenant Pippen
2 moved over to S-2, S-3 or something, and got a new lieutenant in, named Toya. We
3 already got a new staff sergeant in, named Staff Sergeant Lutu from American Samoa,
4 one of the meanest, toughest guys you'd ever see in your life. He couldn't pronounce my
5 name, so when he got there about, I guess March or April, he couldn't say Sergeant Storz.
6 I made sergeant in April, April 1st, and he had to call me Sergeant Story. So I went
7 through my whole time, from that time on until I left being known as "Sergeant Story".

8 JS: Right.

9 DS: I didn't even have my real name when I was over there. They made me
10 sergeant right after I found out Da Nang got rocketed, and they sent us out as a reinforced
11 platoon to the site they thought the rockets had come from, and we had the engineers with
12 us. Instead of dropping us on top of this big old mountain, they made us walk all the way
13 up it. So by the time we got to the top of it we were exhausted. We got up there, and we
14 still have Lieutenant Pippen at the time, and he was going to take one of the squads and
15 go down this kind of fork off the hill, the mountain. He told me to stay up there on the
16 highest part and just watch the back door and around us. So we did, we sit down, posted
17 the guards. When I sat down, I saw three little pieces of bamboo right in front of me. I
18 looked at it and I said, "I remember in jungle warfare [training], those are signs." And so
19 I got up, and I'd already taken my web gear off and put my rifle down, had my radio guy
20 beside me, I said "I'm going to see where these markers are going to." So I got up, and
21 there's kind of a big boulder right in front of me, like a drop off from there going down
22 into the valley. It was kind of pointed right at the boulder, and like a bush [that was] right
23 there. Being kind of a new guy, and not into real big battles at the time, I walked over
24 there, kind of looked and kind of pushed the bush out the way and it moved, I said, "Look
25 right there, there's a trail going down off this hill." And it looked like a drop off, so
26 anyway, I just started diddy-bopping down a little bit. As soon as I turned around the big
27 boulder, there's a rifle standing there and some rice that had been cooked, and I said,
28 "Aw shit." So I hollered up there for them to call the lieutenant and get your radio down
29 [here and] bring my weapon." I just knew I was a dead man standing there like a stupid
30 new guy. Anyway, they came down and we found a big cave up under where we'd been
31 sitting. It had a hospital and all kind of weapons. Apparently, the couple of guys who

1 were guards or whatever, didn't want to mess with us and they'd taken off real quick.
2 One of them left a rifle. So we got word to blow the place up after they took a bunch of
3 pictures and stuff of it. So we blew it up, and when I got back, they promoted me to
4 sergeant. And I said, "Damn, I just did something stupid that could have gotten me killed
5 and I make sergeant out of it."

6 JS: Right.

7 DS: Anyway, I'm still the right guide, and I ended up staying the right guide the
8 whole time I was there. I never went down to squad leader or anything. So I'm probably
9 one of the few guys that can say that I started off as a corporal, as a right guide and ended
10 up being a right guide. Later, I'd be a platoon sergeant, and four times I'd take over the
11 platoon in the next thirteen months, so.

12 JS: Okay, wow.

13 DS: We just didn't have any rank.

14 JS: Right.

15 DS: When we got rank, they didn't last long

16 JS: Right.

17 DS: I was very lucky. I was one of about three guys—I was the only NCO officer
18 who went the whole thirteen months.

19 JS: Oh, wow.

20 DS: In Echo Company. So I saw it all, everybody come and go. When we have
21 our reunions, I can recount more since I was one of the few guys that made it all the way
22 through '68. You know, the weird thing was the three of us that rode that jeep in on '68,
23 we rode that jeep out in '69. And I couldn't imagine the odds of three of us going to Echo
24 Company—although the other two guys were wounded at different times—that the three
25 of us would make it out of there at the same time. We were about the only three that went
26 the whole tour. We probably went through about two hundred percent casualties in Echo
27 Company, in '68.

28 JS: Oh, wow. Could you talk a little bit about—you don't have to go into specific
29 names if you don't want to, but just the group dynamic, and the makeup of the unit. Did
30 everyone seem to get along fairly well? And talk about morale and all that.

1 DS: Yeah, we had good morale. Especially in our group. I know a lot of other
2 units that I hear didn't, but we didn't have a lot of the drugs and stuff. Every now and
3 then we'd catch some new guys coming in or something, but they'd get it [through] the
4 rear pokies, you know, or in the rear every now and then. But most of the guys we had on
5 the front line, we knew that we had to trust each other.

6 JS: Sure.

7 DS: And if one of us slipped, we were in trouble. We had pretty good morale.
8 There for a while that black power thing kind of took over, but most of that was in the
9 rear, and the guys we had out in front were basically told real quick not to even get there.
10 Our officers, as the NCOs, we didn't put up for anybody thinking they were better than
11 anybody else. Basically, my line was, "If you think you're that good; I'm going to let you
12 walk point."

13 JS: Right.

14 DS: Everybody didn't want to walk point. Well, they had a few crazy guys that
15 wanted to do that. Anyway, I didn't have a problem with morale. Actually, we went
16 through so many turnovers that there wasn't that time for a lot of bonding, and the people
17 who did bond, they usually wasn't together for long periods of time, more so toward the
18 end of '68, November, December going into January. But we had so many big operations
19 that our company, at several points, we got down just to—August 18th, we had forty-one
20 guys that walked out, out of the whole company. We've [fought] other battles before that
21 where there'd be sixty or seventy of us left. But I know [in] August, out of those forty-
22 one guys [in the company], by the time December got around there was about twelve of
23 us [left from the] forty-one left. By the time I left in February, there's probably about six
24 of us left [from 1968]. You know, our morale was good with each other because that's all
25 we had was each other.

26 JS: Right.

27 DS: We talked about home, and I didn't get real close to the men like most NCOs.
28 I had some of my favorites, but when they'd get killed or wounded, it kind of hurt. You
29 just got to the point where—everybody had a nickname basically. So, we called
30 everybody "Hawk Eye", "Branch", "Swamp Rat", different things and called someone
31 "Coyote". A lot of times you didn't even know their names, except for on paper. I had to

1 know them because I had to report all the casualties and stuff, but I knew the guys a lot
2 better than even the squad leaders did. I didn't have any problem with morale. We had
3 people that would come that [were] there when the Marines started taking people that
4 were going to jail. And the judges would say, "You can go to the Marines or go to jail."
5 They'd take [the] Marines and they didn't like to be there. And then you had a lot of
6 people that started getting drafted, that didn't want to be there, for two years. We had
7 more problems with those folks than anybody. Most of the time, they'd do stupid things
8 or try to do something to get them out of the fighting part. Of course, the guys that
9 volunteered for their four years were pretty steady guys. I enjoyed them, and we started
10 our reunions about fifteen years ago. One of the last Marine companies to do that. So it's
11 been fun, kind of sitting around talking to them.

12 JS: Sure.

13 DS: We watched each other and backed each other up. Like I say, I went through
14 four lieutenants and five captains while I was there. I saw the whole platoon. My platoon
15 probably went through about three times as many guys. When you end up looking at it,
16 Echo Company I think lost eighty-eight guys. Eighty-eight or eighty-nine men were
17 killed in Vietnam.

18 JS: Alright. When a replacement would come in for one of the original guys, what
19 would it be like at that point? Would the other guys tend to distance themselves until he
20 proved himself? I guess, I'm going on a stereotype here from what I've seen on TV and
21 in the movies, but—

22 DS: Well, in most cases people had to prove themselves. A new guy would come
23 in—a lot of times it would depend on the new guy. A lot of times the guy could come in
24 and have a good personality, and guys would pick up on him real quick. Or if he came in
25 and he was assigned to a squad, and he was from the same state or same city as a guy or
26 two, he was more accepted real quick than somebody else.

27 JS: Right.

28 DS: In most cases, a guy would come in and they would assign him to a team, and
29 the team leader would tell him, "You're just a rifleman. Just do what I tell you."
30 Everybody would—just his little team would really try to get to know him and maybe his
31 squad. It wasn't like everybody would welcome him to the fraternity.

1 JS: Right.

2 DS: But my job—basically, once the lieutenant assigned him, usually the platoon
3 sergeant in most cases, would assign him to the squad leader, and then I would take him
4 over or go with the squad leader and introduce him. Then, he was kind of on his own. A
5 lot of people would call me and knew who I was, but I didn't just hang around with them.
6 I'd stop by and check their morale, and make sure they got all the food and ammo they
7 needed. That was my job, so I did that more than the platoon sergeant. I kind of knew the
8 guys a little bit more than the lieutenant or the staff sergeant in most cases, at first
9 anyway.

10 JS: Alright. I wanted to ask you about the time, as far as when you first arrived in
11 country. Had Tet already taken place by that point or was it going on?

12 DS: It was at the end.

13 JS: Okay.

14 DS: I got there right at the end of Tet. I think it was February 1st or February 2nd is
15 when I arrived. Most of what I saw out of Tet was mainly booby traps and stuff, for the
16 first thirty days I was there.

17 JS: Okay.

18 DS: I heard a lot of stories of guys that were up at Hue, and where they had come
19 from and the Esso plant, and the places that they'd been. The stories were like I was
20 reading in the paper before I left, but when I got there—at that time, I thought, "Man, I
21 got here at the right time." But boy, I was wrong. I think '68 ended up being the worst
22 year of all.

23 JS: Right. Well, could you talk a little bit about the tactics employed by your unit
24 out in the field?

25 DS: Well, the first part of '68 we were on Hill 190, so our tactics are basically to
26 keep Elephant Valley open there on the river. And to guard the outskirts of Da Nang, and
27 our job was to run patrols and night ambushes, and things there in a certain area outside
28 of Da Nang. That's all we did for the first about forty-five days we were there. After that,
29 they moved us over to Hill 55 and we started running larger sweeps. We'd run platoon
30 sized and a company sized sweeps and operations. Let's see, I think February we
31 anticipated in one operation. There really wasn't much to it. The only guys that really got

1 hurt was coming in the wire. Somebody saw a grenade and picked it up, turned out it was
2 booby trapped. And the guy had thought that one of the other Marines had dropped it, and
3 when he picked it up coming into the wire as the operation ended, a couple guys were
4 killed. I know in March we were on—I think it was “Operation Worth,” and we had a
5 couple guys that were hurt. So things started picking up. But between March and May,
6 we ran a lot of series of ambushes, patrols, and really didn’t find a lot of anything. And
7 then, all of a sudden in May, it seemed like everywhere we went there was death. In May
8 we got on “Operation Ballard Valley”, I think it was, and ran into the enemy. We fought
9 on that and “Allen Brook” in May. In “Allen Brook” we lost a lot of guys that were killed
10 and wounded. I actually had one young guy named Ware—he was a black guy, and he’d
11 come to me and said he just knew he was going to die, and he didn’t want to go out on
12 this operation where we were going. Never will forget him, he was a kid from East St.
13 Louis, I think I was only about a year older than him probably. Anyway, he only had like
14 two weeks left in-country, and I went to CO and asked him if we could get Ware out of
15 the field early, he said no. Everybody had to go because we’re shorthanded. We had one
16 of our first experiences over at a place called “Happy Valley”. Everybody knew when
17 you went there, nobody was going to be happy. So we went and we were moving toward
18 a railroad berm, there was a village on our right and a river on our left and a kind of open
19 area with tall grass. As we were moving through it—we had three tanks with us and all of
20 a sudden, the tanks started blowing up. The village started to open up and I remember
21 Ware was with a sixty-mortar group, and I got away from the tank I was close to since it
22 was getting hit. I hit the ground, started returning fire and I moved a machine gun team I
23 had with me over. Next thing I know, just where the sixty mortar guys were setting up,
24 they zeroed in on them and dropped their mortars in before our mortars could do
25 anything. I knew that didn’t look good. Still there?

26 JS: Yes, sir. I’m listening.

27 DS: Okay, I lost my earpiece here for a minute.

28 JS: Okay.

29 DS: Anyway, I was busy. At that time, we had a guy that was with one of the
30 papers or magazines with us, and the stupid guy thought he would get under the tank.
31 And the tank started getting hit, so the tank moved and ran right over him, and I said, “Oh

1 my goodness, this is going to be a long day.” We couldn’t go anywhere so we had to fight
2 it out until we got some support in on the village, and by then all the tanks—two of the
3 three tanks had been knocked out. We had guys laying all over the place, dead or
4 wounded. So we cleaned the village out and got our people out. I got over and I was the
5 first one to Ware, and I found him. He was just laying on his stomach, and I didn’t know
6 what else I was going to find when I turned him over. I turned him over and it was like
7 there was no blood, there was no nothing. I couldn’t understand it. I tried to wake him up,
8 I said, “Man.” I could tell he was dead and it’s almost like, “Wake up.” Anyway, I finally
9 noticed, right in the zipper of his flack jacket there was a hole. So I zipped his flack
10 jacket open and right through his heart, like the size of a pin needle, was where a piece of
11 shrapnel went right through the zipper part of his flack jacket, right through his heart that
12 killed him.

13 JS: Right.

14 DS: I said, “Man, if it’d been to the left or right, you know, half an inch he would
15 have been okay.” Anyway, it started making me think about guys talking about they
16 knew they were going to die or something. But then a weird thing happened. We cleaned
17 up our area, got our wounded out, and then we were told that they were bringing another
18 company out to help us. They had some tanks with them to replace the two tanks we’d
19 lost. That was a mess, getting those guys out of the tanks—gory mess. Anyway, we set
20 up, and as we were set up we waited a couple hours for this other company and their
21 tanks to come out and join us, so we could keep on going towards this railroad berm. As
22 they came out and they got—oh I guess within about a hundred yards from us, all of a
23 sudden, the tanks opened up on us. A guy named Stroby was standing beside of me, with
24 my M-79 men, and we were both looking over just a little brick wall and I said, “Well,
25 I’m going to sit down and rest a little bit longer before they get here.” And so he kept
26 watching them, and the next thing I knew, his head was down beside me. His body just
27 stood there without his head for a minute and then it collapsed. The tank had fired a
28 Beehive round and it just decapitated his head. I said, “If I hadn’t sat down, it would have
29 done the same thing to me.”

30 JS: Right.

1 DS: So we lost a couple guys because they were jumpy when they came out, and
2 the tank just opened up thinking that we were the bad guys. By the time we got that
3 squared away and had to get the dead and wounded out from that, then we moved on out
4 together and stayed out there sweeping the area for a couple days. Happy Valley is where
5 my unit always hated to go. That was our nightmare. When we knew we were going
6 there, we knew some of us weren't coming back.

7 JS: Right. Was this part of—did you say this was part of “Operation Allen
8 Brook”?

9 DS: I can't remember if that was “Allen Brook” or if that was “Ballard Valley”.

10 JS: Okay.

11 DS: They were both about the same time.

12 JS: Okay. Was this the first major—I guess, major encounter with the enemy?

13 DS: It was the first major one I was involved. We had some smaller ones where
14 we had lost a couple of guys back on “Operation Worth”, but that was where the first guy
15 I saw, a guy named Ward, because Ware is the one I just told you about.

16 JS: Right.

17 DS: Mormon from Texas, a corporal named Ward. He was killed one night trying
18 to get to his hole. They just threw some rounds at us, and it just hit him before he could
19 run over in his hole and killed him. But this was the first big battle I was involved in,
20 where a lot of guys were hurt. You understood what it was to have RPGs (Rocket-
21 Propelled Grenade), and mortars, and bullets all coming at you at one time. You had to
22 start moving people around, best you could. You just didn't stand up and run toward the
23 village. We had to kind of crawl and move, and try to get some artillery and air support
24 in. We went on from there and had a lot more of those encounters then through
25 December. After December, in January and February, they kind of went back to the
26 ambushes and stuff with the booby traps. Between May and December, Echo Company
27 really took a beating. Like I said, I imagine we went through two hundred or more
28 percentage in the company—in casualties.

29 JS: Right. Well, could we switch gears a minute and talk a little bit about the
30 enemy, and your impression of them.

31 DS: Sure.

1 JS: And their abilities as a fighting force, I guess.

2 DS: The NVA (North Vietnamese Army) I thought was good, well trained, and
3 they had been there for many years. They knew what they were doing. We were always
4 going to their terrain, where they were dug in. It wasn't like they were always coming to
5 us. When they did, they usually got their butt kicked, but it's the same thing as us going
6 to them, we usually got our butt kicked. In most cases we'd throw out artillery or
7 whatever, but they were so dug in that unless it hit directly on them, they seemed like
8 they didn't want to die. I mean, it seemed like you could shoot them a dozen times and
9 they're still shooting at you. I just say they were just well prepared and good at what they
10 did. I'm sure that some of their newer outfits, and other replacements, were like ours.
11 They didn't last long because they weren't so experienced. The experienced NVA was a
12 good fighting force. I mean, I'd put it right up there beside ours. They would stick it out
13 and they wouldn't turn and run until they knew they needed to get out, and they had a
14 way out. I've seen them do some extraordinary things. Made you wonder, how human
15 can you be?

16 DS: Right.

17 JS: I feel like if I got shot, I'd want to sit down to holler and cry, but I guess that's
18 why the Lord never got me shot. Anyway, the guys were good in their tactics, they were
19 good in their ambushes, they were good in the villages—how they'd set up their villages
20 with booby traps, snipers, machine guns. They had spider holes that you couldn't even
21 see unless you stepped in one. They had their little punji traps here or there in certain
22 areas, and if you jumped from an explosion, you might jump into them. They had all this
23 stuff pretty well thought out. If you went into their villages and you got hit, you were
24 going to be there for a while, and the only thing that was going to get you out of there
25 was artillery or air support, in most cases. It wasn't like a lot of cases where you just got
26 up and could sweep the village. In most cases you couldn't.

27 JS: Right.

28 DS: So I think they were a good fighting force. The Viet Cong on the other hand,
29 we didn't have a lot of fights with the Viet Cong. Most of ours was NVA, and most of the
30 Viet Cong we ran into, the villagers and stuff, was more catching them doing booby traps
31 or as we swept the village, they were caught off guard sometimes, they couldn't get out.

1 We found out where they were dug in, little pig pen stalls and things and dig them out.
2 They didn't like to fight, they would like to throw out a few shots, or do a booby trap and
3 hide. The NVA would get right in your face and they seemed like they always knew we
4 were coming. I think it was like in July we came from the Philippines and had just got
5 regrouped with new officers and new men, and our job was to go in by Amtrak's off the
6 ships. I think it was called Hue Island at the time, and the Army was supposed to be
7 blocking on the mainland, and those folks, they knew we were coming. I mean, we got
8 there—we hit that shore like a World War II movie you might see with the Amtrak's
9 coming off, the village and the sand, and we got out and we started sweeping the village
10 and I'd never seen so many booby traps laid out in my life. They were everywhere. You
11 could even see a lot of them. They knew we were coming, and they were ready for us.
12 The ones that were there, they weren't going anywhere, so they fought it out and lost a lot
13 of good guys that day because they were well prepared. It's like anything; you just can't
14 go into somebody's hometown and pick a fight. They got all their buddies and everybody
15 there with them; they know what they're going to do to you. They had good equipment
16 and the AK-47 was really a bad weapon. If it hit you it was going to some harm to you.
17 They had a lot of RPGs. The machine gun didn't worry me so much because it was
18 mainly the RPGs and the AK-47s that we would encounter a lot more than machine guns,
19 but when we did, they were real effective with them. They really—I think were great
20 with camouflage and concealment. We learned a lot about camouflage and concealment
21 from them while we were over there.

22 JS: Right. Alright, how often would you say going out on a patrol or something,
23 would you come in contact with the enemy?

24 DS: Well see, when we went afloat for six or seven months, really what that
25 meant was we were on a ship from the Philippines to Vietnam, and in the next seven
26 months we didn't see the ship, I think for about two days. So it meant that we were
27 always sent to wherever the hot zone was.

28 JS: Okay.

29 DS: So the next six or seven months that's all we did, was fight. We went from
30 one hot zone to another, and we were getting guys replaced almost weekly. Like I say,
31 when we hit the beach there at Hue Island in July, we went from—I think that was called

1 “Eager Yankee”, and we went from there to (unintelligible). And between Yankee and
2 (unintelligible) we lost a lot of guys. Like I said, on August eighteenth, our whole
3 battalion walked into a buzzsaw. We were pinned down that day, the lieutenant—I was
4 our platoon sergeant that day and the lieutenant that I had got shot immediately, and I had
5 to take over the platoon. The command battalion was sitting on a mountain right behind
6 us, like a large hill really. You could actually see the people walking around on it, back
7 there behind us. But they couldn’t get to us because there was mortars dropping behind
8 us. There was a village in front of us and like ten-foot berms, the openings were covered
9 by machine guns and snipers, and we were going down left and right that day. Like I said,
10 we got through about eight hours later and there were only forty-one of us left in the
11 whole company.

12 JS: Right.

13 DS: There was one lieutenant and he had four men with him. Another corporal I
14 think had seven men with him, and I think I had right around twenty or something, or
15 fifteen or something. It ended up there were forty-one of us. There was one NCO and one
16 officer, and they made us pick up the gear. We had to do all that after the battle was over
17 with and then they made us march out. We were all so tired, we couldn’t even handle
18 even marching out hardly that day.

19 JS: Right.

20 DS: Then, they did what they do, and they sent in more officers and more men,
21 beefed us back up again and we’d go on from there. After August, in September we had
22 to be out on “Mameluke Thrust” and back on “Allen Brook”, and so September was
23 another bad month for us. In October, we got to Talladega Canyon and Molly Peak and
24 lost more guys. Then we kind of had a little quiet November. If I remember, in December
25 we were back on Meade River and “Daring Endeavor”, (unintelligible) or whatever they
26 call it. We lost several guys, and I lost a good friend from Tennessee, a staff sergeant who
27 was the platoon commander of 1st Platoon there in December. I almost went over and
28 shot our company commander at the time. That was real bad because I felt that he was the
29 reason that we lost four or five guys that day. So between June and July, and December,
30 we were probably one of the hardest hit companies, I imagine in the Marine Corps.

31 JS: Wow.

1 DS: And if you look at most of the float battalions that were out there, you'll find
2 that statistics are real high that all of the companies or battalions that were involved on
3 the floats in Vietnam in '68, were probably the hardest hit groups out there. That's why
4 everybody teases me at the reunions, "How in the world did you make it through '68
5 without getting wounded?"

6 JS: Right. When you were out on an operation like that, where you would take so
7 many casualties, how long would it generally take to get replacements to get the company
8 back up to full strength?

9 DS: Anywhere from usually about a week, maybe two weeks. Usually, if you got
10 hit real hard like that, the Marine Corps automatically would send what group they had in
11 the Philippines or wherever they were stationing them. At the time, they would
12 automatically set a fill in different slots, different organizations. They would just send
13 what they had to you in one big glut. So one day you might get ten or fifteen guys report
14 to you. Like I say, it was just a constant men coming and going, and you never were full
15 size anyway, in your companies. Most companies that we were running were usually
16 around a hundred, a hundred and twenty guys in most cases. So your tactics and
17 everything you did was more on a limited basis because of the numbers that you really
18 had.

19 JS: Right, alright. Would most of these replacements be green, or would all of
20 them be green?

21 DS: Probably ninety-eight percent of them were green, right out of boot camp and
22 the officers were right out of OCS (Officer Candidate School).

23 JS: Okay, alright. In an operation like that, where you took all those casualties and
24 you only had, you said about forty-one guys left.

25 DS Uh-huh.

26 JS: Would there be any down time with that, or would you continue to operate the
27 same as normal?

28 DS: Well, we left with forty-one guys, we marched back to our holding area.

29 JS: Okay.

30 DS: I know when I got back there, we had a lot of guys that might be in the office
31 area or whatever. They were automatically assigned to come beef us up. So we might

1 pick up ten, twelve guys from the rear that was with our company in the rear. Some may
2 be coming back from R&R (Rest and Recuperation), or some from injuries. So that
3 would be the first group we would pick up, our own guys who were coming back from
4 wherever they were coming back from. Then, after that we still had to do perimeter duty
5 or something wherever we went.

6 JS: Right.

7 DS: But generally, we didn't have our own base since we were the float team or
8 we're out in the field all the time. So they would take us back and we would join maybe
9 another company somewhere, and kind of fit in and pull duty, maybe run a patrol or two.
10 We still stayed constant as we got beefed up. We just didn't go out on any more
11 operations for another week or two. And then, we still didn't have time to train, so
12 everybody just jumped in and the next operation, you just went into it with all the new
13 guys. That was one of the tough parts about being in battle, it wasn't like the old Marines.
14 You came in there with one guy's company that had been together three or four years,
15 and you knew what everybody could do. In Vietnam, after the first wave came in, all the
16 rotation started in thirteen months. You either left or you left when you were killed or
17 wounded. You were just constantly in a change mode of people coming and going, but
18 you still had to operate.

19 JS: Right.

20 DS: It wasn't the best scenario as far as training or anything.

21 JS: Right, alright. One thing I wanted to ask you, did you guys ever go on any
22 joint operations or ever work with the South Vietnamese?

23 DS: We did several times. We worked with the North Koreans once.

24 JS: Okay.

25 DS: And we always just—the North Koreans we didn't worry so much because
26 they blew out—everywhere they went they just shot up the area. So with the South
27 Vietnamese we kind of stayed where we knew where they were all the time, we kind of
28 watched ourselves with them. We'd heard so many rumors and we just didn't trust them.

29 JS: Right.

30 DS: They seemed like they didn't battle though, very few of them would want to
31 fight. They kind of always seemed like the area that they would want to go into was the

1 safer of the areas. You know, a lot of people knew what was going on. We were there, I
2 think, mainly to fight their battle for them.

3 JS: Did you guys talk about that as far as—I mean, not to put words into your
4 mouth, but—

5 DS: Yeah, we talked about it. It's like, "Why are we here fighting these idiot's
6 wars when they won't come out and fight?"

7 JS: Right.

8 DS: If you see them, they usually got more stuff like Coca Colas, and things than
9 we do. It's like they're more supplied with the rear stuff, like drinks and stuff like that.
10 They didn't like our food too much and we sure didn't like theirs. We were aggravated
11 because a lot of times we'd have to go to help some of these Vietnamese units, and we'd
12 get there and they'd say they were being overrun or whatever, and actually by the time
13 you get there it's like, "You're only taking sniper fire or something, you know?"

14 JS: Right.

15 DS: You'd just be mad that you're risking your life, and they weren't risking
16 theirs. Most of the guys were pretty mad about it, but there was nothing we could do
17 about it except watch them and whenever we heard we were working with them our
18 Marine units were pretty good. At least the people up in command would not always try
19 to intermingle us together. We would have one operational point and they would have
20 another, and we might be a click apart. We always knew where they were and they knew
21 where we were, so. I think our higher epsilon knew what was going on, and they kind of
22 helped protect us out in the field because they didn't trust them either.

23 JS: Alright.

24 DS: But there was some that were good. We would have some guys that were
25 assigned to us as interpreters and stuff. The ones that were entrenched with us, one or two
26 guys that we'd usually have with our company, they were right at home. I mean, they
27 were part of us, and we protected them, and they'd fought right beside us. That's just a
28 one or two, compared to being a hundred or a thousand.

29 JS: Right. Alright. On operations and on patrols, how often would you come in
30 contact with the local civilian population?

1 DS: Most of the time when we were on operation, we were in what they called a
2 “free fire zone”, and there weren’t supposed to be any civilians. Generally, you would
3 always come across a few civilians or a village that was out there, that were told to get
4 out of the area, and they didn’t leave because that was their home. Instead of just coming
5 around and blowing them away with women and children, you just weren’t going to do
6 that.

7 JS: Right.

8 DS: Our position was that when we came across civilians that weren’t where they
9 were supposed to be, we would just gather them up and put them in a circle and keep
10 them there under guard until we swept the area. Then as we left, we’d let them go back to
11 what they wanted to do. Knowing that most of them were kin to the enemy and
12 everything. You know we just wouldn’t go around and shoot people, so.

13 JS: Right, sure.

14 DS: They were quite a few villages and people we’d run into. We would do that.

15 JS: What was your feeling about their—I guess, their loyalties? Did they seem to
16 favor the one side or the other, or were they trying to kind of stay out of things? What did
17 you—

18 DS: The ones we ran across these, they didn’t want no part of us because they
19 knew that we were going to come through and tear through their village, and look for
20 weapons, mess up their day. So I don’t think they really liked us. The ones that I saw—
21 we were out at the deep bush all the time. So they didn’t want us to be there, just like we
22 didn’t want to be there. I think their thing was, “Just get in, get out, and leave us alone.” I
23 think that was the same feeling they had if they were friendly folks. I think they had the
24 same feeling when the NVA came in there. It was, “Get in, get out, and leave us alone.”
25 They really didn’t have anything but their little villages and their little rice fields. You
26 know, that’s all they had to live on.

27 JS: Right. Were there times then, where you’d run into friendly villages that were
28 helpful?

29 DS: Oh yeah, outside of 190 we had several villages that we’d go down and
30 patrol. and the people would come out and laugh and talk. They were pretty secure
31 knowing we were right there beside them. They seemed to be nice folks and everything,

1 not that we could really talk to them. Some of them knew a little English and they always
2 seemed like they had Coca Colas that they sold us, and it was like being in a hot jungle in
3 the middle of a war and some kid will come sell you a Coke for fifty cents.

4 JS: Right.

5 DS: Where in the world are you getting Coke? We can't even get Coke.

6 JS: Right.

7 DS: Anyway, the villages toward the bases were more on a friendly atmosphere,
8 but when you got out in the bush, they were more, "Just get in and get out. We don't want
9 you here."

10 JS: Right. Could you talk about, I guess the tactics involved with sweeping a
11 village?

12 DS: Depends on the village, it could be different. Sometimes we would send in a
13 couple of fire teams just to check out the area, depending on if there were people in the
14 village or not in the village. If the village was empty, then most likely we'd probably just
15 run into some booby traps or something, but you never knew. Depending on what area
16 you were in, a lot of times we might get on a line and start moving in toward the village,
17 then have another part of us sweep to the left or sweep to the right and kind of come in on
18 a flank. Sometimes you might, depending on the situation, put a unit kind of to the rear,
19 in case you ran into something, hoping that they would run into you. Keep them out of
20 the way of your own fire coming towards you. Most of the times, when we're sweeping a
21 village, we usually got hit. So we'd call everything we could get into it. They weren't
22 asking if they were friendly's there or not because when you got opened up, you just
23 started returning fire. You know, if you had artillery or air support, that was the first thing
24 you would do. You would call it in if it was heavy fire coming to you, and let them come
25 in and clean the village, then you would move through it. Sometimes it'd still be there,
26 but most of the cases, especially with air, they would come in and pretty well clean the
27 village out.

28 JS: Alright.

29 DS: Again, a lot of it depends on if you're in a free fire zone or not. The free fire
30 zone you would more likely use air and your supports. If you were in a village area,
31 closer to a base that was not a free fire zone, then you would probably have to sweep it

1 and you wouldn't have your extra support or anything because you wouldn't want to
2 destroy the village and get the people all mad at you. It all depends on where you're at,
3 what type of zone you were in, and what kind of fire you got. If you were getting sniper
4 fire, you'd go clean it out yourself. If you got heavy machine gun and mortar fire, you'd
5 probably try to blow it away.

6 JS: Alright. On sweeps where you actually would not come into contact with the
7 enemy, were there—I guess, would you often find things like rice stores and weapons
8 caches, and things like that?

9 DS: It was about 50/50

10 JS: Okay.

11 DS: Also, sometimes you could go through a village and find really nothing.
12 Sometimes you'd go through a village and you might find not hay, but rice maybe buried
13 in the ground or hidden. You might find a weapon, or a grenade or two. Every now and
14 then you might run across a big cache, but most of those were outside of the villages and
15 things. They pretty well knew that Marines sweeping the villages were liable to find
16 something. Usually, they'd put most of their big caches out in the areas that were more
17 fortified, that they could protect. You'd find a few things maybe in the villages. We
18 didn't find like in areas we were in a lot of large caches, unless it was up in the jungle or
19 somewhere.

20 JS: Okay, alright. I guess if you did find something, the villagers were peaceful
21 but—if you did find something, what would be done with the villagers at that point?

22 DS: Usually, when you went into the village, you'd still try to gather them—

23 JS: Okay.

24 DS: If it was a small village. And keep them—you didn't want any harm to
25 happen to them either if you opened a door and there was a booby trap or something.
26 Even if they might know it was there, they usually stayed away from it. You tried to keep
27 them all in one area so you could watch them because you never knew when a grenade
28 could come out from them or something. But if you found weapons or rice, or things like
29 that, you would call it in. And generally, they would just tell you, if you weren't needing
30 to move out or something, just to hang loose and they'd send out a couple of interpreters,
31 if you didn't have any with you. They'd send out these—I'm not sure what they were

1 called, little squads that the Vietnamese had. Usually, they had an American with them
2 and they would come into the village, they would take over. Usually, we would go about
3 our business and we'd leave them with those folks, where they kind of went through and
4 interpreted the villagers and stuff. Most of the time we didn't have a whole lot to do with
5 it. Once we found it, we'd call it in, and they'd generally send somebody in. If it was a
6 free fire zone, they might tell us to destroy the village, so we would just burn it and leave.

7 DS: The civilians would be mad at us, but they weren't supposed to be there
8 anyway. But if it's in a friendly area, then usually you would call in these other units and
9 they would kind of come in and do their talking to the people, and kind of take over and
10 we'd move on out.

11 JS: Okay, another thing I wanted to ask, you mentioned how you talked about
12 booby traps being a problem, but could you talk about some of the different kinds of
13 booby traps that the enemy would use?

14 DS: Sometimes they would have our grenades. Sometimes they would take a
15 grenade and put it in one of our C-ration cans, put the wire on it. If you hit the wire, it
16 pulled it out of the can and it blew up. Sometimes they had what we called the "Chicom
17 grenades". They looked like a long stick with a little cylinder on the end of it. Those you
18 didn't mind too much because they were about fifty percent, I would say. If they would
19 go off, a lot of them would be duds. But you'd leave it to the big nasty things, like our 60
20 mortar rounds or their big mortar rounds. Most of the time it was our ammunition that
21 exploded. The worst was the 155 rounds that were duds, that they would booby trap. I've
22 seen them take out a whole command almost. We had one operation where our captain
23 actually set off the booby trap and almost wiped out his whole company command, like
24 fourteen guys. I was so mad that day because we were on patrol and the next thing I
25 know, he's taken off with his group to the right of us and it's like, "Where in the world is
26 he going?" Next thing you know, the largest explosion I could ever imagine went off and
27 sand was everywhere. Our whole command group was down over there. The 155 was a
28 nasty round for a booby trap. They would also do some of their little wooden spear
29 things, and we didn't run across those a whole lot. We'd run into the little punji traps a
30 lot, but most of the weird stuff we didn't run into but once in awhile. Most of the stuff we
31 ran into were our old dead rounds or the old Chicoms that they had, their old grenades.

1 They had those little toe popper things that if you hit, kind of jumped up in the air and
2 went off about your mid-waist and would just about cut you in half or blow your legs out
3 from under you. Then, they had a lot of times they'd take our claymores that they would
4 come across and use our own claymores against us, put them in trees and different things.
5 I would say probably seventy-five percent of the booby traps that we ran into were either
6 stuff they stole from us or stuff that we left or dropped somewhere, or our dud rounds,
7 but they were our stuff.

8 JS: Right.

9 DS: I think we were more scared of those booby traps than they were of our
10 ambushes and things.

11 JS: Right. I know there's no way to know exactly, but about what percentage
12 would you think of casualties were from booby traps?

13 DS: Well, they were (unintelligible) in the rear is a hundred percent, but where we
14 were out in the field it was probably more like ten or fifteen percent.

15 JS: Okay, alright. We're coming up on two hours here, would you like to go
16 ahead and stop for today and then pick up at another time?

17 DS: It's up to you, I've got time here on my side, so.

18 JS: Okay.

19 DS: It's whatever you want to do. You got your time schedule.

20 JS: Right.

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Interview with Daniel Storz
Session [2] of [2]
Date 11 September 2009

1 Jason Stuart: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. Dan Storz. Today is September
3 11th, 2009. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of
4 Texas Tech and Mr. Storz is joining me by phone, once again from Collierville,
5 Tennessee. Okay, last time when we were talking, we were talking a little bit about some
6 of the—well, I guess we were talking about the war in a little bit more general terms, but
7 you also talked about this contact with the enemy in the “Happy Valley” area where you
8 lost a man. Are there other specific or significant contacts with the enemy that you could
9 possibly talk about, that you remember?

10 Daniel Storz: There were several of them.

11 JS: Okay.

12 DS: The biggest one, like I said, I believe was on August the 18th, when our
13 company walked out with only forty-one men left. That was probably one of the roughest
14 days we ever had. We were pinned down from approximately seven, eight o'clock in the
15 morning until about four or five o'clock in the afternoon before we could get up and get
16 moving. We lost a lot of guys to snipers and machine gun fire, and it was pretty well
17 pinned down until they finally could get some support out to us. But a lot of people get
18 hit that day, and we were kind of last on getting some relief, so. Those were the days we
19 just had to fight it out and not keep our head up too high or get it smacked off.

20 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

21 DS: I know in December we lost several guys as we were taking our position on a
22 couple small hills. We had the company on top of the hills, we had two platoons with the
23 company commander on the largest hill, and then I had another platoon. At the time, I
24 was acting platoon sergeant—no, not acting platoon sergeant, acting platoon commander.
25 I was breaking in a new staff sergeant who was supposed to take over the platoon, so I
26 could go back to platoon sergeant. That day, the lieutenant sent a squad down into the
27 village down below them and they were ambushed. A lot of people were mad, and we
28 had a little village at night and (unintelligible), where we had one guy surrender. We had

1 a lot going on there for about two or three days, as we're kind of a blocking force right
2 there at these villages. This big rice patty area down below us, where the Army is
3 supposed to be driving people our way. One of the things that I recall happening, that I
4 was so mad about was we had a sniper team with us, and they kept shooting down toward
5 the wells, where the kids were, and I got upset and told the lieutenant that it was
6 unnecessary, and he kind of beefed back that he was the company commander. So
7 anyway, we kind of got into it and they finally quit shooting down that way. The next day
8 is when the squad went down there, and a good friend of mine was killed. I was pretty
9 upset at him about doing something that stupid. Anyway, that's the kind of way things
10 were over there. Most times officers would come in and listen to their sergeants. A lot of
11 times they'd come in and still be in the "John Wayne mode" or something. You just kind
12 of had to work around it the best you could.

13 JS: Speaking of that relationship between the sergeant and the lieutenant, at times
14 if the lieutenant came in there, immediately as you mentioned in the John Wayne attitude
15 thinking that he knew everything, and you being the sergeant that had the experience
16 already, would it take a while for him to realize that he needs to listen to his sergeant?
17 Because I know from a lot of veterans that I've interviewed, or from a lot of what I've
18 read, that said that the experience of the sergeant is what really held the unit together.

19 DS: Oh yeah, I agree. It's like the lieutenants I have that were still left; they kind
20 of say that I was kind of the glue whenever we get together. Anyway, some of them
21 would listen and they'd learn. They still made some mistakes, but they were more free
22 thinking and knew not just to charge somebody when the bullets started flying, unless
23 they knew where the enemy was. Some of them, if they had been out of OCS and this
24 was their first duty station outside of OCS, their mentality was to always charge and
25 flank. You know, you just couldn't do that on ninety percent of occasions over there, due
26 to the terrain and where you were, that gets people killed. You tried to drive it into them,
27 not to look for medals, but to try to protect your men. If you could, call in the artillery
28 and air support first, and then go in. They sometimes had a hard time, they just wanted to
29 get up and go get the guys, not knowing how many were there or if it was a trap trying to
30 lure you in. They'd make one mistake, but they'd learn about it real quick if they're still
31 alive.

1 JS: Right. You mentioned artillery and air strikes, how vital were they to your
2 operations? I guess, how significant, how important were they?

3 DS: Well, if it wasn't for the artillery and the air support, I don't think there'd be
4 too many Marines left standing that were out there in the infantry. We were always
5 calling them in for support. Especially on these big operations where we're going against
6 a large number of enemy, or we had a deal where they were pretty well dug in and they
7 weren't going to flinch, If it's their territory, especially Happy Valley, you'd have to call
8 in air support. A lot of times some of us Marines, we got out too far where we were, and
9 we didn't have artillery support and when that happened, the only thing we could do was
10 wait until we could get some air support. Sometimes that was too long and waiting,
11 there's a lot of things going on in-country—and sometimes the officers would just say,
12 "We got to do it." And that's when usually a lot of people got hurt.

13 JS: I wanted to ask you one more question about the way the enemy operated. I
14 know in the book *We Were Soldiers* it talks about how because the enemy realized that
15 American air power and artillery was overwhelming, that they would try to get in close
16 and try to grab on, basically to the belt loops of the Americans to prevent them from
17 using artillery and air strike. Did you find that that was the case with the NVA?

18 DS: Not in our case.

19 JS: Okay.

20 DS: We didn't let them get that close. Usually, when we made contact, we knew
21 where they were and where we were. If we could call in, we would. If we couldn't, we
22 would hold our position. A lot of times in that movie, they were kind of moving out
23 closer to the enemy and nearly got themselves separated, and we never tried to get
24 ourselves in a jam or we'd get separated. A lot of outfits did, but we tried to work as a
25 unit. If we knew we were in bad man's territory like Happy Valley, we didn't have a
26 platoon going one way and another one going another way. We knew that they'd both
27 probably get hit, and neither one of them could help each other.

28 JS: Right.

29 DS: Our motto was basically if we got hit, as soon as we could call in the support,
30 we'd call it in. But we'd keep the enemy away from us also because we had our M-79
31 launchers, and we had some bazooka rocket teams with us usually. If we set up the

1 machine guns right, they weren't going to get that close to us. A lot of our terrain also
2 was rice patties and a lot of it was up in the mountains, in the jungle. A lot of times you'd
3 just stop where you were. They didn't expose themselves and we didn't expose ourselves
4 too much. We just put the fire down toward them and they put it down toward us.

5 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

6 DS: I could understand in that movie, you know, and how they were talking
7 because they were basically encircled and they had enemy going in at them in different
8 directions all the time, keeping them off guard. The terrain where they were kind of
9 allowed that to happen.

10 JS: Right, alright. Was the Happy Valley—would you say that was the hottest
11 area that you guys operated in?

12 DS: Oh yeah, definitely.

13 JS: Alright. Was that—I'm trying to remember, is that anywhere near the
14 "Arizona Territory"? Did you guys operate there, too?

15 DS: Yeah, we did. It was out there in that same direction. It was all basically
16 enemy territory. You went there and there were no good guys. Once you crossed a bridge
17 and moved out alongside the river, toward the railroad berm down there, just those on
18 that side and that area were all unfriendly. That's why they called it "Happy Valley"; you
19 knew you weren't going to be happy when you get the word you were going there.

20 JS: Right.

21 DS: And I can't remember the name of that bridge, but there's a big bridge that
22 you had to cross the river over to get to Happy Valley. Generally, when we went there,
23 we went by foot because they had lost too many choppers in there.

24 JS: Alright. One other question about the way the enemy operated, in the case of
25 the VC (Viet Cong), they would often run as soon after contact was made. Did you find
26 that the NVA would basically stand and fight?

27 DS: Well, the NVA that we ran across, they would stay and fight as long as they
28 could. Once they knew that the artillery and air support was coming, a lot of times they
29 would boogie out and try to get out of there. Unless they were in some deep fortified
30 positions, then they would just hold out and make it look like the air or the artillery is
31 doing its job. And then, hopefully you would move back into their ambush again. They

1 were well trained. I mean, most of the time they would hit you, and they knew if they
2 stayed that the odds are they were going to get hurt. So they were pretty well organize,
3 except that day on August 18th when they stayed involved. Most of the time they would
4 hit you, they would pull out and just leave a couple guys as a rear guard that would pop
5 some rounds at you, got to keep your head down. Generally, if you've taken casualties,
6 you didn't really pursue them so much as put in the perimeter up to get the casualties out.
7 So they had double chance to get away in most cases.

8 JS: You talked about the fortified positions and bunkers and things, could you talk
9 a little bit more about that? About how they use the environment to their advantage, and
10 the use of bunkers and things like that.

11 DS: Well, most of their bunkers, you could walk almost right up on to them and
12 not see them. They were so well camouflaged. But they used a lot of ant hills so well that
13 you started getting leery just being around an ant hill, or a termite hill. They would take
14 and hollow them out and put their machine gun in there, and usually they'd have two or
15 three men in there, and they could have them in two or three termite mounds across an
16 area. It was almost like they were put there. I know they couldn't be, but they were put
17 there. Up in the jungles—man, you could walk right on top of those things and not see
18 them the way they had them camouflaged along all the trails and the turning trails, and
19 kind of up high, enveloping where you were down low. When that machine gun started
20 rattling off, you couldn't see it. You know they were usually down in a bunker
21 somewhere. It was going to be hard to blow them out of there. Generally, that's what you
22 had to do. You had a lot of places in the jungle you couldn't call in artillery or air support
23 because you could get hurt with all the fragmentation yourself. A lot of times we had to
24 go in there and just find them and try to kill them if they were still there with grenades.
25 They were really good at concealing themselves with camouflage. I know when we came
26 back from the Philippines and we had Hue Island, a lot of them had put their booby traps
27 and things out all over the island. But they knew that the Army was on the mainland and
28 they couldn't escape, so they had all these places dug into the pig pen areas and the
29 mounds and things. We couldn't find them and finally, we had a Korean with this
30 interpreter. He started interrogating some villagers and found out that they were buried all
31 around the island and to look for little pieces of bamboo sticking out of the ground, it was

1 an air hole. We started looking around and we found all kinds of air holes, especially
2 around some of the small dikes leading around the places where they'd keep their pigs
3 and their little animals and livestock. As we started trying to dig them out and everything,
4 we would start where the air hole was, the bamboo. If we couldn't find where their main
5 shoot was, then we start trying to very carefully dig around that and drop a smoke
6 grenade in or a concussion grenade in. I know of one case, we dropped in a smoke
7 grenade, we dropped in a concussion grenade, and finally one of our grenades came back
8 out of the hole at us, and we all ducked for cover. We threw two more grenades in there
9 and when we were through, it turned out there were three NVA in the hole. There were
10 stacked almost on top of each other, and this one guy was taking the blunt of all the
11 grenades and everything. The other two had a (unintelligible), but one of them was still
12 alive and the other two were dead. But the guy on the bottom was still alive after all that,
13 he was just shaken up. I mean, they hit, and I guess what bothered most of us is they
14 always seemed like they knew where we were, when we were coming. In this particular
15 operation, they undoubtedly knew we were coming with all the booby traps they'd put
16 out. A lot of guys got blown up with booby traps. I remember that day because I was the
17 last one out of the field, with malaria that particular night. They'd already got our dead
18 and wounded out of there before I felt sick.

19 JS: Could you talk about—did you guys operate a good bit at night as well? Could
20 you talk a little bit about that if so and how night operations might be different?

21 DS: When we're out in the field, generally we would have an observation point,
22 an OP (Observation Post) or two, out a little bit in front of our lines, just as a warning.
23 Generally, depending on where we were, we might have one or two ambushes sent out.

24 JS: Okay.

25 DS: And generally, whenever an ambush went out, we would usually send almost
26 a squad in most cases, and generally we would send a fire team out on OP. When the
27 squad went out, generally either the platoon commander—in most cases the platoon
28 sergeant, the right guide, would always go out with a squad. Generally, about every
29 second or third ambush I'd go out with the squad leader, just in case they hit something if
30 we were in bad territory. Every now and then we would catch somebody in the ambush,
31 but most of the time, we wouldn't see anybody. A lot of time, the little Ops group that

1 was smaller, would hear them moving around or something, and let everybody know. Just
2 very seldom, I remember that we would catch a couple people in an ambush at nighttime.
3 Generally, a lot of time we're using our night scope and we would see them moving
4 around, and then open up if they were coming toward us or put some fire out if they were
5 going away from us. They were pretty good. The NVA didn't just walk into a lot of
6 ambushes when they knew you were in an area, so.

7 JS: Could you talk a little bit about, I guess just how an ambush would work and
8 how you would set it up?

9 DS: Yeah. Most of the time when I was out with the squad, most of the squad
10 leaders would set an ambush up. First, we'd go out and as it was getting dark, we would
11 pick out a point where we were supposed to set up. We let the enemy see us kind of
12 setting up in a little area. But as soon as it got dark, we'd pick up and move back to the
13 point where we really wanted to set our ambush up, just in case somebody was watching.
14 They might throw mortars in on us at the other position if they happened to see us. But
15 anyway, just as a precaution, we would move back to where we would have our original
16 site. Depending on the terrain, a lot of times you would have a guy down a little bit from
17 the main group, just kind of watching, and you'd have another one at the other end, kind
18 of watching the trail. You'd either have a piece of string or they would have a radio, and
19 they would let you know real quietly if somebody was coming up the trail. If you had
20 some string and you went too far out, you'd just pull on the string and everybody kind of
21 knew what was going on if they did that. A lot of times, like I said, dictating on the type
22 of trail it was, you would either be laid out in a line or sometimes if you had bend, you
23 would kind of be almost like an L shape in a way. But for all your fire would go either
24 straight or say if you're lined up down a left line, kind of bending to your right, you knew
25 that you fueled the fire just straight, and you'd put your little something in the ground to
26 keep from shooting your own guys back to the left. Most of the time we didn't get into
27 too many L shapes, most the time we'd get into just being in line and just kind of having
28 a guy on our backside, watching to make sure nobody came up from the rear on us.
29 That's pretty well how most of them worked. Then, most people would try to keep half
30 your guys awake all the time. That was hard to do sometimes when you were out all the
31 time, only got your two, three, four hours of sleep every night. Everybody was pretty well

1 aware of what would happen to you if you fell asleep on your watch. Nearly about half of
2 us stayed awake on an ambush and the other half were right there beside where we can
3 wake them up real quick. You knew the guys that might make noise. Usually, if you had
4 someone that made a lot of racket in the field, on the ambush, I would stay close to them
5 or a squad leader, or someone, just to make sure that they were quiet. You had a lot of
6 noise when guys go to sleep, that's for sure.

7 JS: Right.

8 DS: If you're in real bad territory, nobody went to sleep. You're out in Happy
9 Valley like that, everybody stayed awake all night long. And that was tough to do, you
10 had to get your mind thinking about other things and try to have a pretty good positive
11 attitude about getting home or girlfriends, or cars, or something like that, just to get your
12 mind working to keep you from falling sleep.

13 JS: When you wouldn't be out on an ambush at night, what would you be doing,
14 where would the rest of the company be if—the guys that were not set up in an ambush?

15 DS: If they weren't on the ambush, if we're out in the field, they'd be setting up a
16 perimeter, and generally we would have a 360 set up and I would be kind of in the middle
17 of that 360. Generally, it'd be me, a lieutenant, the corporals, and radio team. Then, we
18 would make sure depending on the terrain, where our guys were setting up around us
19 because we always had to go out and make sure they were awake on our night watch. So
20 they would set up a 360 and we'd have the machine guns set up in the areas we would
21 think, "That's where I would come from if I was the gooks." Then, the men generally
22 were in three men holes and if they were, then one guy stayed awake and two slept. There
23 were two men holes, one stayed awake and one slept. We'd usually do that, either in a
24 two-hour period or a three hour period. Generally, six hours at the most, but from twelve
25 to six anybody got to sleep.

26 JS: Alright. And would the enemy ever hit these positions at night?

27 DS: Oh yeah, we had several times when they would try to come in. Sometimes
28 we'd have it where they even tried to go out, where they were buried somewhere in our
29 circle, our perimeter, and they'd tried to sneak out at night. We'd catch them every now
30 and then. But yeah, the worse the area you're in, the more you're liable to get hit. So
31 whoever was awake, it was for him to stay awake. A lot of times we'd get word that we

1 were going to get hit, and everybody stayed awake, whether we got hit or not. So we
2 were a hundred percent operational.

3 JS: Right.

4 DS: Most of the time we tried to get somebody to get at least two, three hours of
5 sleep every night anyway. In the daytime you were marching or filling sandbags. You
6 were busy all day long and couldn't sleep during the day, so you had to get what sleep
7 you could.

8 JS: Well, I know one of the common—I guess clichés or sayings of the war is that
9 “We own the day and Charlie owns the night.” Did you find that there was any truth to
10 that? Were the enemy more active at night than the day, or did it matter?

11 DS: No, I don't think it mattered. Charlie owned Charlie's territory, period. It
12 didn't matter if it was day or night, if you were out in Happy Valley or somewhere, you
13 didn't own anything. You were hoping that the clothes you had on you, that you were
14 going to get back with those clothes. We got hit—I would say as far as big operations, we
15 got hit more in the daytime. At nighttime, generally we would get mortared. That
16 happened on most nights when you're out in a bad man's territory. So the daytime you
17 fought off the snipers and the machine guns or ambushes and booby traps. At nighttime,
18 you usually had to have a hole dug and that's one thing. So once you set in, you had to
19 dig a hole, no matter who you were. That helped to make you tired also. So by the time
20 you get your two or three hours of sleep, you're ready to go.

21 JS: Right.

22 DS: We did get mortared quite often in the nighttime. We lost a lot of guys with
23 mortars and things. I saw one of my guys, who was a platoon sergeant in another platoon
24 in our company, at our last reunion and it was the first time I'd seen him in forty years. I
25 remember him getting hit in December by a mortar round, by where we were setting up. I
26 remember him leaving and saying, “Sergeant Story, I've got my wound and I'm going
27 home.” I wanted to shoot him.

28 JS: Right. When a guy would be hit and medevac'd out, would you hear from
29 them again? Would you hear about their condition and what happened to them?

30 DS: Most of the time, no.

31 JS: Okay.

1 DS: Most of the time, if it was real bad, they were taken back to rear, and then off
2 to Japan or somewhere. If it wasn't too bad of a wound, then we would see them back in
3 the field.

4 JS: Okay.

5 DS: Most of the cases, the guys we had you could pretty well tell if they were
6 going to make it or not. A lot of the guys with the gut wounds we knew, even though they
7 had been picked up and they were alive, most likely they weren't going to make it, and
8 they didn't. Only one guy surprised me. I had a guy named Troy Dyer, he hit a booby
9 trap and lost both of his legs. He was bleeding pretty hard, and the corpsman worked on
10 him. We got a chopper in pretty quick, got him out of there. I really didn't think he would
11 make it. Then, the first reunion we had down in Jacksonville, I guess about twelve,
12 fourteen years ago, he showed up in his wheelchair and he still had that little boyish look
13 as he did when he was in Vietnam. He said he'd made the most of his life.

14 JS: Would that be the case sometimes? If a guy was hit pretty bad, you wouldn't
15 find out his fate until, I guess years later?

16 DS: In most cases, generally that's right. Especially if something happened to him
17 like after he got to Japan or somewhere. If he usually was back in our battalion aid
18 station, or where they would take him to clean him up, if they didn't—a lot of times they
19 might take them out to an aircraft carrier, and we'd never hear from them. But if he was
20 somewhere back in our rear, then usually we'd get the word that they patched him up and
21 they think he's going to be okay, or they're giving odds at fifty-fifty. That was usually the
22 only time we'd really know what happened to them, if they were back in our rear
23 somewhere. Usually, if they get an aircraft carrier, or was sent back to one of the big
24 medevac areas where the bad wounds went, and unless he died on the operating table at
25 the very rear, we wouldn't hear anything about him. We got a lot of guys we know that
26 are out there—that we still don't know what happened to them, when they got back
27 home. We can tell the ones that are dead because we could go on the wall and find their
28 names.

29 JS: Sure.

30 DS: We found—I think we had thirty-nine that were killed in '68 and we had
31 eighty-eight in the company that were killed from '65 to '70. So we know who those

1 folks are, but we didn't until we had a wall to go to, and electronically we could pull in
2 and look at things really easy, put in names and see what happens.

3 JS: Alright. Going back just a moment, talking about night operations and things
4 like that, one of the things I wanted to ask you there, you mentioned getting two to three
5 hours of sleep a night at most. Did you get used to that over time? I mean how did that
6 affect you just being able to physically operate, only getting two or three hours sleep at
7 night?

8 DS: We got used to it.

9 JS: Right.

10 DS: I mean, after awhile it's like working a late shift or something. You get used
11 to it, but it doesn't mean you like it. You know, the first few months, when we was on
12 hill 190, guys could get some rest. They'd get at least four or five hours of sleep. Once
13 we hit the afloat thing and we were out in the field all the time, very seldom did we get
14 any rest. That's like I said when we had Christmas in '68 and Bob Hope was there for the
15 USO (United Service Organization) show, and they pulled us back in. They brought us all
16 into a hanger in Da Nang, and they had cots all in this hanger. We had all these guys
17 wanting to go see the USO show, I don't know where they had their energy. I told them,
18 "Go ahead." I wasn't going. I laid down on a cot and I slept all day, I was so tired.

19 JS: Well, that brings up another question. When you weren't out on operation,
20 how would you spend your free time? Mostly sleeping?

21 DS: No.

22 JS: Okay.

23 DS: In the daytime, you were still running patrols in places. The rest of the guys
24 were either fortifying their position where we were going to be for that night, or they
25 were doing something like digging holes for people to use the bathroom and stuff in.
26 There's always something going on. If we were in bad man's territory, we stayed busy. I
27 mean, if we were in someplace like Elephant Valley, then we weren't so much on the
28 guard. We could take a little bit more leisure as far as maybe having a couple of guys say,
29 "Hey, take one of your fire teams and let them go shut eye during the day for a couple
30 hours, or just tell them to relax, they don't have any guard duty today." Most of the time,

1 everybody was busy though, and it was so hot it was hard to sleep anyway. It's not like
2 you had a lot of cover or anything.

3 JS: Were there times that whenever you would be pulled out of the field back at a
4 base camp or was it always out in the field?

5 DS: No. The six months we were afloat, we were always out in the woods. We
6 went from one hot spot to another. Usually, they'd pick us up by chopper and take us
7 over to another place and we would hit those. That's why we had thirteen operations
8 there in '68, because we were always on the move somewhere. Once we left 190 in
9 March or April of '68, we never had a base again, not until—I think about the time I was
10 getting ready to leave in February of '69, they were pulling them back. They were taking
11 them off the float and they were going to give them a perimeter to guard. So from
12 February on in '69, those guys didn't have as much going on, but you know, they were
13 pulled out in '70. They were only there about another ten months or so after I left.

14 JS: Alright. Well, that time period when you were afloat, what was the area of
15 operations? It sounds like a broad part of I Corps.

16 DS: It was any place they needed us.

17 JS: Okay, alright.

18 DS: If anybody got hit hard, they sent us in. They saw a build up somewhere,
19 they'd send us in to investigate. Our job was to be on the offensive all the time. So that's
20 all we did, was sweep and pull operations.

21 JS: Did you ever operate up close to the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) area?

22 DS: We didn't get too close up there. Most of the time—I forget what Marines
23 were up that way, but we were more around Da Nang and around up toward Hue a little
24 bit.

25 JS: Okay, alright. One other thing I wanted to ask you about, I guess operations.
26 You talked about how a lot of times it seemed like particularly when you'd go out to a
27 really bad area, how the enemy always seemed to know where you guys were and where
28 you were going. I know you may not know this, but how do you think that they were that
29 good with their intelligence? That they just knew so much about where you guys were
30 going to be?

31 DS: Well, I think they had eyes as high as you could go in the South Vietnamese.

1 JS: Okay.

2 DS: I mean, it was pretty plain for anybody to see because all of a sudden you
3 pulled out of an area last minute and you're sent into another area, and it's almost exactly
4 they know what you're going to do. They had to have eyes with people, but over there
5 it's pretty easy for them to do it because they would threaten people's families and would
6 kill people and their families if people didn't do what they told them. I'm sure there was a
7 lot of people on the take over there.

8 JS: Alright. Let's see, before we move on, I know you mentioned several of these
9 operations. Do any of these and any other operations, I guess other than the ones you've
10 already talked about, kind of stick out in your mind? Some of these specific operations
11 that you could talk about possibly?

12 DS: Well, like I said, the big one was August 18th, we talked about. Then, we had
13 a big one in December. I'm not sure what month, if it was more maybe Octoberish
14 probably. It was supposed to be one of the biggest airborne assaults of the war, and our
15 whole battalion was going to be choppered in, and we talked about it. Roughly, that was
16 the day I got shot down. That one little machine gun team cancelled out the whole
17 operations of all those choppers, and all the people doing air because we got shot down. I
18 thought that was so amazing to me that one machine gun team took out one chopper and
19 it caused all those other choppers, for a whole battalion to turn around and pull back.
20 That's always amazed me. Another thing that amazed me on August 18th was the night
21 before on August 17th, our whole battalion was sitting on this hill right above the area,
22 which was about four or five hundred yards away. They had our platoon go down that
23 night into the village. We pulled out that night and we were all like, "You've got to be
24 kidding me." It was so dark, we had to have a hand on just about everybody's shoulder.
25 We pulled out and the platoon went down. Lieutenant Toya was our platoon leader that
26 we'd just picked up in the Philippines. We went down into that village, actually got into
27 the village and the next thing, we heard a couple shots at the front and the word was,
28 "Turn around and go straight back where we came from." I often wondered if that was a
29 setup or what had happened, because I never did get any real answers from anybody. I
30 just wonder what had happened if we had gone ahead on that patrol, went through the
31 village, and got on the other side, what would've happened that next day. We would have

1 been surrounded and all killed, and the platoon, if maybe they wouldn't have set up and
2 ambushed a whole battalion basically, so. It brings back thoughts about what if and when,
3 so.

4 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. I know you talked about Happy Valley and how you just kind
5 of knew that you were going to run into something there. Were there other times when
6 you just knew that there was going to be some kind of contact with the enemy, and if so,
7 what kind of intelligence would kind of give you that idea that the enemy is going to try
8 to do something?

9 DS: Usually, before we would go out on an operation, we would get our marching
10 orders and they would call us to the companies CP (Command Post), and that would be
11 usually the platoon sergeant and platoon commander. So we would go in there and the
12 captain most of the time, sometimes his XO (Executive Officer) would lay out what
13 we're fixing to do and what order we'd march out. But generally, they would tell us that
14 intelligence says that there's certain regiment or outfit that's in the area. Every now and
15 then they would tell us that they might expect fifty, sixty percent casualties. It's like they
16 would tell you, "This is just between us." Not to tell the men. I used to kind of hate that,
17 you know, not being able to tell these guys that they're telling us that one out of two of us
18 might not be coming back.

19 JS: Right.

20 DS: Anyway, most of the time it was Happy Valley; the guys didn't need to
21 know. They understood that they were fixing to run into something.

22 JS: Right. Do you remember some of the specific NVA units that you guys were
23 operating against?

24 DS: I had some written down somewhere, but I don't remember off hand. I know
25 after the war and through the years they've pretty well said what those units were, but I
26 can't recall them off my head.

27 JS: Alright. Along these lines, we're talking about with combat, is there anything
28 else we should cover here before moving on to other things?

29 DS: Not really. Most of '68 with our outfit was basically being in hot zones all the
30 time and people being killed and wounded, and new people coming in and taking their
31 place. It was just, you know, nobody really wanted to know anybody, and you just did

1 your duty, and protected your buddy, and hopefully you made it home. A lot of casualties
2 though.

3 JS: Moving onto other things then, did you get a chance to go on R&R during
4 your tour?

5 DS: Yeah, I went to Hawaii.

6 JS: Alright. How long was your R&R?

7 DS: I can't remember. It was either six or seven days.

8 JS: Alright.

9 DS: I remember being taken out of the field. I'd been there ten months when I
10 finally got R&R because they didn't want me to leave, being the platoon sergeant. So
11 finally, when I got it, it was during a monsoon, it was raining, and they came and told me
12 I was going out. So I got back to the rear, changed clothes and went to Da Nang. I got to
13 Da Nang, they didn't even know I was coming, they didn't have a billet for me. But it
14 turned out the gentleman that ran the R&R center was somebody I'd served with before
15 in Marine barracks. He had been wounded when put in that place, so he said, "You stay
16 with me tonight and I'll get you out tomorrow for sure, if I have to bump a general."

17 JS: Right.

18 DS: We hung out that night, and the weird thing was that night we started talking
19 about one guy, and it's the only night I can ever remember being in Da Nang. We're out
20 walking around and we're kind of out in a safety area of the city and just had something
21 to eat. We start talking about this one guy and all of a sudden, we looked across and we
22 said, "It can't be." And it was, this guy we was talking about. We hollered at him and we
23 started talking and went over to Sergeant Hoak's little hooch. We just all had a blast that
24 night and he was fixing to go on R&R also, to Bangkok. So it was just kind of a weird
25 situation. The next day he got me on a chopper—not a chopper, but a plane and got me
26 out.

27 JS: Alright. Well, as your tour was coming to an end, being the sergeant that you
28 were, did your replacement, the guy that took your place, did you meet him? I mean, was
29 he promoted from within?

30 DS: No.

31 JS: Okay.

1 DS: He was a sixteen-year veteran in the Marine Corps. He was a staff sergeant;
2 he'd never been in combat or Vietnam before. He came from Hollywood; he was a
3 recruiter. He got there and bless his heart, he was scared as he could be, but everybody
4 can understand that.

5 JS: Sure.

6 DS: My role was to—on paper I was the platoon sergeant, but tactically I was the
7 platoon commander until he understood what he could do. And the CO told me that,
8 “Dan, you’re in charge until you feel this guy’s ready and then you give it to him and
9 move down to platoon sergeant.” He told the staff sergeant at the same time, “You listen
10 to what he’s got to say.” This guy came in toward the end of December, probably the 1st
11 of January. So I had about thirty days to help train him before I left.

12 JS: Alright. If you can remember, what kind of advice did you give him? What
13 kind of things did you tell him to prepare him?

14 DS: Well, I told him that he needed to listen to the guy that was taking my place
15 because he’s been around for a while and this was his second tour. You know, he had
16 somebody he could listen to. His squad leaders, he needed to make sure he talked to
17 them. That when he was given a marching order, that he actually sat down with his
18 people, his squad leaders and his platoon sergeant, and they talked about it. He rotated
19 people by keeping one person or one group on the front of the rear all the time, make sure
20 he kept people rotated. He didn’t get gung-ho, things happen. Make sure he figured out
21 what was going on and he tried to work through it or manage the plan as I call it. He was,
22 from what I understand, he was killed a couple months later after I left.

23 JS: That brings up one other question I wanted to ask you. I’ve also heard that a
24 lot of guys were, I guess killed soon after getting there. Did you find that that was the
25 case? That if you survived the first few months, that your chances were better of making
26 it through?

27 DS: Not with us it wasn’t.

28 JS: Okay.

29 DS: Generally, a lot of the new guys would make the mistakes. A lot of times
30 they’d be put on point and things. They just didn’t listen as good as they could. They
31 didn’t smell, they had their mind elsewhere when they came over there from home. Still

1 thinking about their girlfriends, blaming somebody for being there. Most of them blame
2 themselves. Anyway, we lost a lot of guys probably in the first ninety days, but even if
3 your odds were that you had made it past that. Like I said, when you look at something
4 that happens on August 18th and there's only forty-one out of them left, and then by
5 December there's probably twelve of us, by the time I rotated there was just a handful.
6 The odds weren't very good, especially in the Marine infantry outfits, period.

7 JS: Right, alright. Well, as your tour came to an end, what was out processing
8 like? What was leaving Vietnam like for you?

9 DS: About a week before I was supposed to rotate home, the company
10 commander pulled me to the rear. Our outfit was supposed to go over to Liberty Bridge
11 and pull guard duty there for about a week or so. He told me I didn't have to go, so I got
12 my stuff, turned it in, and I kept my pistol until the last minute. I turned in a lot of my
13 stuff and I kind of stayed in the rear while the company moved out. The gunny came over
14 to me and told me he was putting me in for another medal, said he appreciated
15 everything, and he probably wouldn't see me again, he left. About two days before I was
16 supposed to rotate home, we had a new lieutenant, and he came over to me. He had just
17 come into the company; he was supposed to go out. Before he did, they were going to
18 make him paymaster. So it was payday, end of January. So he was supposed to go out to
19 the company, which meant he was going to take a Jeep out there. Well, there were very
20 few guys in rear, and he came over to me and another guy and told us that we were going
21 to pull guard duty and go out there with him. I said, "You've got to be kidding me? I
22 already turned my rifle in." I just had my .45, and he said, "Well, now go check out a
23 pistol." I said, "You don't understand. I've been out here thirteen months; you don't even
24 know what I've seen." It didn't matter, he was just an ignorant prick.

25 JS: Right.

26 DS: I just wanted to pull him to the side and beat the crap of him. Anyway, last
27 minute I said, "Okay, I'll go." I've heard of too many stories from people with a couple
28 days left not making it. Anyway, the whole way out there on that jeep I was just nervous
29 as I could be, probably as nervous as I'd ever been. Anyway, we got out there and
30 everybody was surprised I was out there. So I talked and stayed the night, the next day
31 took the jeep back in and that lieutenant, he stayed there and took over his platoon. I just

1 felt for him actually. Anyway, I came back, and this captain was kind of mad at what the
2 lieutenant had done, and he hadn't known about it. Anyway, he told me when I got out
3 there to the bridge to go ahead and turn my weapon in and tell the gunny—not the gunny,
4 but the 1st sergeant back at the company, for me to go ahead and process over to Da
5 Nang. So when I got back and talked to him, he already had the papers and he said,
6 “Here's a twenty four hour pass. So basically, go to Da Nang a day early and hide out,
7 and do whatever you want to do. Get your flight and go home.”

8 JS: Right.

9 KC: I told them all goodbye and kind of felt guilty for leaving, felt guilty for
10 many, many years after that. Even though I'd done my duty and everything, just leaving
11 my men, being alive and not really wounded. I got some things I could have turned in for
12 Purple Hearts and some scars and things like that, but being platoon sergeant it's like,
13 “You know, I don't need to do any of that.”

14 JS: Right

15 DS: You're amiss about medals.

16 JS: Sure.

17 DS: I got to my plane and the weird thing about flying out is the day I reported in
18 over there, they had us go out to the plane, we got in line and they started counting off. I
19 had my two guys that were with me, that were going home also, and I had them in front
20 of me. I said, “You guys get in front.” And being a good platoon sergeant as I was. You
21 know, they counted off everybody. When they came to me, they said, “Well, we've got
22 too many people here.” I had to stay another night in Da Nang, and I said, “Oh, man.
23 First you send me out on guard duty, and now I got to stay another night here.” I said,
24 “You guys want to change?” They just looked at me and said, “Bye Sarge.” (Laughs)

25 JS: (Laughs) Right.

26 DS: Anyway, I stayed there the next night. There was a lot of weird things back
27 there, with people getting robbed and craziness going on back in the rear. So I stayed
28 awake just about all night, just kind of watching what was going on. The next morning, I
29 got that first flight out and I was gone.

30 JS: Alright. After you got back home, did you hear from any of the guys from the
31 unit anymore?

1 DS: Never did.

2 JS: Okay.

3 DS: My four years was up in two months and they said, "If you wasn't going to
4 stay in—" They'd offered me a chance to go to OCS. They offered me a chance to go to
5 either recruiting or drill instructor, but I didn't want to be an officer. Every officer told
6 me in six months I'd be back to Vietnam. So I said, "I'm not going back to Vietnam,
7 period."

8 JS: Right.

9 DS: I went ahead and took an early out. So they discharged me two months early,
10 and after being a week there at Pendleton, they gave me my papers and I left to go home.
11 I didn't see or hear from another person until about sixteen years ago.

12 JS: What type of reception did you receive? Did you have any trouble in airports
13 or anything like that, or?

14 DS: Well, when we first came back, we flew into El Toro.

15 JS: Okay.

16 DS: So, if I remember right, they had a little band there playing, it was real
17 simple. We just got off and walked where they told us to go and had some busses lined
18 up. It wasn't a big deal; it wasn't like family or anybody, except for the little band that
19 was there playing. Anyway, we got on our busses, went over to Pendleton, and then they
20 started picking on us, making us walk around picking up paper on the bus, anything they
21 could. They made us all feel like we just came back from Vietnam and here we are
22 picking up trash again.

23 JS: Right.

24 DS: Anyway, I'm glad I made the right decision. I love the Marine Corps and if it
25 hadn't been for what happened in Vietnam, I'd probably stayed in, but I just couldn't see
26 that I would make it back the second time if I went.

27 JS: Sure.

28 DS: When you talk about airports, they had told us pretty well, "Don't wear your
29 uniforms when you go home. There's too much going on there in LA at the airport with
30 people going through there and stuff." A lot of guys had the short hair, so it was kind of
31 pretty noticeable anyway.

1 JS: Right. What was it like, I guess just being back home after coming from a war
2 zone? Was there a transition period?

3 DS: Yeah, it took the body a while and it took the mind a while. I remember one
4 time pulling up in a convertible and I pulled up beside this church, and there was a little
5 bus stop seat right there in front of it where you could sit and wait for the bus to come.
6 Some kid was on the other side of it with a cap gun and popped it a couple times. I about
7 went flying out of that car.

8 JS: Right.

9 DS: You know, most of the time I was pretty well laid back anyway, so I started
10 trying to relax and it was just hard to relax. It was hard to sleep; it was hard to get back
11 in. And I still am the same way today. I still about every two hours when I go to sleep, I
12 wake up, get up, walk around, and look around. I don't sleep real comfortable, unless I'm
13 just totally exhausted. But yeah, it was a challenge. I got lucky I came back, I found a job
14 and stayed in that job for almost forty years.

15 JS: What was the job if you don't mind me asking?

16 DS: It was with the phone company. I came in and they were looking for people
17 with their military behind them. Actually, it was South Central Bell at the time.

18 JS: Okay.

19 DS: I went with a friend; he was looking for a part time job and while I was there
20 the lady said, "Don't I know you?" It turned out to be a girl I graduated from high school
21 with. She asked me what I was doing, I told her I just got out of the Marine Corps, and
22 she said, "Well, would you like to come back and apply for a job?" I said, "Well, sure." I
23 didn't even know what they did. I went back there and applied for the job. I got it and my
24 buddy didn't.

25 JS: Right.

26 DS: I ended up putting telephones in, then I went on into management about
27 seven years later. I was a designs person, a salesperson, and I retired in 2001 as a project
28 manager. I've been working contracting work back to them ever since 2001, whenever I
29 want to work as a project manager. To me, it all was like my combat training and stuff,
30 but most of the time I was kind of making my own decisions and kind of in charge of my

1 own day. I had my marching orders, and I went out, took the objective and came back. I
2 get to go home and eat and feel safe.

3 JS: Right. My dad worked for South Central Bell for about thirty years.

4 DS: Did he?

5 JS: Yeah.

6 DS: Where at?

7 JS: Down in Mobile, Alabama.

8 DS: Really?

9 JS: Yep. He ran one of the central offices. Well, not one of the central offices. I
10 guess it was central offices. He worked there.

11 DS: With the frames down there?

12 JS: Yes sir, yep. He worked by himself, basically like working in a cave for thirty
13 years.

14 DS: Yeah, it is. We used to go in there sometimes and talk to some of the guys,
15 but I worked my whole tour out of Memphis and here in the last four years I've actually
16 moved down to Florence, Alabama. I love it down here, so that's where I'm at really
17 right now is Florence, Alabama.

18 JS: Alright. Well, before wrapping up the interview, I guess the last thing we
19 should do—you wouldn't mind if I asked some general questions about just your opinion
20 on the war, and the way it was handled, and that type of thing?

21 DS: Sure.

22 JS: Okay. First of all, looking back on your experience in Vietnam, how do you
23 feel about American involvement in Vietnam? And I guess, your own involvement in
24 Vietnam?

25 DS: Well, at the time I just went where I was told to go, so it didn't matter where
26 it was. When I got there, I guess what bothered me was seeing that we were doing all the
27 fighting and that the Vietnamese wasn't, and that they always seemed to know what we
28 were doing, and they didn't seem like they were ever doing anything. I would say I went
29 where I was told to go as a Marine, and it could have been Korea or anywhere. But once I
30 was there, it was mainly about our men, about just keeping each other alive and getting
31 home. We didn't really know so much about what was going in the politics while we

1 were there. We had very little information from home, unless somebody got a paper or
2 every now and then we'd have *Stars and Stripes* or something. The *Stars and Stripes*
3 was—I think not telling the story like it was supposed to. We really didn't know a lot
4 about exactly what was going on in the political world. We just knew we had a battle and
5 we were fighting the battle, and it didn't seem like we were fighting it the way we should.

6 JS: Right.

7 DS: We didn't have any control of what we could do.

8 JS: Alright. You mentioned the *Stars and Stripes* and the way they were covering
9 it, but how did you feel in general about the way the media covered the war?

10 DS: I didn't really read that much about what they said. Everything that I did read
11 was more kind of lopsided in a way. That the men that were fighting the war just seemed
12 like they were either a guinea pig or just put out to slaughter. I just quit reading. I would
13 have papers come to me from the *Commercial Appeal* or *Press-Scimitar*, whichever one
14 it was at the time in Memphis. But you know, very few of those ever got through. When
15 they did, I would read a little bit about the war. It almost wanted to make you sick with
16 some of the things that you would hear. You know, usually more about atrocities or
17 crimes, or something going on, always a death count.

18 JS: Right.

19 DS: I just didn't care about it.

20 JS: Sure.

21 DS: I still don't. I don't even have a TV and I haven't watched TV in five years. I
22 don't count on ever watching TV again.

23 JS: Right. Well, what did you think of—I guess of the anti-war movement and the
24 protestors?

25 DS: Well, I didn't like it, but they had their rights to do what they wanted to. I just
26 didn't appreciate how they treated us. I mean, if they had their rights and they just talked
27 about it and acted on it without trying to spit on us and make us look like baby killers is
28 one thing.

29 JS: Sure.

30 DS: But for those groups that wanted to put us down, I just wanted to take them
31 and put them in uniform for twenty-four hours and see how they would like it.

1 JS: Right.

2 DS: And let them see some of the things we saw with the civilians and kids
3 getting killed, and things. See who the real baby killers are.

4 JS: Right.

5 DS: It's like today, if somebody said something about being a baby killer, there's
6 a great form out that's shows the number of men and women killed in each war, and then
7 it comes down to a number of babies that have been killed by abortion. They have about a
8 hundred and fifty times all those that were ever killed in a war. I could show them
9 something today if I was talking to them, but back then I just took it with a grain of salt
10 and tried to go around them because I knew I'd get aggravated if I confronted them.

11 JS: Right, sure, sure. Well, what do you think about the US policy, I guess of
12 reconciliation towards Vietnam today? And this growing relationship with trade and all
13 the other things going on with Vietnam today?

14 DS: Well, I kind of look at it as the same thing that's happened with Japan,
15 Germany, and Italy.

16 JS: Right.

17 DS: You know, we have to move on, we have to grow, we have to do what God
18 tells us, and that's love each other. It took me a long time to get to that point. As a matter
19 of fact, Wednesday night at church I was listening to a young Vietnamese man give a
20 class, and I just kind of had questions in my head, "I wonder where his parents were, and
21 what they were doing in '68?" But I just let it be. I said, "I'm just thankful I'm here, and I
22 guess I'm thankful he's here."

23 JS: Right.

24 DS: I don't worry about that anymore. I've got a lot of guys who are still real
25 bitter about it. I used to, if I saw them in the old days, I'd go shooting them (makes
26 shooting noise) or something, and just walk on by them. Now, it's just like, "Have a
27 blessed day."

28 JS: Right.

29 DS: They're God's children. They were doing what they were told to do and a lot
30 of them were being forced to do things.

31 JS: Sure.

1 DS: It's just one of those things you wished never had happened, but it did, and
2 it's time to move on.

3 JS: Right. One other thing I wanted to ask you along these lines. If you don't
4 mind me asking this, you mentioned your religion a few times here. Do you think that has
5 helped you in some ways, as far as making peace with Vietnam? I don't want to put
6 words into your mouth.

7 DS: No, it has. When I was in Vietnam, I came to know the Lord about a year
8 before I went. I stood up a couple Sunday nights ago in front of our church and was
9 giving my testimony. One of the things I said, "You know, the most peace I can
10 remember having, until recently, was when I was in Vietnam in the middle of all the wars
11 and battles that were going on. I had a peace about me that I was concerned about my
12 men, but I wasn't concerned about me because I knew where I would be if anything
13 happened." That's the way I felt, and I was made the Protestant lay leader of our
14 company. I had service out in the field a couple times with our men. I had a call, that's
15 why a lot of people were around me when things would happen. They knew, "Hey
16 Sergeant Story's here, let's hang around him." So I got along good with them, and they
17 got along good with me. Now, today—when I got back home I kind of lost it a little bit
18 after awhile. It's like, "Why am I alive and not hurt?" I started having a guilt trip and did
19 some stupid things. Then I started saying, "I need to get back to where I was." And I did.
20 I got back to where I needed to be and now, no matter what battle comes up in my life.
21 It's like Vietnam, I have a peace and I just deal with it. So I feel good about myself now,
22 and I'm still the chaplain of our company reunions, and get to say the prayer and grace
23 and so on. Most of the guys that I know, that were on the religious side, I think that's
24 what's helped all of us to get through it.

25 JS: Alright. You talked about the reunions, could you talk a little bit more about
26 those and the significance of that first reunion that you attended?

27 DS: Yeah, the first reunion was in Jacksonville, Florida. Let's see, we've had six
28 reunions now, so that's twelve—so that's about ten or twelve years ago.

29 JS: Okay.

30 DS: What happened there is I was talking to the guy that had a website for the 7th
31 Marines. He was telling me that Echo Company was one of the few companies that never

1 had a reunion. I started thinking, “Well, there’s probably not many guys left.” Anyway, I
2 started getting to where I could get around on the internet. So I found a couple people, I
3 said, “I wonder if these are my guys?” So I called them and sure enough, they were. We
4 started talking and we started saying, “Well, why don’t we get together.” One of the guys
5 I called lived in Jacksonville, and he had stayed in the Marines and retired. He said,
6 “Well, I’ve been trying to get guys together also.” He said, “Why don’t we do it
7 together?” And he asked if he could have the first one there in Jacksonville, and we’d
8 have the second one in Memphis. I said, “That’s fine with me.” So we found twenty-five
9 guys from the company, that—between 1965 and 1970. So we all met down in
10 Jacksonville and we had a great time. We recognized each other; we could still see the
11 facial expressions on most of us. Some guys brought some pictures. We just had a nice,
12 good time, and we had a color guard. We had the names of the guys at the time we knew
13 who’d died. Then we came to Memphis and invited some folks that we had found, that
14 lost their loved ones. Some of those folks that came and a mother, and a couple
15 daughters, a brother, one of the guy’s kids. So we started helping them understand what
16 had happened, it really helped them close the doors. They felt a lot better after we talked
17 to them about how their loved one was killed. We’ve got now about, I guess sixty-five or
18 seventy guys that we’ve found from ’65, like I said through ’70 that were in the company.
19 We just opened it up for everybody that was in Echo Company. Most guys that we
20 have—there’s about twenty of us from ’68. So we have a good time. We enjoy it, we talk,
21 a lot of us talk on the phone, or we send e-mail to each other. There’s about a third of us
22 that do that. There’s a couple guys that still don’t want to go to any reunions, they’re still
23 all messed up about all this stuff. Anyway, it’s been a good growing process for a lot of
24 guys, as far as healing also.

25 JS: Sure.

26 DS: I’ve seen a big change in a lot of these guys. It’s something that can be very
27 helpful, if it’s done in the right way.

28 JS: Sure, absolutely. Just a couple of more questions. One of them is, how has
29 Vietnam impacted your life the most? How would you say?

30 DS: I think probably the attitude I had for so long, that I couldn’t die. I wouldn’t
31 wear seatbelts; I’d just get up and go. You’d feel like, “Hey, I made it through Vietnam. I

1 can make it through anything now.” I finally understood that that wasn’t the case, here in
2 the last few years because I’m getting a lot older. I think the mental approach—you still
3 have the nightmares, you still have some sweats, you still see ambushes everywhere you
4 go. If you’re out walking around in the woods and something grabs your foot, you have a
5 thought process that all of a sudden you just hit a booby trap. Those feelings and thoughts
6 are still there, I don’t think they’ll ever go away. Lots of people call it PTSD (Post
7 Traumatic Stress Disorder), call it whatever you want to, but I think that’s the worst
8 thing. I think mentally, all the men were hurt just as much mentally as any physical
9 wounds they ever had. I think relationships—it’s hurt me and having relationships with
10 folks through the years until recently. You could walk away from anything and you
11 didn’t take anything. A lot of times you just got to the point, when you got back home,
12 that you didn’t have to take that crap anymore, so you’d just walk away from things
13 instead of confronting them again. I think those are the biggest things. Also, I think one
14 of the big things is that when the guys in Iraq and Afghanistan, we support them. They
15 help them, be with them, and let them learn from what our experiences were. We’re a
16 whole lot more supportive now as a country, then back in Vietnam.

17 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Have you ever visited the Wall, and if so, what did you think
18 of it?

19 DS: I’ve visited the Wall three times. We had a reunion up in Virginia,
20 Fredericksburg, and all of us went up to the wall, blew taps, put flags out of all our
21 eighty-eight guys that were lost. It’s amazing. For us that was there, there’s no way that
22 we can really go there without the tears and the emotions coming out. We know it’s a
23 place for them, and I know now we’re working for a monument for the guys at Echo
24 Company that’s going to be placed at the new museum in Quantico, the Marine Corps
25 Museum. We’re hoping that we’ll have a monument there in the next few years. We’re
26 taking up money for it. It will have the names of all these guys on it also. A lot of other
27 companies are doing it there at Quantico, and that’s a beautiful sight too, if you’ve never
28 been to it.

29 JS: No, sir. I haven’t been there.

30 DS: Yeah, it’s a worthwhile stop, that’s for sure.

1 JS: Okay. Well, is there anything else you'd like to say? Anything else we should
2 cover before wrapping this up?

3 DS: Not that I know of. I mean, as a young man, I went to a place the Marine
4 Corps sent me. I ended up at a kind of a young rank, ended up being in charge of a lot of
5 things. When I got back many years later, I saw all the unit awards that was given, and
6 my company had won two Presidential Unit Citations, which are equal to Navy Crosses.

7 JS: Wow.

8 DS: We had one Navy Commendation Medal, which is like a Silver Star for every
9 man. And we won two Meritorious Units, which are like Bronze Stars for every man.

10 JS: Oh, wow.

11 DS: Out of thirteen operations, five of them were recognized by the unit. So I'm
12 proud of our outfit, I'm proud of what we did, and how we took care of each other. It was
13 a war I wish they would have kept the politicians out and let the military minds fought.
14 That's part of living in this country. I was glad I made it home, so I could see that the
15 Lord's using me in a lot of ways now. Always wondered, why in the world I'd come
16 home and what was the reason for it. Now I see a lot of reasons for it.

17 JS: Right.

18 DS: Anyway, I'm just glad to be here and have an opportunity to talk to you.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Well, thank you for taking the time to do this. I certainly enjoyed
20 talking to you the last couple of days.

21

22 (End of audio)

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