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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with John DeGroot
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 27 May 2010
Transcribed by Cole Edwards**

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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 Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
2 conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. John DeGroot. Today is May 27th, 2010. I
3 am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech
4 and Mr. DeGroot is joining me by phone from Illinois. Is that correct, sir?

5 John DeGroot: Yes, it is.

6 JS: All right, okay. Why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical
7 information? First of all, when and where were you born?

8 JD: I was born in Chicago, Illinois. April 15th, 1950.

9 JS: All right. Okay, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were
10 their names and what did they do for a living?

11 JD: That's a great question. My mother and my father were divorced when I was
12 quite young. My mother was a secretary. She was a pretty hard-working secretary. I lived
13 with her and my grandmother for most of my younger life. My father, he was a heat-
14 treater by trade. He lived on the west side of Chicago. At the end of his life, just around
15 the time I went in the Army, just before that, he bought a tavern.

16 JS: Okay, all right. So did you grow up there in Chicago?

17 JD: Yes, I did.

18 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about what that was like for you, just life in
19 Chicago as a kid?

1 JD: Well, it was different times to say the least. Even as an eight or nine year old,
2 you could take public transportation anywhere. We didn't have a car, or my mother didn't
3 have a car. I took public transportation to get wherever I wanted in the city. It was quite
4 well. I underachieved in school quite a bit, which I changed my ways later after Vietnam.
5 I went to grammar school and moved here and there. Then, I wound up in high school.
6 Probably the only thing I did well in was print shop. I worked on a co-op educational
7 program where I would work half a day and go to school half a day. You weren't
8 expected to go to college.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JD: You know, grew up going to Cubs games and things like that. Got into a little
11 bit of trouble when I was a kid. You know, it was a rough city, so you'd hang with a
12 rough crowd. I wouldn't say I was a juvenile delinquent, but it was rough. You were
13 always getting into fights and things like that. I grew up sort of in a tough little way, I
14 guess. Then, I started working at this print shop called Hall Printing. I had inklings that
15 some of my friends wanted to go into the military. I wound up volunteering for the draft,
16 so my parents wouldn't know.

17 JS: Okay. Before we get into actually joining the Army and getting into basic
18 training and all of that, I got to ask you a few more questions about early life. Did you
19 have any interests in the military as a kid growing up or had you had any relatives that
20 had served?

21 JD: No, but I had some neighbors and naturally I knew a lot of World War II
22 guys. A lot of my friends had—their fathers had served in World War II. I was fascinated
23 with history my whole young life, especially the Civil War and things like that. So I
24 always had a fascination with war and the military, especially historic facts, American
25 historic facts, even when I was young.

26 JS: All right. Not to deviate too much from the regular questions, but you said you
27 went to a lot of Cubs games as a kid. What was that like for you?

28 JD: That was interesting because I would be like nine years old, and my
29 grandmother would give two dollars. I was off at Addison's Bus Line and for two dollars,
30 you could go to the Cubs game, car fare, and have a hot-dog and a pop. There was only
31 about four or five thousand people at the game, so you could even sneak into the box-

1 seats. That's all you needed was a couple of dollars and that was everything, your whole
2 day.

3 JS: Right, right. (Chuckles)

4 JD: It was pretty neat. So I would go down there and just watch the Cubs all by
5 myself. You know, nowadays you would be pretty fearful of your kid going anywhere at
6 that age, let alone taking a bus.

7 JS: Right, right. Growing up, did you pay much attention to what was going on in
8 the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy, that type of thing?

9 JD: Yeah. Well, I guess you couldn't. We would be having drills all the time for
10 atomic-bomb attacks and things like that. It was in the back of everybody's mind. I don't
11 vividly remember, but I definitely can remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. Even though I
12 couldn't comprehend what was going on, it got your attention.

13 JS: Right.

14 JD: Yeah, I think we were all aware. Especially when the Sputnik went up, I
15 remember that.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JD: We weren't yet really in the space program, and then John Glenn doing his
18 orbits and things like that. I sure do remember things like that that would be probably
19 related to the Cold War.

20 JS: All right. How about other things like, say the Kennedy assassination?

21 JD: Oh, yeah. Everybody, I think even. I think I was thirteen then. Everybody
22 remembers where they were at when it happened. I was in Locke Grammar School. I
23 remember it coming on and everybody was glued to their black and white TV set,
24 watching the procession. Everything that had to do with it—you were mesmerized by it,
25 the whole country. It was really pretty incredible. It's hard even as a thirteen-year-old not
26 to know what you were doing at that time.

27 JS: Right. Yes, sir. When did you graduate from high school? What year was that
28 again?

29 JD: 1968. June of 1968.

30 JS: 1968. Okay, all right. Prior to that, had you paid much attention to what was
31 going on in Vietnam?

1 JD: Yes and no. I remember in high school we had—probably somebody that had
2 dropped out of high school, had served in the Marines. They actually had come back to
3 Steinmetz High School where I went.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JD: He had been to Vietnam already. It was amazing that he was coming back to
6 finish up his education. That hit you home. Especially in my senior year, I had one friend
7 Larry Davidson, he had joined the Marines and another friend of mine—they had both
8 dropped out of high school. A lot of my friends had dropped out of high school. I had two
9 friends that were in the military.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JD: You had an idea of what was going on. They both went to Vietnam. One got
12 shot up pretty bad and another one was killed.

13 JS: Right, right. Those that came back, did you talk to them very much about their
14 experiences?

15 JD: No, not really. Not really, to tell you the truth. Being just in senior year of
16 high school, I just had the one guy that was in high school. He didn't really want to talk
17 about anything. I just knew he was a Marine and he had come back, and he had done in
18 Vietnam. I don't think he wanted to talk about it at all.

19 JS: Right.

20 JD: My other friends went to Vietnam after I had gone in the Army, but they were
21 in the service well before me.

22 JS: All right. Could you talk a little bit more about that process of actually
23 joining?

24 JD: Yeah. Well, what happened is I was working—I graduated in June. I was
25 working a third shift at this print shop, which I had sort of been doing an apprenticeship
26 at, and the third shift was horrible as it was. I was just a kid that was just wandering
27 around. I really didn't know what to do with myself. I had an inclination. I just went
28 down to the draft board. I didn't want to tell my parents. I didn't want to join outright, but
29 I knew you could volunteer for the draft and push your name up. They didn't have the
30 number system then. I went down to the draft board, and I signed up for the draft. They
31 would call it, "Signing up for the draft." In September I got a greetings letter. My mother

1 was just shocked. She says, “You’re just out of high school. I can’t believe they’re doing
2 it so fast.” My father was a little oblivious to it. I never told him. I just got drafted.
3 October was the induction date.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JD: October 21st.

6 JS: Okay, all right. What was it really that made you decide to go ahead and do
7 that?

8 JD: In all honesty, I can’t tell you why I did that. I really don’t know. You’re just
9 a kid and you feel like doing something, I guess. I don’t know.

10 JS: Right, okay.

11 JD: I’ve volunteered for everything my whole life and I still don’t know why.

12 JS: Sure. Okay. You said induction date was October 21st. Where did that take
13 place?

14 JD: That took place at Van Buren Street. They used to have the induction center
15 down on Van Buren Street, in downtown Chicago. My father picked me up. I think it
16 must have been four or five o’clock in the morning. My father drove from his house on
17 the west side, came and got me, and left me out there. He says, “Let me know what time
18 you want me to pick you up tonight.” (Laughs) I’ll never forget that. For some reason, he
19 just didn’t think I was going.

20 JS: Right. (Laughs) So I assume once you were inducted at that point, they went
21 ahead and sent you to basic then?

22 JD: Right. Out to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That night, we got on an airplane out
23 of O’Hare. That was a whole day up there and then we got into Fort Campbell quite late.

24 JS: Okay, all right. What was the experience like of arriving at Fort Campbell and
25 getting off of that bus? Were you greeted by the drill instructors immediately?

26 JD: Oh my God, yeah. (Laughs) I think you had the bare-necessities that they—
27 we were so tired when we got in there, I think we fell asleep, and we must have got an
28 hour sleep in, I think. Then, they woke us up. That’s when I met Drill Sergeant Johnson,
29 my drill instructor. They shaved our heads and just gave us a cap. Our heads were
30 immediately cold. I’ll tell you later about Drill Sergeant Johnson, what a character.

1 JS: Okay, all right. Well, I guess if you could talk a little bit about—just about
2 what basic was like for you and a typical day at basic training?

3 JD: Well, it was incredible. I think they would just push you to the limit. I think
4 we would probably get up about three o'clock in the morning it would seem and go to
5 bed around ten after we would polish things and everything else. Every day was just
6 rigorous physical training. You know, running. We'd start running and then I think you'd
7 have about five minutes to have a shower. You had about two minutes to eat your
8 breakfast after that and then you were in formation. It was starting to get a little bit chilly.
9 This was October. You would just go through the same things all the time. Bayonet drill
10 and then the rifle range, and you'd do one thing after another. I just remembered it started
11 getting cold, but it was a southern cold, which I wasn't used to a damp cold. Unlike the
12 north where it's cold, cold, but it doesn't go right through you. I remember we'd go out to
13 the rifle range and just absolutely—it was freezing. I would be frozen to death and just
14 chilled to the bone. It was just constant work. We never had a second to ourselves. I got
15 sick for a while, and they almost recycled me. I had, I think the beginning of pneumonia
16 and they took me into the hospital. I was as sick as a dog. I just begged the doctors to let
17 me out, so I didn't get recycled. I did not want to go through basic training again. I
18 couldn't even imagine going through it again. It was just torturous every day.

19 JS: All right. You talked about going out to the rifle range in weapons training.
20 Were you training on M14s?

21 JD: Yes, that's a great question. We didn't have the M16s yet, at least at that basic
22 training. At Fort Campbell, we had M14s. I qualified as expert on the M14.

23 JS: Okay.

24 JD: They really did teach you how to shoot pretty well. I got pretty adept at the
25 M14.

26 JS: Right. When did you receive your introduction to the M16? At advanced
27 training?

28 JD: AIT (Advanced Individual Training), yes.

29 JS: All right.

30 JD: That's when we got into the M16. After that, I was delayed with my AIT too,
31 but I guess we'll get through basic training first.

1 JS: Okay. Would you mind go ahead and talk a little bit about your drill
2 instructor?

3 JD: Drill Sergeant Johnson still has an impression on me to this day that I can't
4 believe. He was as black as coal, just back from Vietnam. About 6' 3'', and he had a
5 torso—he was just absolutely in incredible shape. His uniform—he was so strack, so
6 starched, and he was an E-6. He was with the 25th Infantry Division. He had a CIB
7 (Combat Infantryman Badge) coming back from Vietnam. I remember Drill Sergeant
8 Johnson early in our days, it must have been the first couple of weeks. He had the whole
9 platoon in the Bay Area, and he had caught of our platoon-mates eating candy. In front of
10 the entire platoon, Drill Sergeant Johnson took one by the scruff, another by the other
11 hand, picked them up off their feet, and beat them with each other.

12 JS: Wow.

13 JD: Threw them down on the ground right in front of us. I'm an eighteen-year-old
14 kid and my jaw just—it's one of my favorite stories, my jaw just hung down. I just said,
15 "I am so happy Drill Sergeant Johnson's on our side."

16 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

17 JD: It's the truth. He was a fair guy. He liked me for some reason. He was just a
18 great drill sergeant. I mean, he was getting us ready for combat. I'd like to shake his hand
19 today. He just had such an impression on me. What a good troop he was. We had another
20 drill corporal there that—I remember all these units, but he was from Vietnam, and he
21 was with the 18th MP (Military Police) Brigade. He must have been one of the grunts
22 because he had a CIB as well.

23 JS: Right.

24 JD: He was a drill corporal. He used to shave in the morning with a combat knife.

25 JS: Wow. (Laughs)

26 JD: Yeah. True, true. It's hard to believe nowadays. I don't remember his name,
27 but I remember he had the 18th MP Brigade combat patch on. I've looked at their history
28 since and they did have some infantry attached to them.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JD: So he must have been an infantryman attached to that brigade. Drill Sergeant
31 Johnson was with the 25th Infantry Division. I remember that he had a CIB as well.

1 JS: Did either of them make many references to Vietnam, in the training?

2 JD: You know, I think they did in some ways. I think everybody just said, “Well,
3 you’re all going to Vietnam and boy, you better just get your head out of your ass.” Stuff
4 like that. They made no bones about it. They were getting you ready for war.

5 JS: All right. Well, outside of picking up people and beating them with each other
6 (laughs), how else would they enforce discipline?

7 JD: They didn’t really have to. You just were so scared of them; you weren’t
8 going to do nothing at that point. I think they made their point. There was no discipline. If
9 they told you to jump, you’d say, “How high?” They’d take you out running every
10 morning. They did have some instances though. I remember one guy—they didn’t like
11 how he shaved one morning. They had him get in front of the whole—I think it might
12 have been the whole company, they had him take his razor and dip it in the butt-can and
13 shave with that in front of the whole company. They broke some people down. They’d
14 have them just crying in front of the whole company, you know. Yeah, they were just
15 ruthless. That’s how they would enforce discipline. You’re too scared to do anything
16 wrong.

17 JS: Right, all right. Overall, did you find the training you went through at basic
18 pretty sufficient as far as an introduction to the military?

19 JD: Absolutely, yeah. We could really march, and I could shoot. I was as good a
20 shape as you can be. That’s all you do. You couldn’t even walk in the company area. You
21 had to run anywhere you went. We never got to the PX (Post Exchange) or anything like
22 that. It was just constant work. You were just a scum-bucket. You were going to work.

23 JS: Right. So then, you felt overall that you were adjusting to the military lifestyle
24 pretty well?

25 JD: Yeah. I was surviving, put it that way.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JD: That’s a better way of putting it. I’d say I was surviving. You really didn’t
28 have time to even think.

29 JS: All right. Any other memorable moments or funny moments, anything like
30 that that sticks out in your mind from basic?

1 JD: From basic, I can't remember things that I would say, "Fun" ever. It was just
2 hard work and just a relief when we did finally graduate. Because it was December, they
3 actually let us go home on a little leave in between that and our AIT.

4 JS: Okay, right. Where was AIT?

5 JD: Fort Gordon, Georgia, Military Police School. For some reason, they chose
6 me to be a military policeman.

7 JS: All right. What did you think about that assignment?

8 JD: First of all, I was shocked they picked me to be a military policeman with all
9 the troubles I had as a kid. I was usually on the other side of the law when I did get into
10 trouble. It was interesting. First of all, I went to—they took me into a Military Police
11 School, and you had to be a certain height at that time to be an enlisted man. It was
12 5'10".

13 JS: Okay.

14 JD: So I remember they were measuring you and weighing you and stuff, and
15 getting ready, and they'd go, "You just made the 5'10". I found out later that I've
16 always been 5'8" and a half. I had just made that. Then, what happened, I also was too
17 young to be a military policeman. You had to be nineteen by the time of graduation. I
18 was still eighteen. So, they put me in a holding company. A lot of these people, they
19 would take and make them infantry after that, and send you different places. They just
20 kept me in this holding company for probably a good month or six weeks. I did mostly
21 KP (Kitchen Police). Just absolutely stupid details around there, it was pretty rotten
22 actually.

23 JS: Things like peeling potatoes and filling sandbags?

24 JD: Yeah, the whole thing. KP would be horrible because you'd start at like four
25 in the morning or something like that. Your night would not be over until ten o'clock that
26 night.

27 JS: Oh, wow.

28 JD: Oh, yeah. It was just grueling. These cooks would just boss you around. It
29 was hard work. It was not fun at all.

30 JS: Right. So, you were in this holding company before actually beginning MP
31 school?

1 JD: Right, because they decided then I couldn't be an MP because I was too
2 young. Then, who knows, they could send you—a lot of people, they would send them to
3 infantry school and stuff like that. They just kept me in this holding company for about a
4 month and then they said, "You're going back to Military Police School." They started
5 me in Military Police School.

6 JS: All right. What was that experience like for you?

7 JD: That was interesting. It was a lot of bookwork and schoolwork at that time. I
8 think I even sent my stuff down to Texas Tech. I had my original schoolbooks and
9 notebook. It was everything you had to learn to be a policeman. They didn't teach you so
10 many combat tactics, even though they would take you out with the M60 one day and the
11 grenade-launchers and things of that nature, you know, an M79. They were really
12 teaching you mostly police work, which the Army changed later because they found out
13 that too many MPs were getting killed because they didn't have the combat training.
14 Back then it was all police work. It was everything about how to use a radio to law,
15 military law. How to apprehend somebody, judo classes, how to use your nightstick. 45
16 they were very big in training because that was the military police basic weapon. M16—I
17 think they qualified us on the M16 as well. I didn't shoot as well with the M16 as I did
18 with the M14. The 45, I just got by with the marksman badge. It was a big emphasis on
19 police work. You know, how to write up tickets and all the forms and things like that.
20 That was eight weeks long.

21 JS: Okay, all right. How about your instructors there? What were your
22 impressions of those guys?

23 JD: They were okay. They weren't as tough on you as they were in basic training.
24 There's only one Drill Sergeant Johnson. They were very thorough, and they treated you
25 a little bit better. Also, the spit and shine in the Military Police Corps—we were actually
26 brassoing our garbage cans and shining the bottoms of our boots and stuff. It was insane.
27 It was all spit-shine. Military policemen, it was all spit-shine, and it was a branch of the
28 Army on to itself. You would learn all about the colors of the military police being green
29 and gold, and things like that. There was a lot of pride in being a policeman. Most of the
30 military policeman, I would say ninety percent were RA or Regular Army. They had

1 signed up to be military policeman because they wanted to get into law enforcement or
2 something like that later on.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JD: Most had signed up to get their choice or branch of the Army.

5 JS: All right. I know you talked about them not really focusing too much on
6 combat but on police-work instead, was it focused on generally being an MP or was there
7 some emphasis on being an MP in Vietnam?

8 JD: There was not that much emphasis put on being a military policeman in
9 Vietnam. I think they were very remiss in that, to tell you the truth. I think after lessons
10 learned, they did change—well, I went into the Army Reserve years later and they had
11 changed their whole way they looked at military policeman after that, after the Vietnam
12 era.

13 JS: Okay, all right. Because you would probably have some interaction, I'm sure
14 with the Vietnamese, did they teach you anything like Vietnamese culture or language?
15 Anything like that?

16 JD: No, no. A lot of the military policeman were still going over to Germany yet.
17 They used them all to guard all the nuke sites and stuff too, which was a waste of the
18 military policeman. They put them in a tower for twelve-hour shifts, watching nukes,
19 doing nothing else. It was such a waste of resources when you think of it. They were
20 basically training you to be a policeman in the Army anywhere.

21 JS: Okay. So, at that point, you still weren't sure if you would be going to
22 Vietnam or not?

23 JD: No, I was not.

24 JS: Okay, all right. Overall, as far as the MP school training is concerned, how
25 would you rate it as far as getting you ready for what you would be doing?

26 JD: It was pretty good, but you really needed a lot of OJT (On the Job Training)
27 after that. Especially interacting with people because you're always the bad guy. You
28 know, getting out there they would have you doing traffic directions and stuff like that.
29 Until you really got into it, I think you really had to have a lot of training on-site after you
30 got out of the school.

1 JS: All right. Well, any memorable moments or humorous moments, anything like
2 that from AIT?

3 JD: We had one guy that actually had an infantry MOS (Military Occupational
4 Specialty), but he had signed up for the military police and he finally got into Military
5 Police School after going through that. He could impersonate John Wayne to a T. He had
6 red hair, very likeable guy. I can't remember his name, but if you would have a question
7 in class or something, there would be a hundred of us in a class, he'd raise his hand and
8 he'd just speak to him like John Wayne. He would just crack them up all the time. At this
9 time, they'd let us go to the PX. They had where we could drink 3.2 beer also. I
10 remember that.

11 JS: Okay.

12 JD: We did have times where we could get out and actually be human beings. One
13 of the people that I worked at the print shop with, all of a sudden, I'm at PX number
14 nine—I remember PX number nine, and sure enough, there was somebody that I use to
15 work with, walks right by me. Sam Bianchi and he was a military policeman down there.
16 So it's a small world. It was okay. You know, I was ready for anything. I think they
17 would always use me, like as a Chicago kid—like if they needed something swiped from
18 some place to get, I'd always be the one that would swipe something.

19 JS: Right. (Chuckles) All right. Let's see. At that point, did you receive the
20 assignment to Vietnam?

21 JD: No. I actually received assignment to 63rd Military Police Platoon in Bayonne,
22 New Jersey. That was a Military Ocean Terminal. Things were going back and forth, and
23 we would do our police duties there as well as port security. I was there until almost—I
24 graduated military police school the 19th of April, four days after my 19th birthday. Then,
25 we took a train up through Washington D.C. and to Bayonne, New Jersey, which is
26 basically New York City. I looked out my little barrack's window and I would see the
27 Statue of Liberty. We had a little platoon there, the 63rd Military Police in MOTBY,
28 Military Ocean Terminal in Bayonne. We would do gate-guard duty. We would watch
29 the POVs (Privately Owned Vehicle) coming in. We'd do warehouse security. Things
30 were coming and going all the time. We'd do the strangest duty. We'd have three days

1 on-days, three days on the second shift, three days on the third shift, and three days off. It
2 was really hard to get used to a shift like that, pretty ridiculous.

3 JS: Sure, right.

4 JD: I still have one of my friends. He lives out here near me and we're still good
5 friends. He was stationed there with me as well. Every month or so, we'd find a body
6 floating in the harbor there and we'd have to retrieve it. "Floaters" we'd call them. It was
7 our job to pick them out of there and get them in the ambulance. It was okay duty.

8 JS: All right. When you would have your days off, did you get a chance to go into
9 the city?

10 JD: Yeah, all the time. But making eighty-nine dollars a month, your money did
11 not go far. I actually had a cousin that lived there. We'd go into the city all the time. It
12 was interesting, New York City. I'm from Chicago, but I felt like the farm boy from
13 Chicago. New York has always made an impression on me after that.

14 JS: Right, right. How long were you in this position?

15 JD: I volunteered for Vietnam duty after that. Like I say, I always had an inkling
16 to volunteer. I volunteered for Vietnam—I still got the paperwork somewhere, shortly
17 after a friend of mine was killed. One of my high school friends I mentioned was killed in
18 Vietnam. I decided, "Well, I need to do something more." And I volunteered for
19 Vietnam.

20 JS: Do you think you probably would have eventually been sent there anyway?

21 JD: No, not really. My one buddy wasn't. In fact, I asked him, "You want to go
22 with me?" He said, "What are you, nuts?" I tried to go into Airborne school too at that
23 time, and they wouldn't let me go Airborne after that, which is a shame. One of my big
24 regrets is that I never went Airborne.

25 JS: All right. Once you volunteered, how long did it take at that point before you
26 were actually assigned to Vietnam?

27 JD: Well, it took a while because first of all, they couldn't block the paperwork. It
28 was one thing—if you did that, even though your unit didn't want to lose you and stuff
29 and would have loved to block it, they couldn't block it. I'm going to say I went to RVN
30 (Republic of Vietnam) training at Fort Dix, probably August I'm going to say. There was

1 like a one or two week course. Then, I got another leave in October. I went out over in
2 October to Vietnam.

3 JS: Okay, all right. What was the curriculum there at the RVN training?

4 JD: Showing you what booby-traps were about. I think also firing the M16 again,
5 qualifying again. I remember booby-traps, things like that. You're going over there and
6 just getting you sort of ready.

7 JS: Any language or cultural training there?

8 JD: There might have been a booklet they handed out. But no, they didn't do a lot
9 of cultural training. At somewhere along the line, they did tell us don't pet them on the
10 head and stuff. I think that was once we got there.

11 JS: Okay. So did you have a little bit of a leave there before actually going over to
12 Vietnam?

13 JD: Yeah, I did. I came back home.

14 JS: All right. How long was that? Thirty days?

15 JD: No, no. I think it was two weeks. I had already taken some time off because
16 my friend's parents had requested me for his funeral. So I had to come home for that too.
17 That was in June. He was only in Vietnam, I think, twelve days before he got killed.

18 JS: Oh, wow. What was your family's reaction to you going to Vietnam?

19 JD: I think they were guarded about it. I don't think they said too much. I didn't
20 tell them I volunteered naturally. "Well, that's the way it's going to be. You'll be okay." I
21 just reassured them. I said, "Nothing will happen to me." You know, I just kept telling
22 them that I got an easy job, things of that nature. In fact, I think—yeah, I've got my
23 volunteer form here right in front of me. Request for overseas assignment. Does it have a
24 date? The day was 12th of June 1969.

25 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about the actual trip over and what that was
26 like? Did you fly civilian airline?

27 JD: Yeah, we flew Tiger Airlines. I remember a layover in Hawaii. First of all, it
28 was amazing. I flew out of Chicago, I think on a Sunday night, and I went to Oakland
29 Military Ocean Terminal. I didn't bring much stuff with me because I knew they were
30 just going to take it and give me new stuff anyway. I went through that terminal so
31 quickly I couldn't believe it. They gave me uniforms, everything else. I'm going to say I

1 got there maybe at ten o'clock at night. I bet you four o'clock in the morning I was on the
2 plane.

3 JS: Oh, wow.

4 JD: Yeah.

5 JS: Right. Okay. As far as the plane ride over is concerned, what was the mood
6 like on there? Were people talking about what to expect or was it pretty quiet?

7 JD: It was pretty quiet. I think I was sitting next to some Signal Corps officer. I
8 think we were all a little apprehensive. I think it was really quiet, if I remember right. We
9 did have one more layover. We had a layover in Hawaii really quick that was an hour or
10 so. We walked around the airport; they opened the doors. Then we landed probably at
11 Clark in the Philippines. They opened up the door and that was my first taste of the
12 tropics.

13 JS: The heat.

14 JD: Oh, yeah. It was like, "Oh, my God." I remember that distinctly. Besides that,
15 it was just a real long tiresome trip.

16 JS: Sure. How long were you there at Clark before moving on?

17 JD: An hour or two.

18 JS: Oh, just an hour or two, okay.

19 JD: Yeah, because I think we refueled and that was it. I don't even know if we got
20 much off of the plane. I don't even know if we got off the plane at all.

21 JS: All right. Where did you come into country?

22 JD: Uh, Long Binh.

23 JS: Long Binh? Okay.

24 JD: I remember seeing a lot of 82nd Airborne people around there. I remember
25 going on the bus and they had the screens on the bus to keep the grenades out and stuff.
26 You could smell the rice paddies and the heat. It was making an impression already.

27 JS: Right, right. What was in-processing like?

28 JD: I just remember—I think they had to mess with you, you know, and fill some
29 sandbags or something. You're sweating and that was quick too. I would think that I
30 might have even been on a plane—I don't even know if I spent the night. I can't quite

1 remember because I've had so many of these little adventures like this in my life. I just
2 remember I was quickly sent up north.

3 JS: Okay. At that point, you received your assignment to—

4 JD: To the Americal, yes.

5 JS: Americal, okay. It was the 23rd MP (Military Police) Company?

6 JD: Right.

7 JS: Okay, all right. Did you receive any further training in-country?

8 JD: Right. They had the combat school at Chu Lai, which was the division
9 headquarters. I think it was a week or two weeks, I'm not sure. They were showing you
10 what sappers could do. That made an impression—how they could contort their bodies.
11 They had a couple of Chieu Hois and they would show you how they could contort
12 themselves going through barbed wire, and diffuse flares, and things like that. You'd go,
13 "Whoa." And again, to the rifle range. They didn't have you zero-in your weapons, which
14 I found rather—now, after years that I've spent in the military that they didn't have you
15 zero-in your weapons. "Here's your weapon. Just go to a range and fire." The range that
16 they took us to was at LZ (Landing Zone) Bayonet, which is where I would be assigned
17 with the 198th Light Infantry.

18 JS: Okay, all right. What was the location of LZ Bayonet? Was it close to Chu
19 Lai?

20 JD: Very close to Chu Lai. It was at the southern southeast tip of Chu Lai. It
21 almost bordered on Chu Lai, but it was on the other side of QL 1, Highway 1.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JD: It really was like, I would say, probably guarded the southwest approach to
24 Chu Lai.

25 JS: Okay. All right. Could you give a little description of the base itself there?

26 JD: It was just a dustbowl mud-hole. It was pretty big when I look at pictures of it
27 now. It was actually bigger than you would think. I remember vividly the northern part of
28 the LZ was the 1st of the 6th was there. At the southern part was the 1st of the 52nd, you
29 know, infantry was there. I was towards some hills that were on the west edge of LZ
30 Bayonet. This was the grace of living at LZ Bayonet, there was some real tall like hill-
31 mountain that was the western-most part of LZ Bayonet. This kept them from throwing in

1 rockets on you. They could hit Chu Lai over us with rockets easily. They would get quite
2 a number of 122 rockets at them, but they couldn't really get the trajectory from the
3 rocket-pocket, which was just west of us. They couldn't get rockets into LZ Bayonet
4 because of this hill-mountain, which we had OPs (Observation Post) up there and things
5 of that nature. So we would get mortars every so often. It would come when you didn't
6 expect it. It was a big enough base. Unless they had a major attack, which one night they
7 did, and they actually overran that line up there.

8 JS: Oh wow.

9 JD: Mortars were sporadic. You know, one night they'd drop a few in and other
10 nights they went when you didn't expect it.

11 JS: Right, all right. How about things like your quarters and things there at LZ
12 Bayonet?

13 JD: At some places they would have bunkers. Because we didn't have the rocket
14 problem, they had hooches with sandbags that went halfway up them, and also fifty-
15 gallon drums filled with sand all around there. Then we had bunkers, naturally all over
16 the place. We didn't have to have a bunker underground to live like that because there
17 wasn't that much of a rocket problem. You know, there was rats running all over the
18 place and things like that. It kept the rain off of you. I was fortunate that I'd be out there
19 all day on patrol and stuff. Most of the times I had a place to come back in. I could take
20 off all my wet stuff, which is a lot better than the poor infantry did.

21 JS: Right, all right. Well, could you talk a little bit about your first impressions of
22 the unit of the 23rd MP Company? You don't have to go into specific names if you don't
23 want to. If you could talk a little bit about some of the personalities you ran into as well?

24 JD: What was funny about the 23rd Military Police Company is—this still sticks
25 today at our reunions—you had the mother company that was up at Chu Lai and then you
26 had platoons that were assigned to each of three infantry brigades.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JD: In my case, I was the 3rd Platoon, which was attached to the 198th Infantry.
29 Then we had the 1st Platoon, which was with the 11th Brigade and then we had the 2nd
30 Platoon, which was with the 196th Brigade at different LZs. There was a lot of animosity
31 towards the mother company. (Chuckles) They didn't really care for us, and we didn't

1 really care for them too much. It was sort of strange because you're all military
2 policeman but staying at LZ Bayonet, we wouldn't—am I getting away from the whole
3 question here?

4 JS: No, you're not. Not at all.

5 JD: We went and shined our boots, and we'd wear helmets, and stuff like that.
6 Whereas the MPs at Chu Lai had hooch-maids and they would have spit-shined boots,
7 they would wear helmet liners. They were like more in the garrison. We would be all the
8 time on the road or with the infantry. The MPs were basically doing police duty in Chu
9 Lai. It was a different culture within the company itself. So we were closer to the
10 infantrymen and we got that way. That was like the mindset of the 3rd Platoon there at LZ
11 Bayonet. We looked at ourselves as military policemen, but we felt more like attune to
12 the 198th Infantry Brigade.

13 JS: Okay, all right. When you first came into country and joined the unit there,
14 how were you received? Was there any of the "new-guy" treatment? Were you welcomed
15 pretty immediately?

16 JD: I think we were welcomed pretty immediately because there had been such a
17 turnover of personnel. I think a whole bunch of us came in new at the same time or
18 within a month. I think there was a huge turnover in my platoon. We were basically—
19 except for a couple of older guys like Ed Costello, who is acquainted somewhat with me
20 now. I think he's angry at everybody now. You know how Vietnam vets get. Ed was
21 really the guy to look for guidance. He was a sergeant, and he really knew the ropes. He
22 took everybody out on patrol and taught you pretty well. You needed to get that
23 roughness. You had to know where to go and how not to get into trouble because it was
24 dangerous on that road. It was good that we had the older guys that were there. Treated us
25 pretty good, the couple that were left. They really did show us the ropes.

26 JS: Okay, all right. Could you talk a little bit about—I guess just some of the
27 things that they taught you to do and to look out for?

28 JD: Well basically, not to go out to this road. I think we had about ninety
29 kilometers that we would patrol of QL1. You know, "Don't go down here because it's
30 really bad. You could get killed down here because there is Viet Cong down here."
31 You'd find out where all the whore houses were and stuff where guys would be held up.

1 Where you'd have to rouse people out and about off-limits. Just speed limits and things
2 like that for accidents. We had a lot of accidents. So many different things could happen
3 on that road. It was incredible and it was just you and another MP. You could be thirty
4 kilometers away from the nearest patrol. All you had was this radio that sometimes
5 worked.

6 JS: Right.

7 JD: It was sort of preparing you for stuff like that. We would do everything from
8 giving out traffic citations, to mop up scenes, to mine explosions. We didn't do convoy
9 duty too much though, which the other platoons did more of. Our platoon didn't do too
10 much convoy duty, but we would do everything else that you can imagine—anything that
11 could happen. You'd get some rifle-fire every once in a while. You'd get some wayward
12 Viet Cong that would take a couple pot-shots at you. If he was a sniper, he would hit you.
13 It would be stuff like that. Every day was a new adventure.

14 JS: All right. Before we get more into your actual duties, a few more questions
15 about the unit at this time. At this point in the war—how was morale at that point among
16 the guys in the unit?

17 JD: That's a great question. It was starting to get low because the war—it wasn't
18 the height of war. Here it is, it's late 1969, 1970, and I think just like every place else,
19 people were disillusioned. They just wanted the thing to end. I think you were seeing
20 morale really take a nose-dive at that time.

21 JS: Okay, all right.

22 JD: Yeah.

23 JS: How did people get along? Were there any problems among the guys in the
24 unit? Any racial tension?

25 JD: Yeah, there was a lot of racial tension all over the place. It was really getting
26 horrible about that time, especially in the rear-areas. I had Black friends and White
27 friends. There was starting to be a separation between everybody at that point. You were
28 almost being forced to take sides in a lot of ways. I started trying to avoid that. There was
29 going to be a real lot of racial tension.

30 JS: All right. How about other things like alcohol problems or drug problems?

31 JD: Oh, yeah. It was getting widespread. It got worse as the year went on.

1 JS: All right, okay. I guess if we could get into a little bit more specifics about
2 your duties now. Patrolling Highway 1, how far would you go?

3 JD: Well, we had three patrols. One patrol would go north, LZ Bayonet being in
4 the middle of the area. One patrol would go north, one would go south, and then one
5 would cover both.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JD: So you only had the three patrols. The Chu Lai MPs would go as far as An
8 Tan, just outside the gates of Chu Lai. So basically, that was our entire area
9 responsibility.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JD: You could be spread really thin. You would just go up and down this road.
12 After a while, you knew every nook and cranny. Sometimes, you'd go out to the side
13 where you felt somewhat safe. You'd have to watch out for mines and be just aware of
14 your surroundings, so you didn't get in trouble. Anything that would happen was your
15 responsibility, be it an accident or—we'd have to call in dust-offs and stuff. Give traffic
16 tickets believe it or not. There were so many accidents, people running over people on
17 that—you didn't want to have that. You just had to handle a lot of different situations,
18 constantly. There was never a dull moment.

19 JS: Did you guys have jurisdiction over the Americans and the Vietnamese?

20 JD: No, but a lot of times we would have a Quan Canh, you know a QC (Quan
21 Canh) military policeman, or we would have a white mouse with us or a National Police
22 Field Force. We would have one of those in one of our patrols so we could have
23 jurisdiction over just about everybody.

24 JS: Okay. What were your impressions of the QCs?

25 JD: We had this one QC, Hao. He was just wonderful. Hao, Hao was his name.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JD: He was very stract and just a good kid. He didn't speak English, but you
28 could count on him. In fact, the national policeman we had too, Hue. You could count on
29 him too. They wouldn't be afraid to draw their M-16s and back you up. So we had a
30 couple of good ones and then we had a couple that were rather strange. Like Binh was
31 another one. He was from the village of Nuoc Mao, which was by LZ Gator—which was

1 south of Bayonet. I remember him—I know he was very corrupt, but he was a National
2 Police Field Force, which was different than the regular police.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JD: Paramilitary he was. He had me in there and I was talking to his brother-in-
5 law who was a—what do they call it? They had the black pajamas but supposedly they
6 were on our side.

7 JS: Like the—

8 JD: PF (Popular Forces).

9 JS: PFs, okay.

10 JD: He spoke perfect English as a PF. He wanted me to get him a flack-jacket.
11 “La-da-da. Yeah, right. Sure, okay.” I guess a couple weeks later, he was killed. He was a
12 Viet Cong. I found that really strange, especially with his command of English. This guy
13 had an unusual command of English. He was Binh’s brother-in-law, so who knows where
14 Binh was coming from. You just never knew.

15 JS: Right, right. For the guys that couldn’t speak English, how would you
16 communicate with them?

17 JD: You’d find ways to communicate. You’d just tell them sign-language. You
18 know, you’d patrol with these guys all the time and you’d know when something was up.
19 I know there was a couple cases, not with me but with another friend of mine, Mike
20 Casey. He learned Vietnamese almost when he was over there. He was very close to Hue.
21 They still communicate, I think. I think Hue helped Casey in a couple of jams one time
22 where Hue had his M-16 out covering him, you know.

23 JS: Mm-hmm, right.

24 JD: They were pretty good guys. Both of them are.

25 JS: All right. You mentioned things like traffic accidents and things like that.
26 How often would you see these accidents?

27 JD: Oh, I’m going to say it could be once a week, a couple times a week. It could
28 be a couple times a day. There was one case, I remember my—not LZ Ross but—oh, LZ
29 Dottie. There was an accident where a five-ton truck—this was later in my career—five-
30 ton truck, GI (Government Issue) truck, had rammed into an ARVN (Army of the
31 Republic of Vietnam) deuce and a half. There was one body in the back. One of the

1 boards from the side of the deuce and a half had snapped and gone right through the heart
2 of this ARVN. He was deader than a doornail. The ARVNs were naturally blaming the
3 GI that drove this five-ton. There was almost gunfights over this stuff. So I get there, and
4 I didn't have a radio because the Chu Lai MPs I think had stolen it. We got a situation
5 here where it's got to be diffused otherwise somebody's going to get killed. It's getting
6 close to night, and I sent my partner back up north to try to get a wrecker, so we could get
7 this truck out of there before it got dark. Once it got dark, you had to be in the LZ or you
8 would get killed because Viet Cong just took over everything at night.

9 JS: Right.

10 JD: He went up north. I'm trying to diffuse this situation. The ARVNs are just all
11 pissed off. They want to just kill this GI. I find out that this GI was from Chicago and
12 actually knew people I knew. We finally got a tow-truck in there, got this thing back, I
13 diffused the situation, and then the sergeant that was in charge of me was just reaming me
14 out. Like, I don't know what I was supposed to do. Basically, I was a squad leader and
15 then they demoted from being a squad leader. I don't know. I thought I had done the right
16 thing and somehow, I don't know what I should have done.

17 JS: Right.

18 JD: But I remember, you'd come in situations like that. I still remember that poor
19 Vietnamese soldier. Just a board right through his heart, deader than a doornail. You'd
20 see things like that all the time. You'd see these little Lambrettas or whatever, they'd hit a
21 truck and then you'd just see bodies all over the place. People drove like crazy.

22 JS: Right, all right. If there was an accident, say between American forces and
23 Vietnamese civilians, how would that be handled?

24 JD: Well, we'd try to get a national policeman in there. Well, if we didn't—but
25 naturally the first thing in my mind was to try to secure the area and just try to keep
26 tempers down because everybody had a gun.

27 JS: Right.

28 JD: So you had to play it by ear. Basically, you just wanted to protect the GIs
29 first, okay.

30 JS: Right.

1 JD: You wanted to be fair too. You wanted to take care of the injured. If there's
2 any injured, you'd try to get a dust-off in there. You'd have to see if the area is secure or
3 else try to take care of injuries first, and then just protect against this volatile situation
4 that could always explode. At the end, they were taking hostages and everything else, the
5 ARVNs. We were having negotiations. You know, people were pulling pins on hand
6 grenades.

7 JS: Oh, wow.

8 JD: Oh, yeah. It'd get ugly.

9 JS: Mm-hmm. I know you talked about your impressions of the QCs but how
10 about of the ARVN and your interaction with them? What did you think of them?

11 JD: I didn't think much of the ARVNs for the most case. I had a couple ARVN
12 friends. There was Sergeant Key that was an interpreter that worked with us. He was a
13 good guy, but he was just happy not to be in the field and have a job at LZ Bayonet. I
14 thought the ARVNs, for the most part, were pretty worthless. They just wanted to live.
15 They were drafted and it's just like they were just caught in between everything. I think a
16 lot of the GIs had a distrustful taste for most of them. I've heard that the rangers were
17 pretty good and things like that. I flew door-gunner too after a while and we'd go out in
18 the field and be picking up ARVNs. They were just so demoralized from so many years
19 of war. It's just like they're placed out there. I can see where most of them didn't have
20 much feeling one way or another.

21 JS: All right. You mentioned cases of tension between the ARVN and Americans
22 during an accident—as a result of an accident. Was that a normal thing that you would
23 see? Would there be a lot of tension between the Americans and the ARVN?

24 JD: Yeah. In fact, there was one case when I think about it—some of this was
25 perpetrated by the Americans, don't get me wrong. I remember one time an ARVN came
26 into our PMO (Provost Marshall Office), which was our little police station at LZ
27 Bayonet, and he's all wet. He's just absolutely chanting around. He is just absolutely
28 pissed to the tenth degree. I guess he was on his motorbike, going by like some track
29 from H-group to the 17th Cav, which was part of our home unit there. Our armor that was
30 out with the 198th and somebody on the track got up and pissed on him. So you'd see
31 something like that. The Americans weren't the greatest to the ARVNs either, you know.

1 JS: Mm-hmm, all right. How about other incidents on the road such as—you
2 talked a little bit about the VC shooting at people. What about mines and things? Would
3 they ever put mines on the road?

4 JD: Yeah. They would put mines on the road. QL1 was paved, the route we had
5 there. You'd go out of our AO (Area of Operation) and get unpaved, but it was paved. I
6 will never forget, I'm going to say February or March, I got a call that there was a mine
7 explosion at this one coordinate on QL1. So we rush there and it was a grader from the 9th
8 Engineers for the Marines. We had Marines make a living in our AO too. This grader
9 was—it wasn't grading or anything but was just going down the road on this paved road.
10 It had actually—a mine went off right under this guy's seat on this grader. He was just
11 driving from point A to point B. So somebody had command-detonated this thing. They
12 had dug this thing underneath the asphalt

13 JS: Oh, wow.

14 JD: Okay? And had put it right under his seat. Believe it or not, that seat was bent,
15 this guy was fine. He didn't have a scratch on him.

16 JS: Wow.

17 JD: Yeah, that's the truth.

18 JS: Right.

19 JD: So naturally, the first inclination I had is, they had to dig underneath this road
20 here. I went to the edge of the road, this and that, but I knew enough that you don't go off
21 of that road because now—that's the perfect plan. They're going to have another mine
22 there for you to step on. We couldn't find no wires. We couldn't find nothing. I didn't
23 venture too far because I was almost as sure that they probably had another booby-trap
24 there just waiting for somebody to go off the road. Another case is LZ Arty Hill, which
25 was just off the road. A lot of these LZs, you could take a road up at QL1 and get to
26 them. You could see them from the road. Another time, they'd do a mine-sweep in the
27 morning. A deuce and a half was going down this road from Arty Hill and it blew up. We
28 figured that they had packed C-4 in glass and put it in there. There had just been a mine-
29 sweep. They were always doing little tricks. You had to be worried about stuff like that.

30 JS: Right, right. How about things like ambushes on the road? Was that ever—

31 JD: We would get some fire every so often.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JD: A lot of times you'd just have a bullet whiz over you. A couple of times, there
3 would be like AK rounds hitting in front of you on the road. I think it would be just—
4 they weren't ambushing you in that area. I mean, if we went a little bit north and south of
5 our AO, I think the probability would have been higher. Not that we were in a secure
6 area, but I don't think they were setting up their missions to do something like that. They
7 were just waiting for nightfall, and they'd come and go as they want. We'd get some rifle
8 fire and that, but not as much as you would think. How easy would that be, you know.

9 JS: Right.

10 JD: We were always aware it could happen, but thankfully, it never did.

11 JS: All right. Would the sides of the roads—would the brush and the bushes be
12 cleared away?

13 JD: Yes, and no. In some areas, yes, and in some areas, no.

14 JS: Okay, all right. The patrols you guys would make, only during the daytime?

15 JD: Yes, yes. Sometimes we would actually take a chance and go—even though
16 Chu Lai was right across the street from us, we would go at night sometimes down QL1
17 into the front gate, which was about a mile or two miles. Sometimes at night from LZ
18 Bayonet, especially if we had something happen, if we had to rush somebody to the
19 hospital or something. But we would actually get to fire sometimes from—they used to
20 call it the quarry. They were doing some quarry work and we'd actually take fire from
21 there sometimes. You had to be careful. At nighttime, it really was owned by the Viet
22 Cong.

23 JD: Okay, all right.

24 JS: They were hard core Viet Cong. I don't think we had a lot of secondary Viet
25 Cong around there. I think there were pretty well-organized units in the I Corps area
26 where I was at.

27 JS: Okay. How about other aspects of your duty? I know you mentioned basically
28 rounding up guys in the whore houses and things like that. Could you talk a little bit more
29 about that?

1 JD: Oh, sure. My platoon, unlike the Chu Lai MPs, we would take it easy on these
2 guys. We didn't really care that much, you know. If there was a case where you'd see like
3 a convoy parked in front of a whore house, you know, with ammunition on it.

4 JS: Right.

5 JD: Well, you'd go in there, "Come on guys." Most times we would really turn a
6 blind eye to all of this stuff. We knew how the grunts had it so bad as it is. Most of us felt
7 sort of bad for these guys. They had a rough tour over there. We weren't going to go out
8 of our way to make it hard on them. There was cases though where we had off-limits,
9 especially racial things where guys weren't coming out. There was a situation where I
10 almost had to kill another GI and we had to arrest them all. It was far and few between.

11 JS: Right. As in one bar belongs to one group and another bar belongs to another
12 group, and you don't go into that bar?

13 JD: There were no bars basically.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JD: There was no place that we were afraid to go. Nothing like that, no. That was
16 our role. We really felt we owned it, our little platoon.

17 JS: Okay, all right. How about other things? Did you ever go off of the road into
18 any villages or anything like that?

19 JD: Yes, yeah. Quite a few times.

20 JS: Okay. What would you be doing when you would do that?

21 JD: Sort of like snooping around just because you got to feel for this whole area
22 because you've been doing almost a year up and on. I'd be going up and down the road
23 and you knew everything. Sometimes, you felt that this might be pretty safe. We'd go
24 maybe a click back on the side very cautiously. I mean, very cautiously. One time, we
25 actually came upon somebody that must have just gotten away, taking a 500-pound bomb
26 or something. We must have came upon them and they just scattered. You never knew. I
27 didn't make a big habit of it. But yeah, we would go off the road every so often.

28 JS: Okay, all right. When you would go off the road and other times when you
29 would come in contact with the local civilian population, what was your impression of
30 them?

1 JD: I've got a lot of respect for the Vietnamese. I mean, they're a hard-working
2 people. They're just trying to make a living. They work hard. I wouldn't have much of an
3 impression to tell you the truth. I think being wary of everything—I was really wary of
4 everything that I noticed over there. As a policeman, you're taught to really observe, so
5 you're just watching your back all the time.

6 JS: Okay, all right. Other duties during this time? Before getting into things like
7 whenever you volunteered to be a door-gunner, were there other duties we haven't
8 covered?

9 JD: We had a little POW (Prisoner of War) cage at LZ bayonet.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JD: That was really interesting. I had been on the road for a while and that was
12 really a nice break. Some guys were there permanently from my platoon. I think I was
13 working like six to six in the morning or something. We had a Monopoly game, and we'd
14 play Monopoly. The prisoners for the most part, except when we'd get some hard cores
15 in there, they'd only stay a day or two before they sent them to Chu Lai and interrogate
16 them there. It was nice duty. We'd play Monopoly and most of the prisoners were pretty
17 damn happy that they were out of the war. It wasn't bad.

18 JS: Uh-huh. How many prisoners would you have at a time?

19 JD: Just a few. Sometimes women, sometimes men. Usually, we'd get them off
20 the helicopter and the first thing you'd do is you'd just give them a good whack and then
21 turn them over to military intelligence. They'd just spill their guts because they're scared
22 to death. You want to get the intelligence and after that, give them a cigarette. The war is
23 over for you but try to get them to talk as quickly as you could.

24 JS: Mm-hmm. What were your impressions of them?

25 JD: Uh, some tough little characters. Especially most of them were NVA (North
26 Vietnamese Army). I remember one kid after exactly like a day, we gave him a whack off
27 the plane and he "blah, blah, blah." After that, we gave him his cigarette and he's just
28 relieved. He's showing me a wound he had and boy, half his hip must have been—was a
29 scar because he had been wounded already. You know, throw him a couple cigarettes and
30 some C-rations. I just knew they were tough little boogers. Real tough.

31 JS: All right. Could any of them speak any English at all?

1 JD: No, I don't ever remember any of them speaking English.

2 JS: Okay, all right. Let's see. Tell me how you ended up being a door-gunner,
3 how all that came about.

4 JD: I guess I'm sort of personal and I met some pilots somehow, if I remember.
5 They happen to be part of the headquarters unit for the 198th. They had their choppers
6 naturally over at Chu Lai because you couldn't keep choppers. It was a little too
7 dangerous to keep choppers overnight at Bayonet. I think all of a sudden one of them
8 says, "Well, you want to go flying?" "Okay." A lot of times we could use a door-gunner,
9 this and that. My shifts would change sometimes, I'd just be on a nightshift. Sometimes,
10 you could catch up on a nap, and this and that. Then, I'd go flying with these guys all
11 day. Finally, they gave me my own M-60 that I kept in the hooch. They'd come right to
12 the pad, and I would just fly with them. I got quite a few hours. It was a Loach. It wasn't
13 a Huey; it was the Loach. They were a headquarters and headquarters company they were
14 attached to. Their nickname was "Slow-Mo". It was really interesting because when I
15 went into the Air Force Reserve, all of a sudden, I see these Air Force people walking
16 around with air medals and I didn't have nothing. I was a little aggravated. I'd go to one
17 guy, I said, "Where'd you get that?" He goes, "I think I got in Panama or somewhere."
18 Are you kidding me? So anyway, I had been looking for these guys trying to feel for it
19 and I'm in an elevator at an Americal reunion. I know I'm getting a little away from this,
20 but—

21 JS: Sure.

22 JD: We're in an elevator, my wife and I, and I see this guy headquarters and
23 headquarters 198th. I go, "You know what (unintelligible)? I was with the same unit. We
24 were sort of attached on. I look at him and it was one of the pilots I used to fly with.

25 JS: Really? Wow.

26 JD: He remembered me, and we became friends. He passed away a while ago.
27 There was only like three pilots, three or four pilots, and we became friends. I used to fly
28 door-gunner for him.

29 JS: Wow. You would do this on days off then?

30 JD: We never had a day off, but I would do it when I was working, like, nights.
31 So I would catch a couple hours of sleep and then I would go up all day and fly missions.

1 My CO (Commanding Officer) never knew, Ralph Stiles. I told him later. I've seen him
2 at reunions, still not too happy about it. I would fly. I'd be all over the place with these
3 guys. Basically, you'd sit on the edge of the Loach because there's no room to sit. You'd
4 have an M-60 from a wire hanging from the top and sometimes we'd have a chicken-
5 plate that you would sit on and then you'd have a metal plate that you put over you. I'd
6 have the helmet, I'd be talking to the pilot, and I'd help them fuel-up. I'd fly all day with
7 them. Then, I'd come back to the LZ. They'd drop me off at the LZ and then go to work
8 that night. I never had a day off that entire year, except for R&R (Rest and Recuperation)
9 and once I was sick a little bit.

10 JS: All right. Would you have the same schedule every day? How was your daily
11 routine? How was that structured?

12 JD: I'm going to say most of the time I was on patrol. Then, I was at the POW
13 cage for a while. Sometimes, they would put you on the night shift because you had to
14 have police presence there on LZ Bayonet. You wouldn't patrol at night naturally. So we
15 would do basically like a bunker-guard. You'd have a jeep there. Our bunker at the front
16 gate is the one we would man, so you'd have an M-60 set up there and two or three man
17 that all night. We'd always sleep on top of the bunker because you know never sleep
18 inside in case a (unintelligible) charge. Then, I think we had that sergeant all night. There
19 was not much for a call for MPs that night, but you still had to have a presence. When I
20 would do that, that's when I would do my shenanigans during the day.

21 JS: All right. Any particularly—any memorable missions as a door-gunner?

22 JD: Basically, a couple of times I remember we were going through some valleys
23 and that Don Bowers would be saying that—that's the one that passed away, he'd say,
24 "There was a .50 caliber here yesterday. A .51 caliber, so try to keep your eyes sharp"
25 and this and that. We'd pick up a lot of wounded and stuff because there wouldn't be a
26 dust-off and you would be in the area. So basically, they were having us do any mission
27 that came handy. You know, you'd take observers up. A lot of dust-offs and things like
28 that. Sometimes you'd take some fire, but I was always lucky. Another friend of mine
29 took my spot one time and he almost got shot down, John Crowley, another MP buddy of
30 mine. We'd thought he did get shot down. I was just lucky every time I flew that I didn't

1 see a lot of heavy action. One of the pilots did get killed out of the three that I flew with,
2 Ralph Bigelow, in May. So just luck of the draw.

3 JS: Right, right.

4 JD: I don't remember anything but small arms and stuff. You know, let loose with
5 a couple bandoliers of the M-60 at some bushes and stuff.

6 JS: Right, right, all right. You mentioned other MPs doing this as well.

7 JD: My buddy John Crowley was about the only other one. Late in our career, we
8 also had some friends that worked for—they were MACV (Military Assistance
9 Command Vietnam). They were interpreters. They were PSYOPS (Psychological
10 Operations), and we'd go flying on a Huey at night. That would be my buddy John
11 Crowley and myself. We actually brought up one of our medic buddies one time. They
12 needed help. I'd be working nights and they needed help throwing all the pamphlets and
13 stuff at night. They had the loudspeakers on the choppers. So we'd fly for that for thrills.
14 They were shooting at you like crazy because they'd be so pissed off that you were flying
15 around theses NVA platoons with the Chieu Hoi tape going. Sometimes, we'd switch Led
16 Zeppelin in there for the Chieu Hoi tape. We'd be throwing pamphlets all over. I
17 remember one night I was throwing pamphlets out there and there was a skill set. You
18 had to open the box of pamphlets, the Chieu Hoi pamphlets, and then you'd have to sort
19 of half-fill-it-up and turn it upside down and kick it out. At first, I didn't know, and I just
20 tried to throw them out there. The inertia from the helicopter just blanketed the whole
21 helicopter with pamphlets. The pilots were all aggravated at me and stuff. That was a
22 little bit later. That was—I'm going to say, probably in the fall just before I went home. I
23 did several of those missions too. And again, my CO never knew any of us were missing.
24 Poor Ralph.

25 JS: All right.

26 JD: He gets pretty upset. We lost one of our MPs when I was over there, and
27 Ralph still has never gotten over it. When I see him at a reunion, this stuff about the door-
28 gunner, he gets so cherry-eyed and pissed-off at me even yet. It's the way it is.

29 JS: Right. How many of those PSYOP missions do you think you flew?

1 JD: I'm going to say five or six. One night actually, the helicopter went down.
2 Either we took a round, or we had some mechanical problems. That was over at Batangan
3 Peninsula by My Lai, around that area there.

4 JS: Right.

5 JD: I remember the pilots said, "We're going down." It's dark, it's the middle of
6 the night. All these PSYOPS missions were at night. I took off my helmet because he
7 started going over the South China Sea. I guess he felt it better that we crashed there than
8 on the peninsula there and get taken prisoner. God knows what the pilot—but that's what
9 he did. He actually maneuvered that Huey and we got just over the gate in Chu Lai and
10 landed.

11 JS: Oh, wow.

12 JD: So that was pretty scary.

13 JS: Would there be heavier concentrations of fire at night on those type of
14 missions than on the door-gunner missions?

15 JD: Yeah, because they were flying right over positions—known positions.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JD: They knew where the—they had a good idea where these heavy
18 concentrations of NVA and stuff were. They were there to harass them at night. They had
19 to fly low enough so they could hear them.

20 JS: Right.

21 JD: Then, they wanted to throw the pamphlets out. That's what we would do.
22 Yeah, you'd see just green little flashes coming. They never hit us or that I could tell. I
23 didn't hear anything. It'd be so noisy anyway. They were quite aggravated. (Laughs)

24 JS: (Laughs) Right. I know that the audio would have been in Vietnamese, but
25 was it basically just telling them to surrender, and they'll be treated well?

26 JD: I think so. I'm not sure and sometimes we would put the Led Zeppelin tape
27 on.

28 JS: Right. (Laughs) How long would those missions last?

29 JD: They'd be almost all night. We'd catch little catnaps on the floor and stuff.
30 You know, you're a kid then. I'd catch a little nap and then I'd just work all day. Nobody
31 would know.

1 JS: Right, right. As far as the door-gunner missions, how long would those
2 usually last?

3 JD: That was almost a full day, yeah.

4 JS: Okay, right.

5 JD: I'd just get back there in time for my duty. The only reason I know—I never
6 had a day off. I know that for a fact. I know I had to get to work somehow and make up
7 for this.

8 JS: Right. When you had a little bit of free time, aside from going on these types
9 of missions, what would you do? Would you write letters home, things like that?

10 JD: Yeah, just hang out with the guys, hang out with your friends. There wasn't
11 much bullshit. You'd work twelve-hour days and that was it. We had a movie on LZ
12 Bayonet. Actually, it got blown up one night. We had a little movie—I might give you
13 pictures at Texas Tech too. They tried to say GIs did it, but I can't ever see GIs blowing
14 up their own people there. Several people were hurt and there was a secondary explosion
15 that blew me off of my feet because I was trying to drag somebody out of there. I was
16 actually hanging around with a patrol. I wasn't on duty that night. I don't know. I was in
17 the MP jeep going from point A to point B on Bayonet. It was just a covered place that
18 had a movie screen and some logs. That got blown up one night too.

19 JS: Right, right. All right. If we could change gears a little bit here, switch gears.
20 Talk a little bit more about the, I guess about the enemy, about the North Vietnamese,
21 and the Viet Cong. I know you talked a little bit about your impressions of them, but
22 what do you remember your first contact with them?

23 JD: First contact with them probably would be seeing bodies on the side of the
24 road. There used to be a habit there if somebody got killed that night or something else,
25 they'd drag the Viet Cong body, or mostly NVA, to the side of the road and then there
26 were guys that would pick him up the next night, you know. So, you'd always see these
27 mangled bodies. That was every couple weeks. You'd see that and that's from the night-
28 action, the CAP (combined Action Patrols USMC) units. Who knows what would
29 happen? Prisoners of war, you know, I had contact with them. Besides that, I wouldn't
30 get much contact except they were on the other end trying to kill you somewhere. Send in
31 some mortars or something. Mostly bodies.

1 JS: Okay, all right. Any exchanges of fire there on QL1?

2 JD: Yeah, a couple of times. You know, you'd just shoot in some bushes. You'd
3 hear some rifle shooting some bushes. Another time on LZ Bayonet, we got hit several
4 times. There was one time that we were taking some fire from that ridge. Again, they had
5 gotten around that ridge or something. I had seen some rifle flashes—a couple of
6 magazines I popped in there until I didn't see any flashes anymore. There wasn't a real
7 lot of chance to shoot at anything. You'd get something shot at you, but you didn't know
8 where it came from.

9 JS: All right. Speaking of LZ Bayonet, I know you mentioned a little while ago
10 one night that at least part of it was—one area there was overrun.

11 JD: April 1st.

12 JS: April 1st. Could you talk about that night?

13 JD: Yeah. That was probably the heaviest concentration of firepower in combat
14 that I've seen.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JD: Went to bed, it was a normal night. I'm in my hooch and all of a sudden—we
17 had artillery going on at night, but boy you know something's coming in. I heard some
18 incoming, got up right away, ran out to the bunker, had my flack-jacket and my M-16 and
19 everything else. I think I remember I didn't have my glasses. I ran back in my hooch, got
20 my glasses on, I still was the first one out there. I don't know. I was running around
21 someplace else, and a mortar round went about five feet in front of me. It must have been
22 a 60 millimeter. It went in the sand and blew straight up, and I didn't get touched.

23 JS: Oh, wow.

24 JD: Yeah, just luck of the draw. Then, all of a sudden, my whole platoon were in
25 the bunkers around in fighting positions. You could see the ridge was burning. You could
26 see the NVA, Viet Cong, running up and down like they owned the place because there
27 was flames all over the place. You knew they had overrun it. Mortars are coming in.
28 From behind us, we heard that one of our platoon-mates, Rich Dell Arena, got killed. It
29 just was ugly. This was all night and then all of a sudden, the choppers came in. The
30 Cobras came in and they cleared things out. It just went on for hours. I guess they lost
31 several people up on that bunker-line too.

1 JS: Yes, sir. Were there any other incidents like this or was this the one time that
2 it got—

3 JD: No, that was the one time that the really overran the bunker. Another time I
4 told you I was exchanging fire with somebody. That was a couple months later. They
5 didn't overrun the bunker-line, but somehow, they got in-between the bunker-line and
6 us—a couple of them. They were shooting down at us. That's when you seen some rifle-
7 flashes. We'd start popping-off back at them. We got hit the mortars with sappers and
8 that, maybe three or four times during my stay there. Mortars we'd get every so often. I
9 think they were really scared to come near us with mortars unless they had a whole
10 coordinated attack. LZ Gator, which was south of us, that got overrun so many times and
11 hit so many times, they finally had to abandon it. We'd see the firework show there all
12 the time.

13 JS: Right. All right. Any other firefights or engagements of any kind that stand
14 out, that you could possibly talk about?

15 JD: Just a lot of little incidents. April 1st was the one that really sticks in my mind.
16 It was really a firework show. That was just like—I mean, all sorts of stuff was going on.
17 It was pretty intense. In fact, we even had a lot of the infantrymen that were there that say
18 they had never seen anything like it.

19 JS: Oh, wow. Right.

20 JD: In fact, one guy had just came to the MPs from the Infantry and he wasn't real
21 happy with this whole situation. (Laughs)

22 JS: Right. (Chuckles) All right. Well, other memorable or even funny moments?

23 JD: There was one funny moment—well, a couple. One was Mike Gaskins. I
24 remember one time a buddy of mine, they were taking fire from—I wasn't with, but they
25 were taking fire from this one area right across from Chu Lai—what were the calling it
26 before the—the Rock Quarry. I guess Mike is returning fire, this and that, and he's
27 yelling at everybody that he's hit, he's hit, he's hit. They get him back and one of his
28 shell-cases went down his shirt. We'd tease him about that. There was a lot of funny
29 times. Everybody used to lay into everybody all the time. We were a pretty close bunch at
30 our platoon. Some pretty good guys and some of them I've seen since. A lot of them,
31 they're gone now. They just passed away. I see my old commander every so often, who

1 poor Ralph, didn't know what was going on. Then, there was another time—I found out
2 they had pizzas at Chu Lai at the officer's club. We had one of these field phones at the
3 LZ Bayonet. You just used to dream about pizza. It was just incredible. I called up the
4 officer's club and I said, "This is Captain Stiles, the Provost Marshall for the 198th. I've
5 sent a military police chief up there to get like twenty pizzas." They were small pizzas.
6 "They're coming up there, so I'm giving them the money and make sure you give it to
7 them." "Yes, sir." Me and my buddies went up there and got all these pizzas. We'd do
8 that. Then, I guess there was another time that Ralph—we invited Ralph to a barbecue.
9 There was just a report about how somebody had broken into the mess-hall and stolen all
10 these steaks. We did it. (Laughs)

11 JS: (Laughs) Right.

12 JD: There was a whore house at LZ Dottie. It was incredible. The commander
13 allowed there. It was pretty neat all the time. People were always going there. There was
14 a place that you could go—you had to run a gauntlet, but you could go to Quang Ngai
15 and there was a MACV compound that you actually could get a hamburger.

16 JS: Oh, okay.

17 JD: Being military policeman, we sniffed out all this stuff. We knew all about
18 this. At the end too, my last month, there was a fragging at LZ Dottie. I remember that.
19 Somebody was doing a Ph.D. on something about Vietnam. He actually called me
20 because I was the first military policeman there. They had caught this guy—I found out
21 later though this guy. They had found who the perpetrator is. I had ETS (Expiration Term
22 of Service) by that time, but somebody had just thrown a hand-grenade in on this poor
23 captain and killed him. Like I said, we were in everything.

24 JS: Right, right. If something like that happened, would you guys then be
25 investigating it?

26 JD: No, we would call the CID (Criminal Investigation Command). We'd be the
27 police there until they called in the detectives. That's what they did in this case. I
28 remember a young second lieutenant was like—he was horrified. I was just so hardcore
29 by that time, I said, "Well, maybe he didn't treat his guys right." This lieutenant couldn't
30 believe I'm saying this. What are you going to say? That's how things were back then. It
31 was just getting brutal.

1 JS: Right, all right. From your perspective, at this time as you were getting close
2 to your end of your tour, could you get any perspective at all, or did you even think about
3 things like the larger perspective of how the war is going?

4 JD: No. I get so apolitical. I didn't think much about it. I really didn't. At that
5 point, especially towards the end of my tour, I just wanted to get home alive. In fact, the
6 night before I left, somebody almost shot me by accident.

7 JS: Oh wow.

8 JD: Another time I was—our duty used to be to, and this happened during the
9 summer, our duties would be to take—like if you've seen *Platoon*, take out the latrines
10 and burn all the poop. That was my job one night behind the PMO (Provost Marshall's
11 Office). It was a night patrol, so it's dark. You'd pour this diesel fuel on there, which
12 doesn't burn too hot. So I poured the diesel fuel in there, it's just about dawn. I throw a
13 match in there, and this kid that was no doubt a Viet Cong sympathizer, had switched the
14 diesel fuel for regular fuel. I almost blew myself up.

15 JS: Oh, goodness.

16 JD: That was a rude awakening. Got to be on your toes.

17 JS: Right, all right. Did you get a chance to go on R&R?

18 JD: Yeah. I actually finagled myself a leave. I got to Bangkok for R&R and then I
19 got a little few day leave, I got to Tokyo.

20 JS: All right. Just a few more questions about your tour before we begin talking
21 about going home. Did you guys ever participate in anything like civic-action programs,
22 working with the Vietnamese, helping the Vietnamese, anything like that?

23 JD: No, no. No, we didn't. No, we were just too busy doing our jobs. There were
24 so few of us.

25 JS: Sure, sure. How many guys would be on the LZ there?

26 JD: I'm going to say at LZ Bayonet, because you had basically at least a company
27 each from each battalion—I'm going to say we had maybe a thousand people there. We
28 had engineers there, everything else. A good thousand. The rest of the people were out in
29 the field, and they'd rotate these companies in and out.

30 JS: Right, right. Okay. Anything else from your tour before we talk about coming
31 home?

1 JD: It's hard to say. I should have probably given it more thought Jason, but just
2 thought I'd wing it. I can't really think right now, no. I told you quite a few things, I
3 think.

4 JS: Sure, all right. One other question I have for you, while you were over there,
5 did you hear much about what was going on back in the States with the war protests and
6 things like that?

7 JD: I remember Kent State happened when we were there and heard about that. I
8 still could not believe that these national guardsmen could screw up that bad. That was
9 my opinion. Why did you give these dumbasses live ammunition if they can't control
10 themselves? I was pretty horrified at that. My Lai was coming around then too. They
11 were talking about My Lai and actually investigations were going on when I was there. I
12 knew guys that were hardcore that thought nothing to throw a hand-grenade into a hooch
13 with babies crying and that. I was horrified to think of shooting civilians and stuff, even
14 back then. I couldn't comprehend that happening.

15 JS: Right, all right. I know you talked about the horror or whatever about what
16 happened at Kent State, but what did you think about the war protests themselves? Did
17 you give them much thought?

18 JD: You know, at this stage of my life, I can't really remember what I thought. I
19 don't know if I had any feelings about it back then, to tell you the truth. In context now,
20 naturally, I got feelings about it. What I felt then, I can't really tell you the truth.

21 JS: Hmm-mm. Well, if there's nothing else then, I guess we can move on to the
22 end of your tour and coming home. What was out-processing like?

23 JD: Out-processing was pretty interesting. I had just got back from Japan because
24 I went on leave there to Tokyo. I was late coming back because there was a typhoon. Our
25 plane just lost altitude like crazy, and we had to go to Cam Ranh Bay. Being a MP, I
26 knew right away to go to transportation officer and get something saying, "I can't get
27 back to Chu Lai." Then, I go yahoo. So I spent several days down there. I got back to
28 end-processing to Chu Lai through the company there and they said, "Well, you're going
29 home like tomorrow or something." I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to anybody. I
30 had to out-process in a real hurry and turn my weapons in, and stuff like that. Naturally,
31 in that, you make it happen. I was just going home. I was just ecstatic. I went back down

1 to Cam Ranh Bay and then I think, stayed overnight there or something, and got back to
2 Fort Lewis, Washington. My hair was too long. They gave me such a hard time. They
3 gave everybody a hard time, I remember. First of all, they took all the people coming
4 back that I think were E-5 and below, and they were trying to have us make up this
5 barracks and make beds, and stuff like that. So we did that. Everybody's getting a little
6 pissy. They take us to another barracks and try to do this again. Just screwing with you,
7 you know. Then, the next thing you know, we're putting all the bedding and stuff—we're
8 going to burn down the barracks. Everybody is just that pissed, okay. An E-7 comes up,
9 they threw a buffer down the stairs at him and finally he goes, "Wait guys, you're getting
10 out." They were just doing stuff like that. They made me get a haircut before I got out. I
11 remember that too. They weren't going to pay me. It was a fight to the end.

12 JS: Mm-hmm, all right. How about your reception when you came home? Run
13 into any problems in the airport?

14 JD: No, I can't ever say I had any protesters. I don't think I would have tolerated
15 it. I never had anybody come up to me like you hear a lot of these stories. I think I would
16 have just went right at them. Nobody was going to spit on me. I was pretty well received
17 when I got home. I didn't realize that my head was not in a good frame-of-mind when I
18 got home for sure.

19 JS: All right. Did you have much time left in the Army when you returned?

20 JD: No. I think I came back. I went in October 21st, I think it was October 12th I
21 was discharged. With that time that I had, I had almost my full two years.

22 JS: Okay, all right. You had a little bit of a difficulty adjusting at first when you
23 got back?

24 JD: Oh, yeah. I would say it was years. I thought I was all right. I was married
25 two years later, almost three years, and I still was—all the blinds were drawn down and I
26 had all the windows closed. My poor wife was just like—you know, that's just how it
27 was. I had thought back then that everything was normal, but in hindsight, I was not even
28 through it all.

29 JS: All right. Once you got back, did you follow the war closely on TV? Did you
30 pay attention to it?

1 JD: Oh, yeah. I think so. The Easter Offensive and then when the whole thing fell,
2 I think I felt pretty bad. Of course, you had Watergate going on and everything else
3 through those years.

4 JS: Right.

5 JD: Yeah, it was hard not to pay attention. But then, I wouldn't tell people that I
6 was a veteran because you couldn't get hired for a job if you told them you were a
7 Vietnam vet. I know I couldn't do that. I had to make my old place hire me back because
8 they didn't want to hire me back. When I applied for other jobs, I didn't put nothing
9 down about service or anything.

10 JS: All right. One more question about the way the war came to a conclusion, the
11 way it ended. Were you surprised by that? Surprised by the way things ended?

12 JD: No. Probably not because I think you could sort of see it coming because they
13 just were half-stepping. You could see that they just stopped bombing them. They could
14 have just come in with—they just didn't want no more to do with it. You could see it. I
15 was disappointed, all these lives lost and stuff to be sure. There was nothing you can do
16 at this pay-grade.

17 JS: Mm-hmm, right. After you got back, you talked about jobs. What kind of
18 work did you do after you got back?

19 JD: Printing. I've always been a printer and I went back to my other job and then I
20 started going to school on the GI bill. I got a degree in printing. I made a career out of it.
21 I'm semi-retired and I work out of the house now. I design the journal for the Americal
22 Division Association.

23 JS: Okay, all right. I know you mentioned earlier that you got back into the
24 military.

25 JD: Right. I didn't pay no attention when they called me for reserve duty and
26 stuff. I just threw it away. After being out almost eighteen years, I went back in the Army
27 Reserve, the military police unit here. I came back in as a PFC (Private First Class),
28 believe it or not.

29 JS: Oh, wow.

30 JD: I stayed with them about a year and a half, and then I transferred into the Air
31 Force Reserve. I retired in '07 as a master sergeant.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JD: I went to Desert Storm. I was in Turkey, and then I was in the Middle East for
3 the Global War on Terrorism. I volunteered for all that stuff too.

4 JS: Would you mind talking a little bit about some of those assignments?

5 JD: Not at all.

6 JS: You said you went to Desert Storm and to the more-recent—

7 JD: Yeah. Well, Desert Storm, I was an E-5 in the Air Force. I was in
8 transportation where you load planes and that. They had a tour going over to—short tour,
9 over to Incirlik, Turkey, which I got on that tour. They gave us campaign participation
10 because it's an area responsibility. I'd load up planes there. It wasn't bad at all. I got into
11 the Turkish culture. It was only three or four weeks but loaded some planes. Things were
12 winding down. They really didn't have much of a need for us and we came home. Again,
13 I got the campaign credit for it. I went into multimedia field in the Air Force after that
14 because they closed my base down. I transferred up to another unit in Milwaukee, the
15 440th. Going through the ranks, I became the multimedia manager. I was still classified as
16 a graphic artist, but graphic artist during wartime duty worked with Air Force
17 Intelligence. I finagled myself a tour of duty over there on '06. I worked with the 335th
18 Fighter Squadron, a F-15 Squadron. It was just incredible. I was one of the very few
19 Vietnam vets that have served over there and they treated me so well. I worked with
20 intelligence with the video-gun cameras and things like that. It was just really incredible.
21 I was so mission-orientated because I knew this would be my last hoorah. I took just
22 thousands of pictures and video. I tried to make sure that I annotated everything. A year
23 after that, I needed a new hip and stuff, so I finally retired.

24 JS: All right. What initially made you decide to go back in?

25 JD: I don't know. They had a one-year sign-up for the Army Reserve. I guess they
26 were having a hard time getting people and this is like 1988. A friend of mine says, "You
27 should try it." This and that. I got myself in pretty good shape again. I said, "Well, you
28 know, it's a year." I talked to my wife, "Yeah, go ahead," this and that. I got into it, and I
29 found it sort of fascinating. I was a little humbled to be a PFC, this and that. You got a
30 combat patch and people are going, "Oh, my gosh. What are you doing here?" I was
31 beating up the kids in the PT (Physical Training) and stuff.

1 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

2 JD: I said, “Well, this is fun.” I didn’t like how the Army Reserve was treated by
3 the active duty. Like bastard stepchildren. They’re treating you like you’re non-existent.
4 For some reason, I said, “I’m going to see about another service.” I don’t know how I got
5 hooked up with the Air Force. Because of job situations, I didn’t have to retrain and go to
6 schools again. They said, “We’ve got an OJT (On the Job Training) program here for air
7 transportation you can get in. You had basic training. You don’t have to do that, and
8 we’ll take you on.” I think I signed up for two years or three years. I don’t know. I said,
9 “Okay, why not?” I came in there and I never looked back. I just had a great career.
10 When I’d go on active duty with the Air Force, it was just seamless. You’re an NCO
11 (Non-commissioned Officer) in the Air Force period, no matter where you go. It was just
12 a wonderful career.

13 JS: All right. Could you get an idea about how much the military had changed
14 since Vietnam?

15 JD: Oh, big time. When I went in this military police company with the Army
16 Reserve, they kept testing me. That’s when I found out that I was five foot eight and a
17 half. My wife said, “You’re not 5’10” like you thought you were.” This little gal, this
18 little lieutenant—because there were no females in the military police when I was in the
19 first time, she’s about 5’4” and she comes to drill one day crying because she hit a
20 squirrel or something on her way to drill. That sort of dawned on me, I said, “Oh, my
21 gosh. Things have changed.” It got more and more politically correct at the end of my
22 tour there. It was like, “Oh, my goodness. Please quit sissifying me.” I’d be yelling at my
23 Air Force guys, I’d say, “Get down and give me one, will you?” There were some things
24 that was hard to get used to. It’s definitely a different military now. In some ways, they’re
25 much more refined and better. But Drill Sergeant Johnson—it’s a shame that people like
26 him can’t exist anymore because that to me was the essence of the military.

27 JS: All right. One last question on this time period in your career. Did you ever
28 get a chance to impart any of the things you learned in Vietnam to the younger guys?

29 JD: I always did, yeah. I think I always did. In fact, my old troops that are still
30 very close to me, I’ve got them all over the place. They call me all the time. I used it

1 really as a mentoring tool. And then—one quick story. When I was in the desert—you
2 might enjoy this.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JD: It's about two o'clock in the morning, you had to take the buses where you
5 go, and I'm in my uniform, my desert uniform. There's a guy sitting at the bus stop that's
6 about my age. He's looking a little old and we start toying with each other. I say, "I go
7 back a long ways." And he goes, "I go back further." I go, "You got to be kidding me." I
8 go, "1968." He goes, "1967. I've never left the Army. I'm in the Army and I've never
9 left." He was a warrant officer five. I carry my combat patch for the Americal in my,
10 what they call, your ID case that I had there. I showed him and I said, "I was in 'Nam. Do
11 you ever know these guys?" He goes, "The Americal Division. I was in the same unit."

12 JS: Wow.

13 JD: Yeah, how's that for a chance-meeting? So, we became friends.

14 JS: Right. How about that? Before wrapping up the interview, if you don't mind,
15 I'd like to ask you some broad questions about Vietnam. Get your opinion on some of the
16 larger issues of the war.

17 JD: Okay.

18 JS: Looking back on your experience in Vietnam at this point in your life, how do
19 you feel about your service in Vietnam and about American involvement in Vietnam?

20 JD: Well, I think we belonged over there. I think that we shouldn't half-step like
21 we tend to do sometimes. I wouldn't change it for the world. I'm glad I came back safe.
22 It's made me who I am. There's no doubt about it, it's made me who I am. I'm very
23 grateful that I had the opportunity to serve this country in all my years of service. I feel
24 really it was a privilege.

25 JS: All right. Could you comment a little bit about on how the war was handled? I
26 know you talked about half-steps, but could you talk a little bit more in-detail about that
27 from your perspective?

28 JD: Well, yeah. I feel I'm a warrior at heart and I feel that if you're going to fight
29 a war, why didn't we go up north and just kick their ass? You know, cut the head off.
30 They never cut the head off.

31 JS: Right, right.

1 JD: Were we afraid of the Chinese? I don't know, but if you're going to do it,
2 why half-step?

3 JS: Right. From someone who saw today's Army, from your perspective, do you
4 think some of the lessons of Vietnam were learned?

5 JD: Yes. With the Military Police Corps, that's a given because they're all trained
6 for combat now and OJT on police work second. I think they've learned quite a bit and
7 the Air Force as well. When they do go in with lethal force, they go in all the way with
8 lethal force. I still think sometimes we're pretty kindly people that we're always so
9 worried about collateral damage and stuff. If we didn't start it, that's not a problem, you
10 know,

11 JS: All right. What did you think about—looking back on it now, from your
12 perspective now, about the media's coverage of the Vietnam War?

13 JD: I think it was slanted, just like it's slanted right now. You don't hear any of
14 the good stories. You just hear the negativity. I think the media really did put a kibosh to
15 the whole Vietnam conflict. I think it worked well with the invasion of Iraq, but only
16 because the DOD (Department of Defense) realized that they had to implant civilian
17 media personnel with the military to get them on our side. When that was over, you can
18 see how most of the media has gone away and only projects negativity.

19 JS: Mm-hmm. So you think the idea of actually implanting the reporters there
20 with the guys actually helped at that time?

21 JD: Absolutely and I know that from a fact because I was with the Air Force
22 multimedia. This has come up in our conferences. It's a given.

23 JS: How would that change? How would that make them—could you explain a
24 little bit more?

25 JD: Because what happens is, if the media is implanted with the military and
26 actually are with these units and interact with them, they have a hard time giving a
27 slanted news story. They actually report more because they feel that they're part of this
28 rather than outside of this. Is that making myself clear?

29 JS: Sure. So they come to, I guess in many ways, empathize with the guys there
30 and they can see things from their perspective?

1 JD: Yes. I think they can be objectionable, but they can actually see things from a
2 different perspective.

3 JS: Okay, all right. From your perspective today again, could you comment on the
4 protest movement?

5 JD: Oh, my gosh. I think it's absolutely ridiculous. After being over there and
6 seeing the intelligence and seeing the things that I see about these bad guys, and how they
7 want a piece of us, anybody that's protesting anything against the war has got rocks in
8 their head. These people are out to kill them and their children. If they just want to just
9 kiss flowers and things like that, that's fine, but I'm telling you, this is the real
10 boogiemer. More so than even the Viet Cong ever were or the North Vietnamese. These
11 people want a piece of you.

12 JS: Mm-hmm. Taking it back to Vietnam though, do you think it was misguided
13 then as well?

14 JD: I think it could have been handled a lot better. I think that the communist
15 boogiemer was there, but it could have been controlled more with diplomacy rather than
16 sending in just millions of troops. At least having a fear-factor done in a different way.
17 Once you did commit, you need to commit whole-heartedly not just piecemeal like they
18 did.

19 JS: All right.

20 JD: It went on too long and the Americans lose heart. Even during World War II,
21 the Americans lost heart during then. They were sending people back home. They report
22 it now, if you're a historian, you would understand that people were not happy with that
23 war towards the end. You just can't keep these things going for years and years without
24 an aggregation of an opinion whole.

25 JS: Right, right. What's your opinion of, I guess, modern-day Vietnam and U.S.
26 policy towards modern-day Vietnam with trade and tourism, things like that?

27 JD: It changes, my opinion changes. I was dead set against it before. I know a lot
28 of people that have gone over there. I still feel that they are a thug government and very
29 oppressive. They're better now only because the Vietnamese like to deal with things. I
30 think they are still a very oppressive government. I think we lose sight of that sometimes.

1 The all-mighty buck just makes up for everything. Our ideals can really shift when it
2 comes to that dollar.

3 JS: All right. Along the lines of Veterans returning to Vietnam, have you ever
4 given any thought of that?

5 JD: I've been asked several times. One of my platoon-mates that passed away, I
6 probably would have gone with him. I've got another platoon mate, if he decided he was
7 going to go, I would probably go with him. I don't think I would be comfortable—I've
8 had a lot of other veteran friends that want to go, but I think it would have to be one of
9 my platoon-mates. I love to travel. I'll travel anywhere. I've been all over the world. I
10 don't know. If my buddy Ack was still alive, one of my platoon mates, I would go. If he
11 wanted to go, I would go in a heartbeat with him.

12 JS: All right. Just a few last questions.

13 JD: Sure.

14 JS: Have you been to the Vietnam Wall?

15 JD: Oh, several times. Yes.

16 JS: Okay. What's your impression of it?

17 JD: I think it's a wonderful, beautiful monument. It's important to all of us
18 Vietnam vets. I'm not a guy that gets choked up or anything. I'm just one of these people
19 that sort of puts his feelings behind him, so I don't get choked up. I think it's a wonderful
20 memorial.

21 JS: All right, all right. Last couple of questions here. Let's see, what would you
22 say was the biggest impact? I know it's a broad question, but the biggest impact that
23 Vietnam had on you, that your service in Vietnam had on your life?

24 JD: I think that all through my life I could always say, "Well, it could always be a
25 lot worse." Even when I was in Vietnam, I would look at the poor grunts and I would say,
26 "Boy, I don't have it that bad." It's given me that kind of feeling.

27 JS: All right. Well, anything else you would like to say? Anything else we should
28 cover before wrapping the interview up?

29 JD: No, Jason. I think we covered just about everything.

30 JS: All right.

31 JD: Sure did.

- 1 JS: All right. Well, I'll go ahead and bring the interview to a close then.
- 2 (Interview audio ends)