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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Terry Caskey
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 12 May 2011, 13 May 2011
Transcribed by Aaron Kellerhals**

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.

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1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
2 conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Terry Caskey. Today is May 12th, 2011.
3 I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech,
4 and Mr. Caskey is joining me by phone from North Carolina. Is that correct, sir?

5 TC: Yes, sir.

6 JS: Okay. All right, well, why don't we begin if we could with a little bit of
7 biographical information about yourself. First of all, when and where were you born?

8 TC: I was born on March 9th, 1948, in Lincolnton, North Carolina, to the parents
9 of Floyd and Doc Caskey.

10 JS: Floyd and—okay, all right. Could you tell me, I guess just a little bit of
11 information about your parents, what did they do for a living?

12 TC: My dad was a longtime, thirty-four year truck driver with Johnson Motor
13 Lines out of Charlotte, North Carolina, a national truck driving division. He worked for
14 thirty-four years and rode trucks all over the United States actually. My mother was a
15 mother of six children that she brought up and didn't go to work till later on in life and
16 worked as a receptionist at both hospitals in Lincolnton, North Carolina.

17 JS: Okay, all right so did you grow up there in Lincolnton?

1 TC: Yes, sir, I did. I grew up until I went into the Army in 1968, I was born and
2 raised there, graduated high school, and then a couple of years of college and joined the
3 service.

4 JS: Okay, all right. Well, before we get into that, I guess could you talk a little bit
5 about, I guess just a little bit about growing up there in North Carolina, if you wouldn't
6 mind?

7 TC: Well, back in the day, in the '50s and '60s Lincolnton, North Carolina, was a
8 great place to grow up. It was a good, family oriented community and everyone knew
9 each other. You didn't have to lock your doors at night. You actually could leave them
10 unlocked and even open and the windows up and no one would ever enter your house
11 unless they knocked. The community life and the socioeconomic range that we were in,
12 we were able to do more than some people and less than others. But we had a good
13 upbringing, had good parents and good guidance.

14 JS: As a kid growing up there again, did you pay attention I guess to what was
15 going on in the world with the Cold War, and all of that type of thing?

16 TC: Yes, I actually remember back in the '50s us, when Khrushchev and Kennedy
17 were—even before they were arguing, back in the '50s we used to practice the alerts and
18 ducking under the desk and going into the halls and covering your head up, as part of a
19 school program to make sure that we survived. But those type things I remember coming
20 up.

21 JS: Did you have, I guess any interest in the military as a kid? Or any relatives
22 that had served? Anything like that?

23 TC: Well, I always went to, as a kid I would go to the movie theater on Saturday
24 afternoons, especially if there was a John Wayne movie and I really developed an interest
25 in the War and the patriotism as a young kid, watching them defeat the Germans, the
26 Japanese, and then of course Korea, the Wars about Korea, I'd watch anything and
27 everything. So, movies and actors were a great precursor to my becoming a patriotic
28 individual and wanting to serve in the military.

29 JS: Okay, all right, let's see. Where did you go to high school?

1 TC: I went to the Lincolnton high school, in Lincolnton, North Carolina, the
2 ‘Wolf Pack’ as they were called. A very good high school, institution, about a 178
3 graduates in our senior high school class.

4 JS: You graduated in what year?

5 TC: 1967.

6 JS: ’67, okay. All right, and I imagine—one more thing about what was going on
7 at the time, do have any memories of the Kennedy Assassination?

8 TC: Yes, I did, as a matter of fact I was in school on that day, and walking down
9 the hall and I heard Leigh Leonard, as a matter of fact a female made the announcement
10 in the hall and was crying that the President Kennedy had been killed. I immediately went
11 home, of course it was time for us to go home anyway and went home and then followed
12 it all the rest of that day and through his burial, I think we were even let out of school. I
13 still have the original *Charlotte Observer* newspapers from that time period in my
14 possession to this time announcing Kennedy’s death.

15 JS: Okay, yes, sir. All right, well, I know the other big thing obviously going on
16 while you were in high school, the beginning of the Vietnam War, were you paying close
17 attention to Vietnam?

18 TC: Actually, I was because not only was it a—well-saturated with the news
19 media, but I had a lot of friends that were older than I that actually had to go into the
20 military. Then of course everyday on TV when we sit down to eat as a group, a family,
21 and back then that’s when families did sit down and eat together, we were saturated and
22 bombarded with the news of the events of Vietnam. So, it was a War over dinner, and
23 you just become accustomed to it.

24 JS: Mm-hmm, okay, all right. Do you remember I guess developing much of an
25 opinion about the War, prior to your own service?

26 TC: Well, I actually did, I had one fellow who I went to school with who was an
27 anti-Vietnam protestor and went to Washington D.C. and he was a good friend until he
28 took his stance, and then he became very agitated towards us because I was more of the
29 patriotic and pulling for the guys and supporting the troops. He was more of spitting on
30 them, and cursing at them, and cursing at what we were doing over there. So even in

1 school during that time period it had a negative effect on you, and a positive effect on
2 you, both.

3 JS: Mm-hmm, yes, sir, all right. Well, what would've been more typical, would
4 you say, among the people that you grew up around? Were they mostly more be like your
5 opinion, or more like his opinion, or did most of them not seem to care one way or
6 another?

7 TC: I think that the War was a lot of the things that people didn't want to talk
8 about, but the most of the people that I hung around with were expecting to drafted at
9 some point in time once they got out of high school if they didn't go to college. And
10 others were basically just very few at the time from our area, that were like protesting or
11 taking a negative stance against the War. War was never popular, but I did notice that one
12 individual who had a strong stance, but as far as the rest of the guys I hung around, most
13 everybody was pulling for our troops.

14 JS: I know you talked about people being concerned about being drafted. Were
15 you concerned, as well, about the possibility of being drafted?

16 TC: I actually I had made up my mind after I got out of high school and did a
17 little college, that I was wanting to go into the military and I had received a draft notice,
18 and once I didn't want to do any more college, I was burned out on school, and I received
19 a draft notice, and I went ahead and joined so I could get a particular MOS [Military
20 Occupational Specialty] that I was interested in.

21 JS: I know you've mentioned in the bio that you sent me, that you were very
22 interested in being a medic of sorts, could you talk a little bit about why that was that you
23 were interested in that particular MOS?

24 TC: Ever since a young age, probably about seven or eight, I had watched TV and
25 saw the medic on TV taking care of the wounded guys and that type thing in war movies
26 and had just thought that that was the greatest thing, being able to take care of people. At
27 one time I thought I wanted to be a physician but just never materialized, I just didn't
28 have the concentration and the time—I guess maybe the patience to spend four years in
29 college and another four years of medical school. So, I thought, "Well, I would go into
30 the military, and I would like to be a medic." I thought that was the coolest job.

1 JS: Upon making the decision to join, did you have any thoughts about, “Well,
2 this could possibly lead to Vietnam?”

3 TC: Well, yeah, as a matter of fact I had watched over the years, a lot of people
4 that I knew had gone to Vietnam and returned. Some of them didn’t return, but I had
5 made up my mind that I wanted to go and do my part for the country. Very patriotic and
6 actually I felt like it was an honor to be able to go and lay my life down if necessary for
7 the preservation of our country.

8 JS: What was your families reaction to your decision, if you don’t mind me
9 asking?

10 TC: The family, when I told them—they knew that I got the draft notice, and I
11 told them that I was going to join. They knew that I was going one way or another, so I
12 think they were kind of ready to get rid of me, one more of the six children out of the
13 house I think was a blessing to them, but they were concerned as far as the safety just as
14 any war that’s going on where you’re children are being sent off. They were concerned.
15 But they mainly kept it to themselves.

16 JS: Did any of your siblings make the same decision, or were drafted as well?

17 TC: No, I had one older brother who had just—he was probably five years older
18 than I, and he had gone to college in Charlotte, North Carolina, and he had gone to work
19 for Exxon, so he had missed the draft and he was married and then had a child, so he was
20 further down the list of being drafted. Then I had four sisters and of course none of them
21 were interested in the military.

22 JS: Right, okay, excuse me. Well, if you could, tell me a little bit about induction
23 and what that was like.

24 TC: I do remember, I went in on July the 25th, 1968. My dad took me to the bus
25 station and let me out, then said his goodbyes, and I stood around and waited till the bus,
26 and I went with seven other friends of mine from the high school who we sort of went in
27 on a buddy plan. We all travelled by bus to Charlotte, and then went through some
28 examination type processes and processing paperwork and then we were put on a bus to
29 Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for the duration of the night travelling, and then arrived early
30 the next morning.

1 JS: Okay, all right. I guess if you could take it from there as far as your reception,
2 once you arrive there at basic at Fort Bragg, and if you could talk a little bit about, I guess
3 what basic training was like for you.

4 TC: Pretty much we arrived there and then they hustled us off the bus, and they
5 put us in the reception station and began the processing. I do remember going through the
6 line sort of like a catering at a restaurant where they have a buffet line and asking what
7 you want because you would get to one individual, and they would be issuing you socks.
8 Measuring you for shoes. Then you would go down and they would measure your waist
9 and throw you some pants out. Then they would measure neck size and your sleeve
10 length, and they would give you the fatigue, coat, jackets and shirts. Then the fatigue
11 jacket, and then of course measure your head and hand you a couple of hats. This all took
12 about a minute, a minute-and-a-half, two minutes to get everything done and put it in a
13 box. Then of course you went through the next day. You got some sleep that night, and
14 then the next morning they started you out and you went through the shot line, and the
15 physicians. The dental and the physical from the doctors and the shots and all. I
16 remember walking away with blood pouring down both arms because they were doing
17 the air-driven syringe injections as well as the needle injections, and most people's arms
18 were just dripping blood and it hurt to be air-inoculated. Then we went to the processing,
19 get our dog tags, I remember that day, we had to manually do it ourselves and stamp
20 those out. Then another day or so, then they sent a bus over to pick us up and this nice
21 drill sergeant got on the bus talking with the bus driver, and we rose about ten minutes to
22 the reception area and the guy turned from the nice, calm, duck into the flaming eagle.
23 Jumped on us, told us we had ten seconds to get off the bus. I do remember the hundred-
24 and-ten degrees in Fort Bragg in North Carolina that day, and where we got out was on
25 some pavement and the tar was actually oozing up through the pavement and it was
26 burning your hands because they made us get down and started knocking out pushups. I
27 thought, "What have I done? What have I gotten myself into?" For the next thirty minutes
28 it was just verbal, mental abuse and that lasted probably for the next eight weeks, but it
29 lessened off in the first two weeks of training.

30 JS: All right, and I guess could you talk a little bit about I guess the daily routine,
31 what that would be like, a typical day as far as the training is concerned?

1 TC: Well, our drill sergeant, Doug Caldwell who was a sergeant first class, I
2 remember him the first morning and once we got our linens and bed, blankets issued and
3 pillows, we went and found the bunk and then we were able to get in the bed asleep
4 probably about midnight. About four o'clock they woke us up to rise, shine, take a
5 shower, and to brush your teeth and get dressed and meet out in formation. Then they
6 began immediately running us once they did a headcount, and then we would go to
7 breakfast. Then once you came back from breakfast you had about five minutes of
8 downtime to go bathroom, and then they would start running you and taking you out to
9 the PT [Physical Training] field. The PT would last on and off most of the day, with the
10 exception of lunch when they would run you back to the mess hall and then you would
11 have like thirty minutes to eat or less, and then you would go back out and do some more
12 PT and physical training, and running, and that pretty much lasted until about six or
13 seven P.M. to whenever you went to eat supper. Then you had downtime as far as getting
14 your gear squared away up and lights out at nine o'clock. Now I went in at 210 pounds,
15 and in six weeks I was down to 160 pounds, I lost fifty pounds in six weeks.

16 JS: Right, wow. All right. You mentioned that Sergeant Caldwell, was he a
17 Vietnam veteran?

18 TC: Yes, he was, and he had already been on one tour of Vietnam and actually
19 when I got to Vietnam, I ran into him at the reception station in Vietnam like ten minutes
20 after being there. I remember him telling me that, "Take this training seriously, learn it
21 well," and he was talking as not only a drill sergeant to try and keep you alive, but also to
22 keep him alive because you had to depend on your buddies and your fellow soldiers to
23 keep you alive, and to preserve their lives. He said, "You may see me in Vietnam one
24 day, and you may not." And the first person I saw in Vietnam was him.

25 JS: How would he and other instructors enforce discipline if it was necessary?

26 TC: It depends on the severity of it, we had a couple of guys who went AWOL
27 [Absent Without Leave] and of course they were dealt with severely, with being sent to
28 what's called E-Company and other structured, more harsh, discipline-type activities. But
29 if one person screwed up, everybody had to pay the price with doing pushups or running
30 or stand out later. Taking something away from you to punish you to get you to conform
31 to the military rules and regulations. He was an enforcer, there's no doubt about it,

1 toughest man I've ever seen for a short-statured man. But basically, you learned a lot of
2 life lessons on how to treat people and how to work together.

3 JS: How about the weapons training? Were you all training on the M14s still? Or
4 had it moved to the M16 by that point?

5 TC: In about week four or five, I think it was week four and five we went to the
6 rifle range and of course we marched out to the rifle range and one time we were hauled
7 back only deuce-and-a-half, but we marched to the rifle range the first time and we
8 carried the heavy M14. The first week of rifle range, we qualified with the M14. The
9 second week, we qualified with the M16. I loved the M14, but the M16 was awesome,
10 and I did qualify 'expert' with both the M14 and M16. Being from North Carolina, I grew
11 up with shotguns and rifles and hunted daily from the time I was ten years old, so I had a
12 lot of weapons handling and training, and actually experience with weapons before I
13 went.

14 JS: Overall, did you feel that the basic was I guess efficient as far as providing
15 you with a good introduction to the military?

16 TC: Yeah, I did, as a matter of fact once we went through the eight weeks of
17 basic, we had like a two week break, and I did not get orders to go to my AIT [Advanced
18 Infantry Training]. So along with me there were four other guys that were held back
19 because our orders did not come through. We had to stay over and help train the new
20 recruits that came through, and we did that for an additional four weeks. So, it was almost
21 like going through basic twice, except we were leading the new recruits during their basic
22 training. So, six weeks of delaying for us getting orders, we actually got to go through
23 basic twice because we were not only exercising and showing them how to do it, but we
24 were doing it with them and I think that made me a better soldier because it made me
25 more fit and gave me more opportunity to grow as a soldier, and to be more
26 knowledgeable.

27 JS: Before moving on from basic, are there any memorable moments, funny
28 moments, anything like that from basic that stick out in your mind that you could
29 possibly mention?

30 TC: Yeah, I was in class one day, and I don't remember what the class was. It
31 might've been shooting azimuth and that type of thing, but anyway I fell asleep. All of a

1 sudden, this swagger stick hit the desk on me—in front of me and woke me up, and I do a
2 perfect impersonation of Gomer Pyle, always have and always did, and he said, “And
3 what’s the answer to that question, sir?” And I said, “Golly, I don’t know!”
4 (Impersonation of Gomer Pyle) And he said, “Where you from, boy?” I said, “North
5 Carolina,” and he said, “Are you playing with me?” I said, “No, sir. And Sergeant, I
6 wouldn’t play with you for nothing,” and he said, “Well—” And the whole group broke
7 up, and it was the first comical moment they had but it was the only thing I could think of
8 at the time because I knew I was in trouble. He said, “I will remember you always, and if
9 you’re ever in another class that I am teaching, that better be your voice.” I said, “Yes,
10 sir!” And we went on from there. So, I kind of got myself into a bind because anytime I
11 was in a class from then on, I had to talk like that. But that’s the only humorous times
12 I’ve found during the military, in the basic training.

13 JS: Okay, yes, sir. So once those four weeks were over, was it straight on to AIT
14 at that point?

15 TC: Well, my eight weeks of basic and then that two weeks of break in there, we
16 got to go home for a couple days and came back for that actually the four weeks of the
17 new recruits, and then we received our orders and all the guys that went in on the buddy
18 plan, that kind of dissolved because everybody had a different MOS. They sent me to
19 Pope Air Force Base, and I got on a four-engine plane and flew to Louisville, Kentucky.
20 The plane refueled, stayed on the plane, then I flew into San Antonio, Texas, as a matter
21 of fact, Brooke Army Medical Center, to begin my basic AIT.

22 JS: Could you talk a little bit about I guess the AIT, and what it was like for you?

23 TC: AIT was not as physically demanding as the basic training was, but however
24 we did have to do a lot of walking and a lot of carrying of men who was supposedly
25 wounded and that type thing. We got up in the morning, we went to breakfast, we then
26 went to class say from seven o’clock, 7:30 to five o’clock in the afternoon, and then we
27 would have break time. Once in a while there would be evenings that we had to go in and
28 stay out in the field, at Camp Bullis, and mock Vietnam villages and that type thing, of
29 doing patrols and taking care of wounded. But basically, we spent most of the time in
30 class, or learning how to treat patients as well as carrying them over your head, across
31 creeks, both water up to your chin and over your head. You had to jump up and breathe

1 above the water, to hold your breath, walk underwater, jump up with the litter straight up
2 over your head. So that was kind of a tough task, but we stayed with a lot, but the medical
3 training was excellent actually.

4 JS: A lot of that was focused on being a combat medic?

5 TC: Yeah, your first ten weeks was combat-filled medic training, and that was
6 geared up for being a medic in the field, which as a medic you had to do six months in
7 the field, and six months in a rear-unit. Once the ten weeks of training was up, they talked
8 to you to see if you wanted to go any further with any type of training that would benefit
9 you and how you could score on your testing. They tested me, and I scored high enough
10 to be able to take Operating Room Technician training, which was another three months,
11 another twelve weeks of training, and which I was accepted. So, we went what we called
12 from one barracks, about two hundred yards to another barracks is what it's called, up on
13 the hill at Fort Sam. We did six weeks of training, which was basically class time from
14 eight to five each day about how to be an operating room technician. Learning all the
15 nomenclature for medical terminology, learning all the instruments, and the types of
16 sutures, bandages, and all the basic information that you need to work in an operating
17 room. Once the six weeks training was up, then I was sent to the 101st Airborne Division
18 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky to the hospital area there, to where I did six weeks of didactic
19 on-the-job-training which was very interesting because you to work into the operating
20 room. So, I had already secured my combat medic training certificate, and now I was
21 working on the Operating Room Technician certificate which is—the combat medic
22 training was 91810 MOS, and the operating room technician 91D20 MOS.

23 JS: Did this training you received during your AIT, all this training, did it prepare
24 you I guess as best that it could for what you would be doing in Vietnam?

25 TC: I felt the training was excellent, that I did feel secure in my own skin to be a
26 good medic as well as an operating room technician, depending on whichever one they
27 would use me as. I felt like I had been trained to the best of their ability and mine. I
28 wanted to treat people, and I wanted to take care of them, and I felt I was ready to go. I
29 do remember that we, after graduating—working in the operating room, I'll tell you a
30 quick story too. We were operating on a guy who had what they thought was a tumor in
31 his chest, and the doctor, as one of my first big cases to work with him and to assist him,

1 and I had never seen lungs before, and so we cut into the guy then we took a rib out, and
2 the doctor reached into his chest and pulled out this white object, and it was not attached
3 to anything. It turned out to be an encapsulated jaw-tooth. They do not know how that it
4 got into his lung cavity, but it was just laying between the plural lining of the lung and
5 the plural lining of the lung and the lung itself. It was just a jaw-tooth, and they don't
6 know where it came from or how it got imbedded there, but it was not attached to
7 anything. But we took the man's rib out, and that always bothered me, we removed a
8 man's rib for the particular case and the lung didn't even have to be cut into or operated
9 on in any fashion. But that was just one of the first things that I noticed that kind of
10 bothered me, just the removal of a rib for something that was so minor.

11 JS: The patients here at Fort Campbell there, where would these patients come
12 from?

13 TC: First patients, mostly what we were doing was reconstruction surgery on
14 Vietnam guys. Of course, your guys who had appendicitis. Gall bladder attacks. Redoing
15 stumps and amputations on arms as well as legs. Regrafting the skin for the late primary-
16 closure wounds and taking care of the guys who needed additional surgeries from
17 Vietnam. So, you had routine and elective surgery as well as taking care of the other guys
18 to help them with their functionality.

19 JS: Were you doing this when you received your orders to Vietnam?

20 TC: Yeah, I was, as a matter of fact we graduated from class and five minutes
21 after graduating they called six of us into attention, and they went down the line and the
22 first guy they handed him certificate. They promoted him to Spec-4, and they said,
23 "You're going to Germany." Second guy, hand him certificate, promoted him to PFC
24 [Private First Class] and sent him to Panama. The third guy went to Germany. The fourth
25 guy, he went to Panama. The fifth guy was me, and I got orders for Vietnam, and number
26 six got orders for Vietnam, and was promoted to Spec 4 in addition.

27 JS: I know you had said previously that you were looking at it from a patriotic
28 point of view, therefore how did you react to receiving the orders?

29 TC: I was kind of tickled with it because I thought, "Well, these other guys, I've
30 never been to Germany and never really thought about it, but Panama kind of intrigued
31 me," but I thought, "Well, I'm going to Vietnam. I've gotten my wish," and it was karma.

1 They told us that we would be leaving in three days, and they said, “If you have any
2 problem with that, you need to go see the clerk and talk to them about getting in a few
3 days because you’re supposed to be in three days.” Well, three days would not allow me
4 any time to go home to visit my family. So, I went down to the clerk of the unit and
5 talked with him, and he turned out to be from Shelby, North Carolina. I struck up a
6 conversation with him and he asked me where I was from, and when he saw the paper
7 and I told him, “Lincolnton,” and Lincolnton and Shelby were big rivals in football. We
8 struck up a conversation, we went out to dinner, and he said, “Hey, I might be able to
9 help you get your extra days off.” So, he said, “You go on home, go home today and fly
10 back to North Carolina, and do not do anything until you hear from me.” So, I said,
11 “Okay.” I flew back home, and I had his phone number and that type thing, he said, “If
12 you don’t hear anything in thirty days, call me.” Well, about two weeks later I had like
13 thirty days of leave and so I was pretty comfortable, end of thirty days I got worried
14 because I was out of leave and I called him and he said, “Well, your orders haven’t come
15 in, just stay there until you hear from me.” So, forty-three days later I finally got the word
16 to be on the plane to go to Vietnam. That was pretty nice, forty-three days from time you
17 left Fort Campbell until you have to report, and you didn’t get charged for it. I thought
18 that was pretty awesome.

19 JS: What did you do during that time?

20 TC: Mostly spent some time around the house, visited some old girl friends and
21 then type thing, but mostly hung out with the guys that hung out at particular parking lots
22 and got together and just chit-chatted about the military and that type thing. Called up and
23 hooked up with some of the old buddies that you went in the service with as they came
24 home. But basically, just hung out and just chilled out in preparation for going, and just
25 stayed active. Because it was in the spring of the year, so it was a good time to be
26 outdoors.

27 JS: Where did you have to report to?

28 TC: Was told to—they mailed me the ticket from Charlotte on Eastern Airlines.
29 My family drove me down there. They took a picture of me getting on the plane, and still
30 have that picture as a matter of fact, and I flew to Saint Louis, Missouri. I had like, going
31 out there two or three days ahead of time, I wanted to be there on time, and they said,

1 “The plane is overbooked, if anybody would like to take the plane an hour later, we will
2 give you your money back and make sure that you get on the next plane.” So, I said, “I’m
3 not that big a hurry, so let the other people that need to get out there go on,” so I got the
4 cash money. They give me the cash money, and then they put me on a plane an hour later
5 and then we flew to Seattle, Tacoma Airport, SeaTac, and we took a cab down to Fort
6 Ord I think—not Ord, but Fort Louis Washington, yeah Fort Louis. Took a cab down
7 there and when we got there, the first thing they did was checked in and then they took all
8 your possessions and told you to send all your money, rings, and everything home. So, I
9 didn’t get to spend the money except maybe twenty bucks for a cab.

10 JS: Right, right, okay. What happened at that point once you arrived? Were you
11 there very long before getting on a flight?

12 TC: We were there approximately five to seven days. We had to draw our
13 Vietnam attire, our fatigues, jungle boots. We had to get our boonie hats and everything
14 that we needed to get us through Vietnam. Then we had to take ARVN [Army of
15 Republic of Vietnam] training, or Republic of Vietnam training, which was not only
16 classes, but we had to take additional shots, and then we had to go out on three different
17 ambushes. I do remember being killed seven times on the first ambush, and three times
18 on the second, the third one I survived it, I did not get killed in mock combat. But they
19 showed you the defensive mechanisms or walking to an L-shape and the U-shaped
20 ambush, and by the third time I had learned my lesson. It made a stringent point to you
21 that you know, this is getting serious. You can die if you do not follow the rules, you
22 know? Even if you follow the rules you could die. But we went through this training out
23 in the woods, the fields, for hours and days on end. We spent time out in the woods, but
24 at night they would lock us in the barracks.

25 JS: All right. Well, what was the flight over like? Did you go on a civilian airline,
26 or a military?

27 TC: It was a civilian airline. It’s called World Airways, but they’re usually
28 retained by the military government, but the plane I remember was black and white. It
29 was a beautiful airplane, and we took off from SeaTac and we flew to Anchorage,
30 Alaska. We landed in Anchorage some four hours later or so, five hours maybe, and we
31 refueled, and it was getting late in the afternoon. We taxied back out. They started down

1 the runway then boarded the takeoff because they blew an engine in that 707, and so they
2 had to taxi back to the airport. They let us get off the airplane after two or three hours and
3 walk up on top, there was like an observation deck. It was in latter part of June, almost
4 early July of '69 and it was very cool, but it wasn't cold, but it was very cool, I do
5 remember that. They changed the engine out, and then we took off and we flew for
6 another—I'm going to say six to eight hours, to Japan. We landed in Japan; they
7 wouldn't let us off the airplane because no one had passports but being a military. They
8 still just didn't want us off the airplanes. So, they made us stay on, and I do remember it
9 was raining, and I don't know what the weather was, but I noticed it was raining because
10 I did have a seat on the right side towards the rear of the aircraft at the window. That was
11 my first view of Japan. You could just see people at the airport running around.

12 JS: What was the mood like on the, I guess the flight over? Were people talking
13 about it very much, or was it pretty quiet? Or—

14 TC: There was chitchat, there wasn't a whole lot of talk, I think everybody was
15 somewhat subdued because they were going over, but there was a little chitchat, but it
16 wasn't a loud, boisterous crowd going over it. It was more subdued.

17 JS: Right, right, okay. How about that final flight into Vietnam? What was that
18 like?

19 TC: Well, we took off. It was still dark, and we flew—I'm going to say another
20 six to eight hours. It was a long flight to Vietnam. When we—of course you slept as
21 much as you could, but your rear end got very tired, and you almost got like saddle sores
22 because you were just tired of sitting and getting up and stretching but with all those guys
23 on board there was just almost impassable to get by. You could go to the restroom, but
24 everybody was lined up. So, you're just mostly sitting in your seat. But the mood over
25 there was somber, and I do remember it getting kind of tense as the sun was coming up
26 and we were coming into landing. They told us to make sure we buckled our seatbelts
27 and that they told us that we were going into Cam Ranh Bay Air Force Base. They told us
28 that there was a rocket or a mortar attack going on at the time. They would be coming in
29 with their lights off and they would be coming over the bay area, and that we could be
30 shot at or that type thing. So, I had a window seat at this, and I remember as the plane
31 was getting down low. It was flying over all these sampans over there, I remember seeing

1 them because the sun was just coming up and you could see these people standing up in
2 these sampans, and there was hundreds and thousands of them out there and just over
3 them and over them. Then once we landed, they opened the doors up and told us to hurry
4 up and get off the aircraft, and I remember when I got to the aircraft's door and I stepped
5 off, the most horrid heat, humidity, and stench and smell, sort of like the smell of death
6 but not quite as bad as that, but Vietnam had its own smell which was unique. And you
7 would never forget it, and I remember running down the steps to get down to the airport
8 tarmac, and then they huddling us off to the side in a secure area, and we were probably
9 178 to two-hundred people that was on the aircraft, and we're all huddled over there. You
10 could see helicopters flying over, gunships shooting, and that was just an awesome
11 display of just like a red worm, just snaking in the air. It was just absolutely amazing. The
12 sounds of explosions in the background, there was no immediate explosions within a
13 half-a-mile of us, but you could see definitely the tracers going in and coming out.

14 JS: What was in-processing like?

15 TC: Well, in-processing, once we gathered our duffel bags and they got them off
16 for us. They took us and put us on a bus, and the first thing that I noticed that was very
17 intimidating, is that each bus had like a mesh of steel mesh on the windows, and I asked a
18 question of what that was for. They said, "To prevent RPGs [Rocket Propelled Grenade]
19 from coming through the windows," so that was not a comforting feeling. But when we
20 got to the processing station. It was like seven o'clock in the morning, 7:30, and then we
21 went straight to the chow hall—eat because it had been a while since we had eaten. I
22 remember eating there and coming out of the mess hall is when I run into Sergeant Doug
23 Caldwell, and we talked for about fifteen or twenty minutes, and I asked him about the
24 process and he said, "Well, you just find yourself a place to sit. They will announce your
25 flight. They will announce your name, and then you just get up and go to the processing
26 area, and it might be an hour, or it could be two to three days." Well, being that I had
27 pretty much been tired of twenty-four hours of flying, I kind of fell asleep and the next
28 day I'm sitting there and during the daytime I'm awake, and I'm waiting on my name to
29 be called, name to be called, and it's not called in that twenty-four hours. You have to
30 sleep, so you fall asleep laying on your duffel bag, and you wake up and your name had
31 been called and you didn't hear it. So, two days later I go and ask them about it, and they

1 said, “Well, your name was called, and you missed your flight, then you need to go do
2 KP [Kitchen Patrol] duties. So, I went over to the KP place, and I had to wash dishes, and
3 I finally got tired of that, so I just walked out and went back out to my duffel bag and
4 went back to the clerk’s office and told him I needed to get out of here, to get to the unit
5 because I was expected, and they said, “Well, you need to stay awake and listen to your
6 airplane to be called.” I stayed awake and it was finally called three days later, and they
7 took me to the airport.

8 JS: Where were you assigned to?

9 TC: They told me I was going north, so I got on a C-130 and we flew for it
10 seemed hours, about five or six hundred miles north to Da Nang. When we got to Da
11 Nang that afternoon, we got there about five o’clock and at seven o’clock a typhoon was
12 supposed to be hitting. They moved us down to the 95th Evacuation Hospital area, put us
13 in one of the bunker areas. I remember the typhoon came in and it was very windy, and
14 water was lapping up under your little bunk. It was wet. It was cool. Even though it was
15 July the weather, the cold water and the wind blowing was very cool. We survived that,
16 and then went back to the airport after the typhoon was over, and we sat around there for
17 like twenty-four to thirty-six hours waiting on another airplane or helicopter, airplane,
18 didn’t know which one it was going to be till they called your name. Then they told me
19 that I was going north, and I thought, “How far north can you go?” They said, “Well,
20 you’re going to Phu Bai,” which is sixty miles north of Da Nang. So, they put us on a C-
21 123 with little jet pods on it, and it took off and we landed in Phu Bai which was a little
22 dirt strip. It may have been a little strip of asphalt down the center of it, but most of it was
23 dirt. When I got off the 123, there was a little building about the size of a—I don’t know
24 a normal house, and it had been there since the Tet Offensive, and there must’ve been ten
25 thousand bullet holes in that operation center. It was well-ventilated, and that’s when the
26 real thought of, This is a real thing, yeah this is the real thing, this is no joke. This is
27 serious. Went into the operations center. They made a call out to the 22nd Surge
28 [Surgical] Hospital which was south of Phu Bai about twenty miles, towards the A Sau
29 Valley and they sent a Jeep about two hours later to pick me up and transport me to the
30 22nd Surge.

1 JS: At that point, did you know if you were going to an operating room tech, or a
2 combat medic? Did you know your orders at that time?

3 TC: I knew I was going to be assigned to the 22nd Surge, I just didn't know what
4 capacity. But when I got there, I was basically assigned as an operating room technician
5 and also some of us guys were also assigned with the 571st Medevac [Medical
6 Evacuation] unit. So, I had the ability to go out with the 571st and fly out with the medics,
7 and the crew chiefs, and the helicopter pilots out into the A Sau Valley as I deemed
8 necessary to help bring the wounded back and then of course be able to help assist with
9 operations of them. I arrived there in early July of '69. Hamburger Hill, the original
10 Hamburger Hill had already ended about five or six weeks prior to that. One thing of
11 little importance but didn't get much news on it, was that they went back on that hill
12 again in July or early August of '69 to take it again, which got very little recognition in a
13 *Charlotte Observer* paper that my mother sent me. By the time I received the paper, that
14 episode had already been over with. There was like five killed and fifty wounded, and
15 they reported like one killed and five wounded, you know. That was a point that kind of
16 woke up reality for me, that our government suppressed the information because the
17 statistics didn't mount up with what we had just been on two weeks prior, ten days prior
18 to that. The numbers didn't match up, the wounded as well as the dead didn't match up,
19 and they were—our government was actually not being honest with us. That was when I
20 first noticed it.

21 JS: Could you talk a little bit about the 22nd Surge Hospital? Just a little bit about
22 what the hospital—the purpose of the hospital, and I guess a little bit about what it looked
23 like as well, if you wouldn't mind.

24 TC: Have you ever seen the movie *M*A*S*H*?

25 JS: Uh-huh.

26 TC: It was similar to that. We had a few tents where we kept our C-rations and
27 supplies, but basically, we had what's called MUST [Medical Unit, Self-contained,
28 Transportable] units. They were J-4 fuel—MUST units was about the size of a small
29 bedroom in a house. There were J-packs that produced power and electricity and air
30 conditioning. They were fueled by JP-4 fuel bladders set in little revetments and there
31 about a thousand gallons or two thousand gallons of fuel in each one of them, the JP-4

1 fuel bladders. We had four operating rooms set up, which was called MUST units, M-U-
2 S-T, mobile unit surgical transportable units. These collapsed in the size of a small
3 bedroom, also they expanded out and had everything in it including operating room
4 tables, all the instruments, all the tables, everything that you needed including anesthesia
5 machines and that type of thing. The wards was made up of inflatable material that was
6 inflated with air, and that's how the wards were where you put the patients once you had
7 operated on them. We had like six wards from surgical to orthopedic and that type of
8 thing, and the patients only stayed there for a short period of time before they were
9 helicoptered out to an evacuation hospital, or to another transportation area to send them
10 to Japan, Hawaii, the Philippines, or back to the United States. The hospital actually had,
11 like I said, four operating rooms and then a blood supply, a blood bank, and support units
12 and a bunch of little six-man hooches with revetments all around them and sandbags all
13 around the unit. You know it was about the size of a football field, a football-field-and-a-
14 half wide and included six helicopters with the 571st Medevac.

15 JS: Let's see, was the 22nd stationary when you were there, did you all make any
16 moves?

17 TC: No, you were supposed to be able to break it down and transport it in twenty-
18 four hours, but we did not have to move. We were on the outer southern fringe,
19 perimeter, on both sides of the mountain from the 101st Airborne Division, we were about
20 a mile from a Marine Corps unit, and we were sort of isolated and on our own. We faced
21 the A Sau Valley, if you flew straight down you could see it. We could watch them fire
22 rockets off 122 millimeter rockets off the top of the mountain into our position. You
23 could track the rockets once they'd left, when they lit up coming off the top of the
24 mountain. About six-and-a-half miles away, and then they would come in and slam into
25 our area. They were very good with just putting these things over a couple twigs and
26 firing them off, you know a couple stakes. Getting those things come in, and they usually
27 fired them in volleys of three. We also took a lot of mortars, we got hit on the average of
28 every third night we got hit with rockets or mortars, or some type of a ground attack
29 every third night. That was a harrowing experience because you could watch the rockets
30 and track them as they come in and you can make your decision as to where you were
31 going. But with the mortars, they were short duration. You could see them drop the

1 mortars down the tube if it was daylight, and you could hear the chi-tunk (sound like a
2 mortar fire) from the mortar and then you would see the explosion, and then you would
3 hear the sound. Also, there was a group about a half-mile away, there was six 155
4 millimeter batteries, artillery batteries from us. At time they would fire out into the
5 Valley out there when we had enemy out there. You would actually see the flash of the
6 artillery, you'd see the cluster-bomb explode, then you would hear the initial shot from
7 the artillery, then you would hear the explosion. So, you were seeing it, hearing it. Seeing
8 it, hearing it. And so, it was already exploded before you heard the first shot, so it was
9 just an awesome display every night. One thing a lot of people don't realize, that the
10 NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the VC [Viet Cong], if they were using their own
11 type of rounds of ammunition, their tracers were green. That was a different type of
12 psyche that it produced on you because our tracers were red. Not to say that they did not
13 take our ammo or weapons. They did, and they fired them on you, but we saw a red tracer
14 coming in you knew that they had captured weapons, but typically their tracers were lime
15 green and it was odd, and it was different.

16 JS: I know you mentioned that you all were kind of separate from everyone else,
17 what kind of security did you all have? Did you all—were you responsible for providing
18 your own security?

19 TC: Yeah, we provided our own security. We had an ammo bunker right in the
20 middle of the compound, M16s of course, we had those with us, some of them, people
21 did not carry. The ones that were good had weapons with them, that were expert, and that
22 type thing could have them, but if something happened everybody else had to go get their
23 weapons. But they pretty much had—we had Starlight Scope and like a sixty-foot tower
24 that the guys stood up there at night and watched, and so they can alert people and they
25 could go get their M16s, but I kept mine with me all the time. 95th Evacuation Hospital's
26 a little different. They did not hand your weapons out unless you had guard duty,
27 however with us being hit every third day, we had ready access to our M16s.

28 JS: What was your first impressions of the unit itself there, the 26th—I mean 22nd?
29 Excuse me. You don't have to talk about specific names if you would prefer not to, but
30 could you talk a little bit I guess about the unit and some of the personalities that you ran
31 into?

1 TC: When they picked me up and we drove through the camp, they were under a
2 mortar attack at the time, and we got in there without being hit but it was a little bit
3 harrowing, and they closed the gate as we came through. Then of course once the mortar
4 attack, they said there probably wouldn't be one for a couple more days. Well, that night
5 we had another one. But I drew my M16, I also drew my sheets and my pillow, and they
6 found me a hooch and I buddied up. I remember they were showing a movie that night.
7 They had gotten a movie in, and they were going to be showing it in the middle of the
8 compound and I was not concentrating on the movie, so I went over and sit down. There
9 was this one black guy, and he was a sergeant E-7, and he was like a unit chaplain type
10 thing, and I was talking to him. He had been in World War II, and he was telling me an
11 interesting story about how God stepped in and saved his life when the Japanese and him
12 met face-to-face, and they looked at each other and neither one of them would shoot each
13 other, and the Japanese just turned and walked off, and that's why he became a chaplain.
14 I was asking him about rocket and mortar attacks, and I said, "How often?" And he said,
15 "Well," he said, "You will start getting hit first, then you'll hear the siren later," but he
16 said, "In these other areas and towns like Da Nang and Saigon, the sirens would go off
17 first and then you would get hit." So, I was sitting there talking to him, and all of a
18 sudden, he got up and started running and left me sitting there, and I'm sitting there
19 twiddling my fingers like, what did I say? You know? He saw the rockets coming in and
20 then they started shouting, "Incoming, incoming," and everybody was gone, so I didn't
21 even know where the bunker was. So, I ran about fifty yards, I jumped over this little
22 berm, and I landed on one of those thousand-gallon full bladder of JP-4 fuel and bounced,
23 and then I didn't realize what it was, and I just laid there. The rockets went over about a
24 hundred yards over and exploded and there was three of them, three different explosions
25 and one of them hit right in the center of the compound, right at the entrance of the
26 bunker. No one was injured at that one, but there was occasions where we had some
27 people wounded and injured, but as far as that night went, there was no one injured. But I
28 learned the next day where the bunkers were, didn't take me long.

29 JS: I guess, did you begin your work or your duties the next morning?

30 TC: Yeah, the next morning we had to be there at seven o'clock and of course we
31 met, and they introduced me to all the staffing and everything and told me what to expect.

1 It wasn't too many hours before we had casualties coming in and starting to actually
2 work on stripping them down, getting the IV started, and also prepping them for surgery.
3 They went through the Receiving area once the helicopters brought them in or the
4 ambulance brought them in. They brought them into the Receiving area. They prepped
5 them, and then we took them, and we further prepped them, and then we set up all the
6 instruments and tools, and we went started operating on them. Some of the surgeries was
7 short, some of them were ten and twelve hours long, depends on how bad of a wounded
8 guy you received. I know there was one guy that we operated on him for like ten hours,
9 he had lost both legs had to be amputated, one arm and the other arm was tremendously
10 mangled. He had a chest wound, he had shrapnel in the wound in the abdomen, and
11 hundreds of shrapnel wounds. We worked on him for like ten hours, and that was
12 probably my first three or four days there, and after they removed him and took him by
13 helicopter to Da Nang and then flew him to Cam Ranh Bay to a hospital down there. The
14 very night that he was arrived there, Sappers came in and blew up the ward and he was
15 killed that night. A couple of days, on that particular first day that he got down to that
16 other hospital unit. They killed about eight or ten wounded guys and a couples nurses—
17 err not nurses but other medics and that type thing that was on the ward, but this guy died
18 as a result, and we had worked ten hours to save him. But you know I think it was—they
19 told us about it, and I think it was just the merciful thing for him. I never forget, he was
20 probably 6'6" when he came into the operating room, 6'5", 6'6" and then he went out
21 there maybe four foot tall because he lost both his legs. He was a black guy. Just very
22 thin and I still see his face today.

23 JS: Had your training you had gone through and the work that you had done there
24 at Fort Bragg, had it prepared you for dealing with casualties of this sort?

25 TC: Yeah, the military training at Fort Bragg and then San Antonio, the medical
26 training, had me pretty much prepared but I was, as a twenty, twenty-one year old kid,
27 and twenty-one's kind of old to be in Vietnam by the standards, but I was like twenty-one
28 when I was over there and I tell you, I saw wounds that I never thought that I would see
29 people torn up like that. But you learned to grip with it, and deal with it. I remember
30 working five straight days without any sleep because of an incident going on in the A Sau
31 Valley and your clothes was absolutely just saturated with blood, and dried, and when

1 you flexed your arms the flakes of blood just flaked off like snow, red snow, and you
2 were so dirty, and nasty, and stinking, and just blood crunched. You were just absolutely
3 in bad shape; you were a walking zombie because three or four days with no sleep is
4 around the clock. People did not realize that it wasn't like that the whole time, but that
5 particular incident that they had in the A Sau Valley was bad enough where it was one of
6 those times that everybody had to suffer.

7 JS: I know you've talked about being pretty busy the day after you arrived, but
8 how were you received as a new guy? Were you trusted right away, or was there some
9 sort of proving that you had to go through before others would trust you?

10 TC: Well, the first thing your fatigues were very bright green. You know they
11 weren't faded or anything, so they knew you were a newbie because they hadn't even
12 been washed yet. Knew you was a newbie, so you were worthy of being watched but
13 after a couple of weeks, I think you were kind of okay once your fatigues got washed and
14 they started fading, and you started blending in and started proving yourself. You had
15 to—your guys with you would kind of mess with you the first week or two, you know in
16 the hooch and calling you, "Newbie, newbie, newbie" you know, then finally that just
17 went away. But after being hit every third night with the rockets and mortars and standing
18 there operating on an individual when a mortar comes through, the roof and sticks in the
19 floor and fails to explode and you stand your ground. You don't move, and you stay
20 there, and you operated on the individual and finish the surgery without exploding and
21 have to call the EOD [Explosive Ordinance Disposal] and I think you kind of proved
22 yourself. Of course, with the ground attacks and the people that come into the compound,
23 even the enemy come in to be treated and they treated them because some of them didn't
24 wear uniforms you know. They would take them off and just wear casual pajamas and
25 that type of thing. But you knew, you knew who the enemy was.

26 JS: How was morale at the time that you arrived?

27 TC: Well, morale was absolutely—it was really good. There was a thing called
28 Vietnamization that was just been announced, so they finally announced that the South
29 Vietnamese would be taking over the military duties, and the Americans would be going
30 home, the units would be coming home, and so we knew that about three or four weeks
31 prior to the unit closing down, that said the announcements would be made soon about

1 units coming home. So, the 22nd Surge was one of the first units slated to come home, so
2 they slated a date for August the 20th, 1969. I remind you I got there the 1st of July, so
3 that was going to be six weeks from that point in time. During that six weeks, we had a
4 lot of ground incursions as well as a lot of things going on in the A Sau Valley. During
5 that five day deal that I was telling you about earlier where we were up, a couple days
6 later the sergeant first class from the 101st Airborne Division came down to our unit and
7 he wanted to see his wounded guys from the 101st Airborne Division. I was one of the
8 first persons that he run into, and he asked my name, and I told him, and he said, “Well,
9 you did a great job on my guys,” and patted me on the back and all that, you know and all
10 that, but I didn’t realize he was on a fishing expedition. He was actually looking for
11 medics because during that five days, he had five medics that were killed. So that
12 afternoon I got a notification that me and five other guys would be TDY’ed [Temporary
13 Duty] to the 101st Airborne Division to help replace their medics until more medics could
14 be brought in and got up to snuff. So, where they’re blowing smoke up your rear end and
15 patting you on the back for doing such a good job, they were going to sucker punch you
16 and send you up to the 101st Airborne Division to go out with them because they were
17 short, and the fact that they announced Vietnamization, our unit was closing down and
18 the unit was going home, you thought that you were being put into harm’s way, and you
19 were already in harm’s way because of all the rockets and mortaring. But the thing about
20 it is, the nights that they hit our unit they let the 101st Airborne Division on both sides of
21 that thousand foot mountain go, but when they rocketed and mortared them, we got
22 risked. So, we could see the rocket attacks on them. They could see it on us. Sure, enough
23 we got TDY’ed up there for twenty-one days but only spent twenty days with them.

24 JS: How long into your tour was this? That you were picked for this duty?

25 TC: Probably within ten days or less.

26 JS: Oh wow. Could you talk I guess a little bit about that experience, and what
27 that was like?

28 TC: They took us up there by Jeep, and they dropped us off, and then they said
29 two days later they were going out on the mission, and we were transported out by the
30 159th Assault Helicopter battalion down the A Sau Valley. I had already been up there
31 to—on a blood run mission to pick up some blood that had been gunned in, I had already

1 gone up there by helicopter and had seen the unit and brought the blood back because we
2 went through just tons and tons of whole blood. We even had to give in our unit itself.
3 But when we got up there, they just briefed us on what they were doing, the sergeant said,
4 “You just hang loose with us. You just go where we go.” “Okay, we’ll do it.” They
5 packed us on a helicopter, on a chinook, and flew us into A Sau Valley, let us off the base
6 of this mountain and said, “We’ll pick you up in three or four days, five days. Be back at
7 this point,” and I pretty much I was a follower. I wasn’t in on the loop of things, I just
8 there to take care of the guys wounded. They went back up on this mountain and didn’t
9 realize it turned out to be that Hamburger Hill originally, I don’t remember the number,
10 nine-seventy-nine-eight-something, I don’t remember the number on it, but I do that one
11 time I cross-referenced that, but we went back up on that as far as I didn’t get to the top
12 or anything but stayed down about halfway and toward the bottom of the base. They went
13 back up there and fought as far as going back up there to take it again. I almost made it to
14 the top but not quite. This absolutely—we knew it by number only, but the place was just
15 tore up from the previous incursion and I remember laying up there with the helicopter,
16 once they got our helicopters there and taking wounded off the top, but I didn’t have to
17 climb the mountain or anything like that, we just picked them up at the base or the top.

18 JS: Did you treat wounded in the field while you were—

19 TC: Yeah, we did for those five days out there, and I didn’t have to go out on any
20 other missions, and finally I just told them, “I need to go back to my old unit,” but we had
21 one guy that would sit down on a punji stick while we were walking, and just beating the
22 bushes. I don’t know where we were going other than just walked, walked, walked up
23 and down these mountains. One guy sit down. They gave us a break, and he sat down on
24 this punji stick, and it went up his rectal anal sphincter, up into his abdomen. He was a
25 black guy, probably about 6’2” and he was in dead seriously pain. He was in a bad shape.
26 There was another guy that got jumped on by a tiger. I saw the guy after they called for
27 my supplies, in fact I took up extra supplies to him in mind because he had just been
28 shredded. Probably five thousand stitches ended up in the guy. It was amazing. It was just
29 different thing that happened, I mean there were guys that were wounded, guys that was
30 sitting on punji sticks, stepping on punji sticks, and just being injured. But there wasn’t a

1 whole lot just walking around in the field that got injured that I had to treat, but there was
2 a lot that got wounded up on that mountain.

3 JS: I know you mentioned being out just for five days during that time, what did
4 you do for the rest of the time that you were TDY assigned?

5 TC: I stayed up there and just hung around, and they kept saying, "Well, we're
6 going to have this mission, this mission here," and then those missions didn't take place. I
7 just kind of made myself invisible. Finally, I just kept saying, "I want to go back to my
8 unit. I want to go back to my unit," and they finally complied and sent me back. They got
9 their replacements, and I went back to the unit. But I only had to go out in the field one
10 time, and they must've felt sorry for me, I guess.

11 JS: I know you also mentioned a little bit early that there was the possibility of
12 going out flying DUSTOFF [Dedicated Unhesitating Service To Our Fighting Forces],
13 did you do that very often?

14 TC: Yeah, we did, and I did for the first couple of two or three weeks and then it
15 got to where we were so busy from then on, I couldn't do it that much anymore. But we
16 did go out and pick up some guys one night. One particular night out on the A Sau Valley
17 and I don't even remember what hill it was because I didn't have privy to a lot of that
18 information. The crew chiefs and the pilots knew exactly where they were going, I just
19 was a sort of a passenger that treated the wounded. Wasn't part of the team as far as
20 mechanical part of the helicopter went. But I carried an M16 with me because I wasn't a
21 conscientious objector, but I do know that we brought back people and we had a lot of
22 holes in our helicopters at times. One helicopter wouldn't even take off once we landed.
23 It was smoking so bad and dripping so much fuel, but it made it back. That pretty much
24 done it in for me, as far as just wanting to fly anymore.

25 JS: I guess getting back to your duties as an operating room technician, could you
26 talk a little bit more I guess about the specific duties there, and what your daily routine
27 would be like, if there was such a thing as a normal day.

28 TC: After breakfast you would go and you'd check in, and you'd check in with
29 the sergeant and the NCOIC [Non-commissioned Officer In Charge] of the operating
30 room. They would give you different duties and tell you what your roles and
31 responsibilities were. Sometimes you had to makeup supply kits, and clean the

1 instruments, and you would have to get the surgical packs put together, and have to have
2 a stockpile of sponges and tape and just have everything that you needed there to be able
3 to take care, to provide surgical instruments to the surgeon as well as yourself because
4 you had to have plenty of suture, and knew you were not only giving him the instruments,
5 the scalpels and the scissors and that type thing, but you were also helping work the
6 surgery. So, you had a multitude of functions to do. Most times the doctors just worked
7 independently, but if it was a bad case, it'd be two doctors and a couple techs, operating
8 room technicians, to help them. You basically sit around a lot waiting on the wounded to
9 come in, and just making sure once you got your duties and stuff caught up, you had free
10 time and as long as you were there to make sure that the preoperative things were done,
11 the postoperative things were done, and the surgical was going on. But you may operate
12 for twenty-four hours, and then be down for thirty-six. So, it depended on what was going
13 on in the field, with the different operations that the military had going on. We had a
14 mess hall that food was very poor. It was not very good. I'd rather eat C-rations than I
15 would in the mess hall. We captured ten tons of rice and we had rice for breakfast, rice
16 pudding for lunch, rice and gravy for dinner, and rice for midnight snack if you pulled
17 guard duty. We had rice cakes, rice pudding, rice pie, and I didn't eat rice for five years
18 after I come back home. As long as you were doing your job—the number one thing was
19 take care of the soldier. Get the fighting strength back to the field or give them a better
20 quality of life to get back home. That was preserved a fighting strength, and you were
21 very conscientious and aware of that. Now in our off-time, we could get a beer for fifteen
22 cents, we could get a mixed drink for a double for a quarter, if they had ice and if they
23 had a chaser and then if they could get the alcohol. But you could pretty much get an ice
24 cold beer even on the unit because we had Sergeant Smelcher who was an entrepreneur
25 who made that happen by trading things for alcohol. We could actually, you know—two
26 dollars you could get intoxicated. I didn't do marijuana or drugs, but I drank my ample
27 amounts of alcohol.

28 JS: Speaking of drugs, was drugs an issue at all?

29 TC: Drugs was a big issue, especially for your lower ranked personnel. I think it
30 was proportional to the race too, and the black race had a tendency to want to do a lot
31 more drugs. I'm not throwing off on the black race, but the most drugs I saw over there

1 was with the blacks by far. Again, not quite as bad with the white guys but the white guys
2 were more into heroin and the hardcore drugs whereas the blacks would do more
3 marijuana. They would do some hash and that type thing, but there was a lot of race
4 issues that went on there as well as drugs, but I didn't partake of the drugs. But I would
5 take a drink.

6 JS: Let's see, you've mentioned—well, let me ask you this. Did you guys only
7 treat wounded from combat, or would you also treat people suffering from other illness as
8 well?

9 TC: We treated the South Vietnamese as well as North Vietnamese and the Viet
10 Cong, depended on whoever was brought in there, civilian, enemy or whatever, was
11 treated and they all received the same amount of treatment, the best of everyone's ability.
12 With the small unit, there was the 85th Evac in Phu Bai and we were south of Phu Bai out
13 in the field, so we were the closest unit that they could get to first. So, we were the closest
14 unit to the A Sau Valley so in fifteen, ten to fifteen minutes they could have you there at
15 that hospital. If they had to fly in to Phu Bai, they had another five minute flight or more,
16 and the golden hour could be lost in that amount of time. The 85th Evac got its large
17 amount of wounded also but being a MUST unit or a portable MASH [Mobile Army
18 Surgical Hospital] unit, we got the first ones, we got the worst ones quickest. So, we
19 received an influx of all types of soldiers, and anything and everything.

20 JS: Were there special precautions for treating the enemy soldiers?

21 TC: Looking for booby traps and knives as well hand grenades and that type of
22 precautions that you would take with them. But you didn't want to turn your back on the
23 South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, or the VC and it was hard to tell a VC from a
24 civilian. But the NVA had a particular type of colored uniform, you knew their patches
25 and stuff wasn't from around here, so you knew which ones was the NVA. They had a
26 color coding of their own. The South Vietnamese Army you could pretty much tell, but a
27 lot of the same guys that cut your hair during the day were the Viet Cong's at night. We
28 had a VC woman who worked in our admissions position, and we found out she was
29 giving counts of how many wounded was coming into our hospital, both American as
30 well as NVA, Viet Cong, and giving out statistics. We called her and they hauled her off.
31 You couldn't turn your back on anybody, we had hoochie moms that came into this unit,

1 we paid them ten dollars a month to wash our clothes. If they didn't come to work that
2 day, you knew you were in trouble with the rockets and mortars. If they told you, if they
3 liked you, they told you, "Be in the bunker at two o'clock in the morning," you better be
4 in the bunker at two o'clock in the morning.

5 JS: As far as treating the enemy, was there any resentment about treating the
6 enemy?

7 TC: Yeah, a lot of people have mixed emotions, I had some mixed emotions when
8 down at the 95th Evac when I got down there about it. But you know, you know that they
9 had—you knew that they had killed some Americans because some of them would be
10 wearing the rings tied up with—actually wrapped with like tape on the inside of the ring
11 because their fingers are a lot smaller than American soldiers. But when you have a
12 lieutenant that graduated from—

13 JS: West Point?

14 TC: Well, West Point, or a ring on, a college ring on with their initials on it and
15 you track it down, once you've cut it off the finger of a Viet Cong, and you knew that he
16 died two or three weeks before then, when you track it and made the calls back on the
17 MARS [Military Auxiliary Radio System] telephone system back to the school, and
18 found out who the initials belonged to and find out it was a second lieutenant killed a
19 couple of weeks before, you knew that that guy had something to do with it. That actually
20 happened, I mean that happened with us at the 95th. The poor guy, he died in the room in
21 there, but it was an emotional time. The enemy was in and out of the hospital all the time.

22 JS: So, would they come in as Prisoners of War and also come in on their own
23 volition?

24 TC: They would come into the 95th—of course we haven't gotten to 95th yet, but
25 the 95th which was down in Da Nang, they would come in and we had an interpreter, and
26 he could tell immediately if they were NVA and also carrying AK-47s as well as the
27 color of the uniform. They would have wounded or be having some type of medical
28 problem, and they would all show up between one o'clock and five o'clock in the
29 morning. They would sneak in, sneak out. It was kind of a hairy situation.

1 JS: How about supplies and equipment, did you all have everything that you
2 needed? You know this time with the 22nd Surgical Hospital, did you guys have
3 everything? Were there times where there were shortages?

4 TC: We had everything that we needed, Well, you know, we didn't have air
5 conditioning and that type thing in our hooches or anything, but we had plenty of C-
6 rations and we had plenty of food. The food wasn't good, but it was there. We had plenty
7 of surgical supplies, and they were a bunch that could have things done. They could make
8 particular types of towers, so sunbathing towers to get the Seabees [CBs, Construction
9 Battalion] to come in to do, swap for cases of liquor for example. They could have
10 different things, but the ingenuity of the American soldiers is amazing, what all they
11 could do. Your parents and that type of thing sent us a lot of extra type of foods and
12 things from home that we all shared in, so we had most of the comforts. Even had a fan in
13 my hooch because we did have electricity in the hooch from the MUST packs which was
14 portable generators. But we had plenty of things, we didn't go without, even though I did
15 crave a Krispy Kreme donut from Charlotte, North Carolina, from Krispy Kreme was the
16 only one around here at the time, and a cheeseburger from the grill in Lincolnton which
17 was the best in the world. But those are the two things that I craved, but as far as having
18 supplies and food, we did well. I might add that on August 20th, we had been slated for us
19 to go home to close the unit down.

20 JS: Right.

21 TC: My mother sent me a paper, "Nixon declares reduction in the War," units
22 coming home and the people coming home. We packed the unit up, the 22nd Surge up,
23 and the guys left but they forgot seven of us and left us back there on that little football-
24 sized field, air of unit, and the helicopters come in and picked the 22nd Surge up and took
25 it to who-knows-where to be shipped back to the United States. But they left us and
26 forgot us, and they left us there for like I think it was eighteen or twenty days also, that
27 we were there before we got out of there. The thing, I may have told you earlier about our
28 government being corrupt, well field unit and units come home, people come home was
29 just announced in the paper, but the military guys, the doctors, nurses, medics, and
30 technicians and sport people, were all reassigned, not one single person came home from
31 the unit.

1 JS: So basically, it was just the unit colors or the name of the unit but none of the
2 people?

3 TC: That's correct.

4 JS: Okay. So, you had been I guess in-country by that point, how long before you
5 were reassigned?

6 TC: Six to seven weeks, I think from last of June to August the 20th, and then
7 three more weeks would put it probably two months and a half or so and finally we got
8 out of there one night. We woke up one morning to fifteen thousand NVA camped out in
9 the A Sau Valley out there just a thousand feet from us. When I was going out to brush
10 my teeth that morning and only seven of us left behind, and watched them set up mortar
11 tubes and started firing on in. There was probably a thousand campfires for fifteen
12 thousand people out there, and it was just lit up in the valley out there, and then the
13 helicopters started coming over immediately, the gunships firing and artillery going off.
14 We boarded, taking a shower, brushing our teeth, and we grabbed our stuff and we hauled
15 out of there, went to the nearest artillery unit and they eventually got us out of there, but
16 last thing I remember before I left the 22nd was the B-52s dropping bombs out there on all
17 these fifteen thousand people that was camped out. Hardcore NVA. We had been alerted
18 from—well, weeks before everybody else left, we had been alerted that there was a group
19 moving from North Vietnam that was coming through this area. They just didn't know
20 when. But we found out.

21 JS: Was there any sort of explanation as far as what happened, as why you all
22 were simply left out there?

23 TC: The thing about it is, the company commander who I talked to just a couple
24 of years ago, Ronald A. Weir, he was a young captain. Actually, he was a major, Major
25 Ronald A. Weir, but he was young from what I thought at the time for being in Vietnam,
26 he was probably in his thirties. He basically just—they had told us that the NVA were
27 moving down, but then everybody else had to be out of there to go to their units, so
28 helicopters and buses and stuff like that picked up, but they left seven of us behind to
29 close down the unit and to pack it up, to close it up, so the helicopters could come in and
30 hook it up and take them out. The helicopters came in to took them out, but nobody came
31 back to get us. So, we don't know where the lapse in the communication was. We

1 should've gone out with the last helicopter, but that was not one that was transportable
2 for seven people. It was like a heavy-lift helicopter that just took a piece of equipment
3 out, you know. So, there was no room for individuals, and we waited, waited, and waited
4 and nobody ever came. But we had plenty of C-rations is what we lived off of, for the
5 next almost three weeks.

6 JS: What did y'all do during that time?

7 TC: We just hang around and slept, and just waited. Waited because there was
8 nowhere to go except a mile away, but see our problem was that we had no
9 communications, if we'd have gone to the next unit, we didn't know the sign,
10 countersign, we could've been shot you know that type thing, or involved in a fire fight,
11 so we were kind of just staying, waiting on them to come pick us up, we were patient you
12 know. Once we were forced out of there, when we woke up to those 15K out there, that
13 forced the issue and we had to go to that artillery unit. We did not know the sign or
14 countersign, but we were able to convince them to let us come in.

15 JS: Once you arrived there, how long were you there before you were sent out?

16 TC: Immediately, they hooked us up with a transportation, a deuce-and-a-half,
17 and took us up to Phu Bai to the airport, and then we got our rides to Da Nang by
18 helicopter.

19 JS: Were most of the people, from the 22nd, were most of them reassigned to the
20 95th? Or were they spread out differently?

21 TC: Only one guy was assigned with me, and that was Jay Corey who was from
22 Elmira, New York who lives currently in my hometown, he moved down here in the late
23 '70s when the economy got bad in New York. I keep in touch with him pretty much
24 monthly, and he and I went to Da Nang together, we were the only two that went to Da
25 Nang. Everybody else pretty much went to other units scattered throughout Vietnam.

26 JS: Well, I guess could you tell me about the 95th, and your arrival there?

27 TC: When we walked in, we got three days of R&R [Rest and Recuperation]
28 actually which we just took, and then was supposed to been there at the 95th three weeks
29 earlier, but like I said they forgot to come get us, so we took three days at China Beach
30 and then we moseyed down to 95th and we walked in, and the first person I saw was
31 Colonel Al Albrite who I met, was the company hospital commander, and he said he was

1 from Havana, Cuba originally. He got a sergeant and a lieutenant to come over there and
2 we looked like we were dirty, nasty, muddy, grungy, you know. Had lost fifteen pounds
3 being up there because C-rations and the first thing he said was, “Set your clothes down,
4 set your duffel bags down and they’re going to take you down there and give you two
5 steaks each.” So, this lieutenant walked us down to the Officers Club and they cooked us
6 two steaks each to eat because we were so hungry. Then they came back and assigned us
7 a bunk and a hooch. Took a shower, changed clothes, and we got all of our clothes
8 washed up. Then we went to the mess hall and ate again, then we checked in officially.
9 The first thing that I noticed at the 95th was there was flush toilets whereas they were
10 outhouses at the 22nd. That was amazing, I said, “I’m going to like this place.”

11 JS: Before going further as far as what the 95th looked like, could you talk I guess
12 a little bit about Colonel Albrite? I know during the reunion you and I talked about him a
13 little bit; would you mind talking a little bit more about Colonel Albrite?

14 TC: Colonel Albrite was born in Havana, Cuba and migrated up to the United
15 States in the ‘40s to get a better education. He made the military a career. My first contact
16 with him, I just thought he was a cool, cool man. He had turned out to be a physician to
17 the Presidents of Eisenhower, Truman, I don’t think he was with Kennedy, but I think
18 Nixon and a couple others throughout the years with his stay at Walter Reed Hospital.
19 Actually, they gave him three million dollars because he was an Eye, Ears, Nose and
20 Throat doctor and—Ears, Nose and Throat, not eyes, but Ears, Nose and Throat and the
21 military was suffering from earaches and a lot of soldiers would be down because of ear
22 problems. A lot of kids were having the ear problems and earaches and that type of thing,
23 so they gave him three million dollars to perform a study since he was a very smart man.
24 He invented the ear tubes for children, and also invented the first ear drops for people’s
25 ears to clear up infections. So that’s what he’s well-noted for and known for, and his
26 contribution to not only taking care of a lot of patients for no charge when he had his
27 private practice in Texas after his military experience. But he was a good hospital
28 commander, a good inventor, and we contribute the success of the ear tubes, and the first
29 ear drops due to him. His wife is named Amy Albrite, and she was an aristocrat from
30 New York, and she was a well-known Bridge player ranked high. Amelia Albrite, A-M-
31 E-L-I-A, Albrite, A-L-B-R-I-T-E. Well, known ranked Bridge player. They made a great

1 team and was good people until they both passed away four years ago, in 2007 and 2008.
2 Colonel Albrite passed away in September 2007, and Amy passed away in February
3 2008.

4 JS: I guess as far as the hospital itself is concerned, I know you talked about it
5 being more of a permanent facility with flush toilets and all that, could you talk a little bit
6 more I guess about what the hospital itself looked like and the facilities and all of that?

7 TC: The colonel's facilities, he had a two-bedroom trailer that he lived in. It was
8 air conditioned, and then of course when he left Colonel Weiner came in. Colonel Albrite
9 was well-liked and loved, and Colonel Weiner was hated and despised. But the hospital
10 itself was made up of Quonset huts that had different—they were all the same size, but
11 your x-ray division, your dental, your surgical boards and that type of thing were
12 probably thirty, forty-person beds capable—Quonset huts, air condition, as well as the
13 emergency room, the receiving area of the hospital, was all these white Quonset huts.
14 White reflective to keep the heat from beating down on them and absorbing heat. The
15 unit housing quarters were two-tiered wooden buildings, two floors tall, that probably
16 slept forty on a floor. It was probably eight of those for the enlisted, and then about four
17 or five for the doctors and nurses quarters. Each one of them—and the doctors and nurses
18 quarters, they were separated to smaller units for privacy, but all the enlisted men, all
19 their units was dormitory type huts. It was best to sleep on the lower bunks. It was on the
20 upper because of the tin on top of the sleeping facilities. The facility was much, much
21 better with flush toilets and running water, that type of thing, than it was at the 22nd. Even
22 the small, bedroom-size, six-man hooches in Phu Bai compared to a forty-man dormitory
23 type building, two-story building, was much nicer quarters. You had your own little
24 space, but it was not individual spaces. It was just your bunk and then your little two foot
25 space or three foot. It was bad if you had a rocket or mortar attack to try to get out of
26 there because you had to go down two floors of steps. The hospital was laid out in these
27 Quonset huts probably twelve to fifteen in a row, times two rows for the length of the
28 beach. Now it was right on the beach at China Beach there at Da Nang at the base of
29 Monkey Mountain. Before that, it moved there. It was a MUST unit like the one at Phu
30 Bai, at the base of Marble Mountain, which was six miles south on the beach, south of
31 where the fixed site was. But once the MUST unit was dilapidated, they were working at

1 the old 95th Evac, the MUST unit, and during the daytime they would go up and be
2 working and building the new hospital. Took them about three months to get it built,
3 along with Seabees help and other peoples help. They had to work two different
4 hospitals, and then this one, the fixed site, was like a 450 bed hospital.

5 JS: How about things like food and things like that there at the 95th?

6 TC: 95th had a big mess hall. The food was much better there. It was very edible.
7 It was very tasty and good, and the chefs and the cooks there were very good. They did
8 special cakes for different types of year, and for Thanksgiving, turkeys and Christmas
9 and Valentine's Day they would do cakes and special goodies and type thing. It was more
10 like a restaurant than it was a mess hall. The food was very good, I would have to say at
11 the 95th.

12 JS: You talked about Colonel Albrite, could you talk I guess a little bit about
13 some of the other personalities you ran into here at the 95th? And again, you don't have to
14 use names if you would prefer not to.

15 TC: Okay, that's fine. Carolee Day, the real tall nurse that you met at the reunion,
16 Carolee and I worked together in receiving, I did not work in the operating room at the
17 95th Evac, I worked in the receiving area where we brought patients off the helicopter and
18 brought them in to prep them for surgery. We started IVs, treated their wounds, did the
19 breathment, and took care of the minor shrapnel wounds, and preparing them for surgery.
20 Carolee and I worked together along with Jay Corey who came from the 95th Evac, so
21 that's where we all hooked up together. The physicians there were fantastic. They were as
22 good or better than the ones even at the 22nd Surge and all of them were top notch and
23 well-trained. But the 95th Evac was more like a hospital of today's environment, where
24 they wore their class-A uniforms or either their khakis, and sometimes they wore the
25 scrub greens and that type thing for the surgical people, but most times they would be
26 treating patients just like they do here in the United States. They had an Eye, Ear, Nose
27 clinic. They had different clinics that was going on. They had an ENT [Eye, Nose and
28 Throat] clinic. They had different routine treatment of patients with gout, with injuries
29 just the routine injuries, treated car accident victims as well as the wounded soldiers and
30 civilians. People don't realize that we treated a lot of car accidents because of the people
31 in the vehicles having accidents, the deuce-and-a-half's, the military vehicles, the

1 motorcycles and civilians and all. There was a lot of accidents over there that was treated,
2 and a lot of people were killed.

3 JS: I know you talked about working in receiving, was a lot of that having to do
4 with things like triage?

5 TC: Yeah, it was, we did take the patients in, we triage them, we started IVs, we
6 triaged them, left the ones that was obviously mortal in a particular area. You monitor
7 them, kept them. You prepped the ones that needed to go to surgery immediately. You
8 put them in preoperative care. You segregated them by their wounds and that type thing.
9 But anyway, you knew exactly which ones needed immediate surgery, which ones could
10 wait, and which ones were obviously mortal. So, you did break it down into those
11 categories. The people that I worked with—a lot of the people there was at the reunion,
12 most of those people were there during my time. There was doctors and surgeons there
13 that I worked with like Ray Brown, I think you may have even talked to him, I'm not sure
14 if you are the Major Cowell talked to him. I think it was Major Cowell, but anyways he's
15 the one, that guys that wore his uniform.

16 JS: Right, right.

17 TC: Ray was a nephew of the star anesthesiologist and he put people to sleep. Ray
18 was a good friend over there, and we pulled some shenanigans on people, and he would
19 suggest that we do things where they didn't aspirate and die, like one guy got drunk and
20 was keeping everybody awake and he passed out. We cast the guy from his head to his
21 toe with cast material, and we hauled him down to the emergency room and threw him
22 on a bed, and he raised his, "Better turn him over on his stomach in case he vomits, that
23 way he don't aspirate, and die because you guys don't need to go to prison." But Ray,
24 Ray was—he was a cool dude over there. He really was. He was a captain over there and
25 he was just one of the coolest doctors I've ever known.

26 JS: Again, how was morale here at the 95th?

27 TC: Morale at the 95th was very good because you were on the beach. You
28 couldn't go on the beach or anything like that, but you had a beautiful view. We still got
29 rockets, we still got mortars, we even had to do our guard duty down there, every third
30 day you had to guard duty at night. It still had its problems and had the problems with a
31 lot of drugs. There was a lot more drugs seen down there then I did see at the 22nd

1 because they bought hash in blocks the size of small pound loaves of bread because it's
2 dirt cheap, and they smoked a lot of dope. But for the most part, you steered clear from
3 those guys. We had one guy named Rocky. He rocked back and forth constantly because
4 he was so strung out on drugs. He ended up cutting a guy up with his bush knife and
5 Rocky disappeared and we never did hear from him again. So, you had to watch yourself,
6 even with who you associated with because there was some danger elements there,
7 especially with the guys on drugs.

8 JS: Were there racial tensions there as well?

9 TC: There was, one episode I went up in a guard tower and a black guy come up
10 there and he said he would kill me before the night's out because he didn't like white
11 people. I said, "Well, you may die before me," and we pulled our M16s on each other. He
12 just didn't like white people, and he started it, and so I just left and went back and
13 reported him and they took him out of the guard duty because you don't need to be
14 fighting yourselves when you're trying to stay alive, keep everybody alive you know.
15 You had to twelve hours of guard duty every third day; it was required till the last month
16 I was there. Then they brought the Marines in to do guard duty.

17 JS: Could you talk I guess a little bit just about what guard duty would be like?

18 TC: At 6:30 you would muster, and they would have a briefing, then you went out
19 to your guard tower, and it was reported at seven o'clock. You climbed this forty-five
20 foot tower, sandbags all around it, and there was two of you. You'd basically sit there till
21 dark, and then you would alternate doing staying awake and alert two to three hours on
22 duty, and then you would take a nap and the other person would do his part of it. So, one
23 of you was sleeping at all times, and one of you was waking every three hours or so till
24 the next morning. If you got into any firefights or if you had any problems, you were both
25 awake. The only problem with guard duty is if you got into something and you fired up
26 your ten rounds of—your ten magazines of ammo—you couldn't get resupplied,
27 somebody had to go get ammo and get back. That happened a couple of times, but it was
28 not fun. But the problem with, no one wanted to guard duty. If it was monsoon season
29 and if it was raining and it was fifty-nine degrees, that was cold over there, and if no one
30 wanted to do it they would pay you seventy-five dollars to a hundred dollars to do it for
31 them, and you could make a lot of money to send home. But you had guard duty every

1 third night, and you had to work your day shift. It was off that next day during the
2 daytime. You then had to go back and report the next day, so you still worked six days a
3 week. Guard duty was intense because we were surrounded by three villages, one on the
4 north side of the beach, one on the south of the beach, one at the back side of the
5 peninsula we were on, and plus Marble Mountain and Monkey Mountain being right
6 there, Monkey Mountain where rockets could be fired off or mortars. But you also had
7 the villages that didn't like each other that would mortar each other too, and they would
8 go over us sometime.

9 JS: We are coming up on two hours here, did you want to go ahead and take a
10 break for today? Or would you like to continue?

11 TC: Yeah, we can wind this up in a couple minutes if you want to?

12 JS: Okay, well, I should say that I have some questions about after Vietnam as
13 well, if you don't mind.

14 TC: Okay, can we take that up then tomorrow?

15 JS: Sure yeah.

16 TC: Or whenever?

17 JS: Yeah, we can do it tomorrow if you'd like. Let me go ahead and stop the
18 recording.

Interview with Terry Caskey

Session [2] of [2]

Date 13 May 2011

1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University
2 continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Terry Caskey. Today is May 13th, 2011,
3 and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off, we were
4 talking about your time with the 95th Medical Evac hospital, and I know you and I were
5 just talking a moment ago and you were mentioning that you wanted to talk a little bit
6 about your responsibilities in receiving when patients came in. Do you want to begin
7 there? Talk a little bit about that?

8 TC: Certainly. We worked twelve hour shifts, mandatory six days a week, and
9 when we would come in in the morning or even at night, at 6:30PM at night, we would
10 basically be reassigned to the receiving area which is called the emergency room
11 nowadays. Basically, our role and responsibility was to make sure that supplies were in
12 well need in the emergency room, with the proper IV kits, IV fluids, scalpels, suction
13 tubes for the chest and all the variety of bandages as well as gauze dressing. Everything
14 that we needed in there we pulled from CMS [Central Materials Section], Central
15 Materials Section, which was another division of the hospital who maintained the
16 supplies. And once our supplies were all fixed and ready to go for the day, we would
17 usually start receiving casualties. Now majority of the casualties would come in by
18 helicopter on traumatic firefights, gunshot wounds, explosion-type injuries. Our role was
19 first to take a stretcher on a gurney, go out to the helicopter, wait on its arrival. Once the
20 helicopter did a hot landing and was still running, we would approach the helicopter from
21 a safe area and unload the mass casualties from the helicopter and then return them to the
22 emergency room and begin to strip their clothes off of them. At that point in time, once it
23 was determined that the clothes were off and the wounds were located, we would
24 immediately start an IV. The doctors, of course, would be there also along with the
25 nursing. So, it could be a medic, a doctor, or a nurse who is starting the IV. Basically, we
26 dealt with all types of helicopters on taking the patients off, we did from the Huey to the
27 Chinook, to the Navy workhorses, the big helicopters, and the Marine helicopters and I
28 don't know their numerics or their types. But they had mass casualty situations and they

1 would also drop head wounds off and severe chest wounds off at our hospital, so we
2 treated Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

3 JS: How busy would receiving generally be? Was it a case where at times it was
4 extremely busy, and other times there was nothing going on?

5 TC: Yeah, you had a lot of free time, sort of like sitting around waiting on grass to
6 grow. You would just sit around, and you would be sitting there playing cards, or just
7 stocking supplies, or shooting the bull, going visiting people in other areas of the
8 hospital. Or you would be doing projects like rinsing the blood out of the gurneys that
9 were outside with the hose pipe. The gurneys got very bloody, and those necessary
10 housecleaning projects had to be done, but you also had the military—the routine cases,
11 or the convalescent cases, walking in for treatment and you had the South Vietnamese
12 citizens and public coming in for routine exams and treatment. Also, we had an OGBYN
13 [Obstetrics and Gynecology] guy who delivered a lot of Vietnamese babies at our
14 hospital unit, so there was always something going on, there was times that we didn't
15 have anything to do, and in that spare time we would goof off and make toys.

16 JS: Were there any I guess any memorable patients that you can still remember,
17 that came through that you could possibly talk about?

18 TC: Yeah, one morning around four o'clock in the morning the NVA rocketed a
19 village, and we got about a dozen casualties, and I remember one South Vietnamese guy
20 who, apparently, was a businessman type. He was wearing a white shirt and a pair of
21 black pants, nice shoes, and he was complaining of abdominal pains and problems, and of
22 course he had blood on him. His whole family, some of them were dead, some of them
23 were wounded real bad, and totaled about twelve, thirteen people had been injured. But I
24 remember the guy because when I looked, we took his shirt off and cut his pants off, the
25 guy was complaining and holding his belly and it was swollen extremely. When I looked
26 at his belly, I could see a grey area just underneath his skin and it was probably the size
27 of two golf balls, but it was a solid piece, and it was a very greyish piece of material
28 underneath the skin, and it was hard as metal. As I looked at him, I was wondering, What
29 in the world is this? I couldn't put a grip onto what it was. So, once we got an IV started
30 on him, and the nurses and doctors tried twenty times, and then I got it on the twenty-first
31 time to stab this IV. Once we got the IV established, we rolled him over, and what it was.

1 It was a piece of a rocket that had gone through the guys back, through his intestines, and
2 had pushed on his abdomen, and pushed his abdomen up and it was the size of two golf
3 balls if you had two golf balls taped together. It looked more like a growth than anything.
4 The doctor just came over and just made a split, and just picked it out and then they took
5 him into the operating room and of course repaired all of his internal organs. But that was
6 one that I will never forget. The other one was, we had a guy who came in with severe
7 injuries, he was a Viet Cong, and he was wearing an American high school ring. He had
8 it taped up on his finger and we couldn't get it off, and finally we got it off. We checked,
9 of course the guy died in the room very shortly thereafter, but we checked, and it turned
10 out to be that the ring was taken off the guy that had been killed three weeks before, he
11 was a lieutenant in the field. We sent the ring back to the family. Those were the two
12 things that I remember as far as at the 95th on two specific cases that stand out.

13 JS: Another thing I wanted to ask you about, I know you had, even when we were
14 talking yesterday, you were talking about how the people there at the 95th—everyone at
15 the 95th respected Colonel Albrite but were not too fond of Colonel Weiner. Could you
16 talk a little bit about that, and why that was?

17 TC: Yeah, I think it was along October of 1969. Colonel Albrite departed the unit
18 and went back home, and he was replaced by Colonel Weiner. I remember that we had
19 guard duty one night and it was during the monsoons, and we were out there during the
20 monsoon with heavy raining, and typically we didn't stand out there. During the rain and
21 we had the pre-muster for guard duty instructions inside, but for some reason somebody
22 had done something wrong, and he mustered the whole unit out there, all the enlisted
23 men, some enlisted guy had done something. Don't even know what it was. But he got
24 everyone out there in knee-deep water and stood us at attention during the monsoon
25 season during a mortar attack. We all had to stand there at attention for five minutes and
26 then he released us, and most of them just walked off and he threatened to court martial a
27 lot of people. So that put a bad taste in a lot of people's mouth, that he could be so
28 negligent for so many people under his command, to get them in one—you remember the
29 old term, "Do not cluster together because one round will get you all", you diverse during
30 a rocket attack or a mortar attack and you do not cluster. That made some people mad,
31 and that night somebody threw a hand grenade underneath his trailer. The problem is that

1 he was not in that end of the trailer. It was not until we did our reunions in 2003 that I
2 found out who did the grenade tossing. Now I had thrown that out and talking to a friend,
3 and he stepped up and took responsibility of the role and responsibility, but that was
4 answered in 2003 that question, and I didn't realize it at the time who had done it.

5 JS: Was this—now you hear a lot of stories about attempted fraggings and things
6 like that, was this the only time that you saw something like this?

7 TC: Yeah, as a matter of fact I did hear the explosion and I went to investigate,
8 and then of course the MPs got there and they kind of cleared the area out and locked
9 everybody down for like twenty-four hours we couldn't do anything. That was the only
10 incidence of fragging that I was aware of, I wasn't a participant in it, but I did hear the
11 explosion. Didn't even know for many years afterwards, twenty-four years or so
12 afterwards, when it even happened or thirty-some years actually. But it was a shock to me
13 that happened—but I wasn't surprised because of the way the Colonel acted. I mean his
14 total disregard for the safety of his men was in question.

15 JS: What was—I know you mentioned being in shock, did you talk to others
16 about it, as far as did you hear other people's reactions to this happening?

17 TC: At the time when we were there, when it happened everybody wondered who
18 did it and we suspected maybe Rocky, the guy who was on drugs, or one of the other
19 persons that was strung out on drugs. And even this guy who did it was pretty much an
20 addict, he was heavily on drugs himself, but he was an x-ray technician. You just didn't
21 have an idea, but the buzz was you don't admit to it, nobody will ever know, and as far as
22 I know he never admitted to it over there.

23 JS: All right, well, given Colonel Weiner's impact and what he had done, did his
24 presence there and his decision making, did that have a negative impact on morale beyond
25 this fragging incident? Did you see other incidences of—?

26 TC: Well, it did for the enlisted guys because the officers and the nurses who
27 were also officers didn't have to get out there during that monsoon season and during that
28 attack. They were safe and sound in their little bunkers, but as far as the morale and the
29 E-5s and below, yeah, it's pretty detrimental. Even some of the sergeants first classes
30 were out there, and they didn't agree with it either. But you kind of blew it off and just

1 went on about your daily chores because it was just each day was just another day off the
2 three hundred sixty-five days and you just dealt with it. Just adapt and overcome.

3 JS: Is there anything else we should discuss regarding your time with the 95th
4 before talking about the end of your tour?

5 TC: Basically, it was a good unit. It was a much safer unit than the 22nd Surge and
6 I enjoyed my time there, the China Beach there, sitting out there pulling guard duty
7 overlooking the village and the ocean, the South China Sea at the same time, and looking
8 at Monkey Mountain and Marble Mountain, watching the helicopters fly in and all the
9 war activity going on around you. The USS *New Jersey* firing the battle cannons off, and
10 the cruising up the South China Sea. The flotilla was awesome, but the camaraderie there,
11 the professionalism there at the 95th was top notch and the group of people were top
12 notch. When you left, you left as an individual, so you didn't know what happened to
13 them when you left, and you had no contact with anyone for many years. That's pretty
14 much it. It was the China Beach unit, the unit that the TV series *China Beach* was made
15 out of during the '80s with Dana Delaney and that was a historic unit. Did a lot of good,
16 we treated Rocky Bleyer, we treated a Captain Chris Christofferson and a few other
17 people that turned out to be important people in life who did well. So, it has a big role
18 and responsibility, and that, of course, goes back to World War II to an illustrious career.
19 Also lost a lot of doctors and nurses in World War II when a German airplane bombed
20 them. But later on, at the 95th even after I left, there was a jet that accidentally dropped a
21 bomb on the 95th Evac in '72 or '73. I don't know if it was accident or intentional, but
22 they did get hit. That's kind of repeated itself, the history from World War II to Vietnam.

23 JS: You mentioned the *China Beach* TV show. Did you watch the show yourself
24 when it was airing? And if so, what did you think of it?

25 TC: Well, I didn't watch much of it because I didn't like the show. I didn't like
26 the way it was, but there was a lot of, I guess, enhancement to get viewers to watch it,
27 and a lot of not-so-real episodes. But the few episodes that some of our people, nurses,
28 and doctors, that gave them information regarding the particular stories and had credits to
29 help writing the stories. The only enjoyment I got out of it, the few episodes I saw, was
30 when they told particular stories I knew who they were talking about. Other than that, I
31 didn't watch that much because it was too fabricated, and it wasn't real life. The love part

1 of it where doctors and nurses got together and cohabitated. That was true. We had
2 doctors that married nurses and a lot of them had affairs and that type of thing. But the
3 enlisted men basically didn't dwell too much with the nurses because they wanted the
4 doctors and that type thing, but there was a couple enlisted men who did have affairs with
5 nurses. But for the most part, *China Beach* series. It was just a television series, and I
6 didn't really pay that much attention to it. It put too much credence in their writing
7 capability because it was more fabricated than it was factual information except for the
8 few stories that they used some people to help write.

9 JS: I've heard that part of the show was based on the book *Home Before Morning*.
10 Are you familiar at all with that book?

11 TC: No.

12 JS: I know it's fairly controversial, the fact that a lot of folks who there have said
13 that it fabricates a lot as well. I'm not sure. Obviously, I don't know myself, but I have
14 heard that some of the material came from that as well, so I was just wondering.

15 TC: Right. No, that I don't have privy to, I'm sorry.

16 JS: Okay, that's quite all right. All right, well, if there's nothing else then why
17 don't we talk about the end of your tour and coming home. As you were approaching the
18 end of your tour, did you get any of the I guess we'll just call it the short timer's
19 syndrome?

20 TC: Well, actually, I lasted five months and twenty-six days in Vietnam and then
21 I was injured and spent three months recuperating in the hospital in Japan at 249th
22 General Hospital for three months. Once I recuperated and went through a lot of rehab
23 and got better from my injuries, we flew back to the United States from Tokyo, Japan to
24 Hawaii on a Braniff International Airlines which was yellow and white aircraft. It looked
25 like a big lemon, and of course we found out it was a lemon when we were on the way
26 home, but we flew to Hawaii, we refueled, got to get off the plane to get a bite to eat, and
27 then we took off for Travis Air Force Base. Once the plane left the ground and the wheels
28 retracted, about fifteen seconds the plane shook violently and made a loud noise, and
29 nobody knew what was going on. When we got about halfway over the Pacific Ocean to
30 Travis Air Force Base, they determined that the hydraulics system had failed on the
31 aircraft. It was too committed to turn around and go back to Hawaii, so they proceeded

1 on. As we were flying, the captain come on and his name was Captain Slaughter, and he
2 said, "This is Captain Slaughter, we've lost our hydraulics system, we'll be making an
3 emergency landing at Travis Air Force Base." Then probably two hours later he said, he
4 come on and said, "We're going to be landing at San Francisco International Airport
5 instead of Travis, so we will not be going through customs and that type of thing. But this
6 is because of better firefighting facilities." Now that didn't make everybody comfortable.
7 You know six months of Vietnam, three months recuperating in the hospital, then coming
8 in to land we're going to do a crash is my theory. However, we did make a good landing,
9 and they had pulled the plane off into the grassy area and the plane just kind of bogged
10 down because it was very wet and rainy there at San Francisco. They got us off the plane
11 and took us into the terminal. They brought us our duffel bags. We didn't have to clear
12 customs or anything, so we could've brought hand grenades, guns, weapons, anything
13 back. I was a little bit tore up because we thought we were going to die as we circled the
14 Golden Gate Bridge, the rolling hills of San Francisco, the Alcatraz, the Oakland and that
15 for two hours burning fuel off. So, I was a little bit leery about getting on the airplane, but
16 I mustered the courage up, I went and get on the airplane, flew back to Atlanta, Georgia.
17 Changed planes and flew to Charlotte, there was three people on the airplane, and my
18 flight attendant sit there and hold my hand the whole time because she knew that I was
19 upset and nervous about flying, and I've never been upset and nervous about flying since,
20 but that was not a good time. I was thinking we were going to die a couple hours before.
21 But the lady did talk to me, and I landed, and my parents picked me up. We went to the
22 Krispy Kreme, got a dozen donuts, and went home.

23 JS: Was your military career over at that point, or did you still have some time?

24 TC: Actually, I had another fifteen months to go, and I was assigned to Fort
25 Gordon, Georgia. I spent my time down at Fort Gordon, Georgia, and started out in the
26 Central Materials Section, preparing lat packs for surgery and the basic supplies that they
27 needed for the hospital unit. But after a couple months I was promoted, and then I was
28 put into the operating room and to anesthesia, where I become an anesthesia assistant and
29 basically helped start the IVs, sit there and assist the anesthetist and the anesthesiologist
30 during the surgeries, and I spent the rest of remainder of my time at the Fort Gordon,

1 Georgia, and Augusta doing those particular duties which I liked tremendously, I really
2 did.

3 JS: Well, once you were back in the States again, did you continue to follow the
4 developments of what was happening in Vietnam?

5 TC: Yes, I got out of service on December the 23rd 19—I mean July 23rd, 1971,
6 and I came back home, and I went to work the next day. During that time period, of
7 course, every meal we had of course we were inundated with television and the War. We
8 could see the turning of the War, we could see the de-escalation and the bringing the
9 troops home, that happened a year after they had promised to bring us home and actually
10 began to physically bring them home. So, our government did finally own up to their lie
11 in 1969 when the unit came home, and the people were reassigned. But the physical
12 bringing back the troops by staging, started working out and that Vietnamization where
13 the Vietnamese would take over most of the War duties. I watched it and I watched it
14 daily at work because I went to work for an emergency ambulance service in Lincolnton,
15 North Carolina. So, when we weren't on calls and that type of thing, we were sitting there
16 watching TV in the evenings and following the news. I didn't keep up with anybody, but
17 anytime I could see anything related to the hospital unit or stuff I read it, but there was
18 very few and far between. But I did support the troops and I did send care packages over
19 there to them just in general, no specific person because by the time I was back and out of
20 service most everybody I had served with was already gone.

21 JS: I know you mentioned that you did pay attention and that you supported those,
22 the folks that were still back there. But how about your view on the War itself? Had it
23 changed as a result of your service? Or did—

24 TC: At the time it had not, but when they decided to settle with the North
25 Vietnamese at the Paris Peace talks, my views then changed, I felt like we had been sold
26 out, we had been dishonored, and that all the 58,000 men who died, died in vain and I
27 was very, very upset with our government. The guy that I talked about earlier in the
28 interview who was a protestor, our ambulance service was right in front of his house, and
29 he was going to Washington D.C. to protest. We kind of hooked up, and I asked him
30 since he was going to be at the White House, he was going to throw some things over the
31 fence and meet all the guys throwing the stuff, their medals and things, back over the

1 fence. And I asked him if he would throw mine back over the fence, and of course he did.
2 So, where I didn't agree with him in earlier '60s before going in the service, I was in
3 cahoots with him after service, and actually had him to take my medals and throw them
4 back over the wall there at the White House and gave them back. Because I felt like they
5 dishonored me, you know? Along with everybody else. It was an odd twist. Odd. Odd.

6 JS: Given that, do you think that—would your opinion I guess have been different
7 had the War been, I don't know, I guess fought differently, and had there been the
8 objective to actually win?

9 TC: I think that you got to be in it to win it, and this of taking a hill for five days
10 or week and then going off of it and letting them come right back. In World War II you
11 took territory and you kept it, here you just took territory and you moved off. You didn't
12 keep it. So, you fought the same battles over and over again and you wasted men's lives.
13 It was not a well-fought out war. It was run by the politicians who never even seen a
14 weapon or held a weapon or had any type of training. It's sort of like if you were going to
15 have your appendix taken out, you would get your mechanic to do it, you know? You just
16 didn't use the right person to do it. I just had problems with it, and I was very bitter, and I
17 still am very bitter with our government, but it's the best government there is. But I don't
18 trust them, but it's a good government. It's the best place to live, in America, and we've
19 got the best military and the best veterans there is.

20 JS: What was your reaction to the way the War came to an end with the Fall of
21 Saigon?

22 TC: Well, the Fall of Saigon, I was sitting there watching it on TV and it was
23 disheartening to see that we just allowed them, we just walked away from the South
24 Vietnamese, we turned it over to them, we walked away, we didn't support them, we
25 didn't give them the air support that they had promised. We didn't give them the weapons
26 and the armament. They needed to maintain the certain strength and we just basically left
27 those people. I was really ashamed of our government. Henry Kissinger, who did
28 basically the negotiations, I thought did a terrible job and he caved in. If they would've
29 just bombed them for a couple more days, the North Vietnamese would have surrendered,
30 that's been factuated and the books that I have read, and from the Ho Chi Minh and the

1 general that was over the Army, stated had they another week of bombing they would've
2 surrendered. So, I felt like we just caved in.

3 JS: Let's see. Well, would you mind, I guess talking a little bit about life after the
4 Army?

5 TC: I got married, I had two children, I worked at the ambulance service until
6 1976 but then I quit there, and I applied for medical school for physician assistant in
7 Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, and I was accepted and completed
8 the program there and became PA [Physician Assistant]. Came back to Lincolnton, North
9 Carolina, and practiced PA until 1982, and by that time I had been burned out on
10 physicians, doctors, nursing, patients, and treating Little Johnny at three o'clock in the
11 morning because he cut his head, and Granny Grunt for her falls. You just got burned out
12 from surgery. You were working sixty hours, eighty hours a week and you were making
13 forty-hour wages. Every time that you turned around, "Well, call Terry. He'll take care of
14 it. Call Terry. He'll take care of it." No weekends off, no time off to yourself, very little
15 sleep at night. Sew little Johnny up, sew up so-and-so, go to this car wreck, and so it just
16 burned me out and so I just walked away from the medical career in 1982 and took a two-
17 year hiatus. Then I changed my entire job career and went to work for a police
18 department, and of course became the communications supervisor and records, and
19 communication supervisor, payroll, writing grants in that time, and then I did twenty-
20 eight years with the Newton Police Department in Newton, North Carolina, and just
21 retired December the 24th of 2010. So just over five months ago. Which was a great
22 career. But back in the '90s, 1991—the late '70s and '80s, the demilitarization and the
23 reduction of our military, that was sad to see that we became not the most powerful
24 military in the world. Until I guess you could say Desert Storm, when Saddam invaded
25 Kuwait and took over, then we mustered our forces together. Our forces manned together,
26 and we put together a coalition of half-a-million people, half-a-million Americans over
27 there. It's the same amount of people that we had in Vietnam, and they went over there,
28 and they took Kuwait back and they drove the Iraqi forces back into Iraq and they quit.
29 They just, "Okay, let's stop. We've driven them back, that's enough." They started
30 bringing the people back home, and I thought, "That's no way to run a war. You don't
31 just start and then drive them out and quit." I mean, if you are hunting for a deer and you

1 shot it, would you quit tracking it just because you got tired? If you needed the meat, you
2 would pursue the deer and bring it back to your family, but you just don't quit. I just did
3 not like that aspect of our government doing that. Of course, that's just a personal
4 opinion.

5 JS: Well, before wrapping up, I just have a few more questions.

6 TC: Sure.

7 JS: Could you talk I guess a little bit about the reunions, about the 95th Evac
8 reunions, how they came about and the significance of those?

9 TC: Well, like I said in 1991 I was watching the return of the Iraqi War vets and
10 they were getting tickertape parades and they had not even fired a shot, and basically did
11 very little bit other than the airplanes bombing some people and that type of thing, but
12 they got a hero's welcome and that changed my whole philosophy. I got to thinking,
13 Wonder what it would be like if we gave a welcoming back to our veterans from
14 Vietnam? I decided to talk to my wife, and I said, "You know, I'm going to take thirteen
15 months to see how many people I can find that I served with, and at the end of thirteen
16 months if we've got three people or three-hundred, we're going to have a reunion. So, I
17 started going to hospitals, and libraries, and doing research in the computer at work to
18 find some people, and doctors were easy to find, I could find those in medical libraries
19 and track them, then made a lot of phone calls. I spent thousands and thousands of
20 dollars, even in the '90s, on phone calls and writing letters. Nurses were difficult to find
21 because a lot of them changed names when they got married, so that was more of a
22 difficult problem, but I knew where two other guys were. One was in New Orleans, one
23 was in New York, and the other one was in Virginia. So, I tracked those guys down, and
24 the one in New York happened to have moved to North Carolina. I got together and
25 found two, I got names from those other two guys, and we got up to six names. So, we
26 found those people and then we contacted them. They each knew a couple more, so it's
27 kind of spidered out. We were able to find a hundred-and-about-thirty people in thirteen
28 months and notified them we were having a reunion. We had the reunion in 1992, May of
29 1992 in Ashland, North Carolina, the first one. Of all the veterans we had about seventy
30 in attendance, doctors, nurses, medics, technicians. That was a special time because we
31 had not seen each other since 1968, '69, and '70. It was a very special reunion, and it was

1 a most awesome experience and at that time we decided, well, we're going to do this
2 every three years. So, in 1995 we went to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Doctor Ray
3 Bonnabeau hosted it, and I just found out this past week after we returned from our last
4 reunion, he passed away in February of this year. He had hosted our second reunion.
5 Then we decided to go to San Antonio, Texas, back to where we took our training in
6 1998, and Sharon Zamfro, a nurse, hosted it. We had a good reunion there also, we had a
7 smaller turnout group because we did it basically in March, and that's monsoon season in
8 Texas. But everybody had a great time. Then from San Antonio in 1998, we went to New
9 Orleans in 2001, hosted by Doctor Luke Cusanata. We had a great turnout there. Then I
10 hosted it in 2005, I mean 2003 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on the beach which
11 basically took us back to a beach, and that was our large group in attendance there. In
12 2003. 2005, at that point in time we decided we need to do it every two years. So, then
13 we went to Las Vegas in 2005 and that was the largest group ever, I guess because of the
14 gambling. That was in 2005, 2007 I hosted it again in Nashville, Tennessee which we had
15 a good group there. And then 2009 we just did two weeks ago in Myrtle Beach—I mean
16 Washington D.C. which you were present at. Of course, we're going to San Diego in
17 2013, and I will be hosting that also. This was a tribute to our veterans who, which next
18 year in 2012 will be our twenty years of having these reunions, and we've had nine great,
19 successful reunions. A lot of healing processes have gone on. A lot of post-traumatic
20 stress syndrome. Problems have left a lot of individuals because it has healed them from
21 them. Even me, in before 1992 our first reunion, I was a pretty much, you wouldn't've
22 wanted to know me because I was not a very nice guy. Wasn't a mean guy or anything
23 like that, but just not very nice. I held Vietnam within, but I learned how to release it at
24 our reunions and a lot of other vets have too. They have prospered and benefitted by
25 having these reunions.

26 JS: Did you talk much about Vietnam with people that were not there, prior to I
27 guess going to the reunions? At what point did you start talking about Vietnam?

28 TC: After the reunions I started talking about it, after 1992. You got to remember
29 back during the '60s when I was there, the parents didn't talk about it because everybody
30 was ashamed that your son or daughter was in Vietnam and they thought you were baby
31 killers, and it was not a popular war. So, parents did not speak of it, and when I returned

1 home, not one time did my mother, dad, brother or sister or any friend ask me one thing
2 about Vietnam. So, I shut it down from 1970 when I got home, until 1992. Twenty-two
3 years I kept that bulled up inside of me and was just about ready to explode until we got
4 together with our vets, and we could talk about it, and we could hash it out. We've had
5 great healing experiences; we've talked about PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder];
6 we've talked about the problems. I've seen miracles happen where guys come in. They
7 could not even speak when you addressed them when they arrived at the reunion, to
8 where they were speaking eloquently three days later at the end of the reunion. It was just
9 an amazing healing process. My wife says she loves every veteran we have and their
10 families because she says it's so special, and it's such a miracles that she sees on a basis.
11 I suggest that any veteran who has served in Vietnam or any other war, hook up with
12 unit, make a reunion because that is a life experience that you will never forget, to
13 reacquaint. It answered the question to me that I always had when I left Vietnam. What
14 happened to those people that I served with? And it took twenty-two years to answer that,
15 and another twenty years since we've been doing our reunions those answers still
16 continue to come to this day. So, forty-two years of answering questions. Twenty-two
17 years of no questions, just wondering, now all the answers are coming the last nineteen
18 years. And it's great.

19 JS: I know that during this last reunion, the one that I attended, the group went to
20 the Wall. Could you talk about, I guess a little bit about that experience, and your
21 thoughts on the Wall and the significance of it, if you wouldn't mind?

22 TC: I was looking forward to it, I had been to the Wall three or four times prior to
23 that, but this was just special by going with our group of doctors and nurses who worked
24 hand-in-hand. On a lot of these peoples, this names are on the Wall. I don't remember
25 anybody's name that's on the Wall that I didn't know from my hometown because the
26 ones that died you just put that aside out of your head when you were dealing with them
27 in Vietnam. I do know that there was one lieutenant that was shot in the head, and he had
28 a bullet-center-mass of his head, and he was obviously a mortal case. They pushed him
29 off in a room, and I wasn't doing anything that night, and I sit there for six hours and just
30 talked to him in the dark and patted him on the arm until he died and passed away. At one
31 time I knew his name, but I could no longer remember it. I've always wanted to know

1 why I didn't write it down, but I put it away. I've looked in the books for his name and
2 trying to figure it out, the date of death, I even know the date of death, but I didn't know
3 what his name was. I felt like I needed to talk to the family. But I just could not pull the
4 name out of the head or anything, too much time has passed. But to see the guys that I
5 served with, the Captain Robby B. Hunt who I waterskied with was a helicopter pilot, he
6 died. Paul Loin was a sergeant first class, Special Forces guy, he died in combat. Spencer
7 Sigmund died, stepped on a landmine. Dennis Days who married a friend of mine died.
8 And others. To be there and to see their names on the Wall, and have our picture taken as
9 a group, paying homage and respect to the people that sacrificed our lives, what we did
10 was nothing compared to what they did. To sit there with your—from looking back
11 where people were taking pictures, looking at the Wall we were paying them homage
12 rather than paying us homage by our pictures taken in front of the Wall. I felt
13 uncomfortable looking out from the Wall, having my picture taken, but I felt that my
14 back needed to be turned to be able to pay the homage to the Wall by facing them, you
15 know? Does that make sense?

16 JS: Yes, sir, yes it does.

17 TC: It was just the real honor to be there with all the doctors, the nurses, the
18 medics, the support techs there, and we could do it together and have our picture taken.
19 That was the culmination of my—that was the cream of the cream, that was the top of the
20 icing—the icing on the cake. It just don't get any better than paying homage to the vets
21 who laid their lives down. Able to do it with your group of individuals who you served
22 with.

23 JS: One more question, what do you think about I guess America's relationship
24 with Vietnam today? This developing relationship with trade, travel, tourist going to
25 Vietnam, veterans going back to Vietnam, what do you think of that?

26 TC: Well, you know, it's ironic, I have a friend, Richard Brown, who lives in Da
27 Nang, Vietnam, married a Vietnamese and I hooked up with him a couple of years ago
28 and he goes out and takes photographs and pictures for me and he posts on YouTube,
29 Richard Brown 368370, RB368370. Richard posts these little ten minute videos on
30 YouTube going out to where the old 95th Evacuation Hospital was, where Ten City
31 Hospital was at the base of Marble Mountain, the base of Monkey Mountain, and goes to

1 all these different units and posts these YouTube videos for our veterans who want to
2 know what's going on. Prior to seeing that, I was locked into the 1969 and '70 range of
3 what the country looked like. But to see it now the way it's prospered, four lane highways
4 right where the hospital unit was, is amazing. It looks just like any street in Florida.
5 Highways, superhighway. It's absolutely gorgeous, beautiful place. When I would pull
6 guard duty, I would think, "This could be a beautiful resort. This could be a very fine
7 vacation place if you could get rid of them mosquitos and the stench and smell." To see it
8 now and to see how it has grown, they're still somewhat backwards, but they're doing a
9 lot of trade with the United States. They're products are still somewhat inferior, however
10 they are making amends but they're still Communist control. But I do not hold the
11 bitterness towards the Vietnamese any longer. I have released that, and I actually enjoy
12 seeing the videos of what's going on. It's still a strange language to me. I'll never
13 understand. However, it took away the pain. It took away the bad time that I have, and I
14 still do not want to go back but it's different. It's just totally different for me now. Whole
15 different perspective, I have a different view of Vietnam now.

16 JS: Well, is there anything else? You'd like to say anything else we have not
17 covered, before bringing the interview to a close?

18 TC: I just want to thank you and Major Cole for y'all's hard work and dedication
19 to preserve the history of the 95th Evacuation Hospital, Da Nang, South Vietnam. Had its
20 illustrious history from World War II on, and I know that will continue to have a history
21 in the future, and to keep the memory alive for the people who served there. Most of our
22 guys are getting old now, but the youngest guy in our unit now is about fifty-nine, sixty
23 years old. So, it's not going to be too long, our time's going to be up and gone, but you
24 guys are preserving the archives and history for the future twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a
25 hundred, two hundred years down the road. Somebody'll be listening to this, and this is
26 Friday the 13th, May the 13th, 2011 and somebody may be listening to this in the future,
27 and just want them to know that our military and support services, not everybody was a
28 frontline fighter, carried weapons. I did carry a weapon at times, but not everybody was
29 fighting on the frontlines, but there was no frontlines in Vietnam. But we all were
30 soldiers first, we were professionals second in our different classes and MOSs, we strived
31 to make sure that our wounded soldiers were taken care of. They've returned to duty or

1 returned to home if possible. The 95th Evacuation had a low mortality rate, lowest in
2 history of any unit, three percent, and if you came to that hospital your chances of
3 survival was great. I just want y'all to think about honoring those veterans that served
4 there and appreciate the history that the military people and professionals have laid down
5 for the people that made the sacrifices. I give them my credos and my fondest thanks.

6 JS: Well, I just want to say it's been my pleasure, I've enjoyed talking with you,
7 and I certainly appreciate you taking the time to do this and ensuring that the history of
8 the 95th will not be forgotten, so thank you for that, for adding to that. But I will go ahead
9 and bring the interview to a close now, but—.