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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with David Williams
Conducted by John McGonagill
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Transcribed by John McGonagill**

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

1 John McGonagill: This John McGonagill with the Vietnam Archive at Texas
2 Tech University conducting an oral history interview with David Williams. David was a
3 specialist assigned to the 57th Aviation Company as a crew chief and door gunner on a
4 UH-1 Huey. Today is October 27, 2015. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special
5 Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech, and David Williams is joining me by
6 phone from Poulsbo, Washington. How are you this morning, sir?

7 David Williams: I am good.

8 JM: Awesome. First of all, while we are on the record, I would like to thank you
9 one more time for agreeing to participate in this interview because I know it's a break in
10 your normal schedule and it's a lot of work, and I appreciate that. So why don't we begin
11 and if you don't mind I'd like to start with a little bit of biographical information. For
12 example, when and where you were born, that type of stuff.

13 DW: Okay, I was born in Seattle in 1946 in May. My folks were at that time
14 living in Seattle, north Seattle as far as I know. I don't remember that far.

15 JM: So that was post-war Seattle 1946. I bet that was an interesting time. How
16 long did you spend in Seattle?

1 DW: I don't remember Seattle at all. I think my parents moved to Bainbridge
2 Island sometime in that transition. I start to remember things first from Bainbridge
3 Island. We were living next to my grandfather in a house that my dad had built on my
4 grandfather's property. That's when I first start to remember things. I remember when
5 my sister immediately younger than I was born in [1950], '49 or '50, one of those years.

6 JM: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

7 DW: I have one older brother and I have three younger sisters. Have a sister four
8 years younger than I am, then I have one that was born in '57, and one that was born in
9 '64. There's quite a spread between my sisters. My older brother and my immediate
10 sister below me, grew up together and the younger sisters were kind of a bit removed.
11 We remember them it's but not quite the same.

12 JM: So what was life like growing up in Bainbridge Island?

13 DW: Bainbridge was a small town at that time, it's still a small town. It was
14 quite rural. We lived not in a neighborhood. We had our own, we were out by ourselves,
15 so really didn't have neighborhood kids to play with. But it was, I remember it as a good
16 thing as I look back on it now. It was a good home. Farm style raised chickens, animals,
17 cows, and dogs, had a garden and always had a place to do things outside as a kid, so that
18 was good.

19 JM: Was the property a working farm?

20 DW: The first one wasn't, the next one that I remember the most was a dairy
21 farm. My dad had wanted to farm, so he started out raising chickens several hundred
22 chickens. That was on a forty-acre piece of property and then to raising dairy cows, that I
23 think was more prosperous for him. Having the dairy the dairy cows and the price of
24 milk in Kitsap County was fairly good so you could make a living at it. Then he chose
25 to move to Sequim later, that was more when I was a little older and that was not good
26 because the price of milk was not that good and then they had to pay shipping to get the
27 milk to Seattle and it didn't work as well. The farm on Bainbridge did reasonably well as
28 a dairy farm. That was a nice place.

29 JM: I know your brother doesn't live up there anymore, but how about your other
30 siblings are they still up that area or are you the only in Washington?

1 DW: I'm the only one in the immediate area. I have a sister in Auburn and
2 another sister in Carnation. The youngest sister is down near Tacoma, and the rest of us
3 are in the general area, yes. Charlie has stayed down in Texas. When he got out of the
4 Air Force he stayed there for life.

5 JM: If you don't mind. Tell me a little bit about Mom and Dad. What did they
6 do before they decided to have the farm and raise kids. Did they grow up in this area?

7 DW: My dad was born and raised on Bainbridge Island. He was an only child
8 and he worked for the Navy. He was a sheet metal person. That was the thing he
9 enjoyed the most. He worked for the Navy and he also had worked for Boeing Aircraft
10 Company and it was bits and pieces here and there. It wasn't like he started a career and
11 finished it and started another one. He would be, of course Boeing was at that time you
12 worked and then when the jobs ran out you got laid off and when they got more jobs you
13 got re-hired. That's why he was going back and forth between the Navy yard and Boeing
14 mostly. Farming was kind of mixed in between. My mom, the only time I remember as a
15 young kid was she worked as a telephone operator at the time when they had telephone
16 operators. They had several of them. If you called long distance you had to use a
17 telephone operator, and that's what she was. I can remember her going to work. Usually
18 she worked evenings and different hours. It worked out fine because Pop was home
19 during the evening so she could work if she chose to, it was a part-time job.

20 JM: Did she start doing that during the war?

21 DW: She probably learned it during the war. During the war would have been
22 before my time. I was after the war. That's when she filled in, when were kids, as she
23 could. She learned that, I presume, during the war.

24 JM: In 1946 I'm kind of curious was there a post-war economy slowdown in
25 Seattle, because Boeing was a big thing, and the Navy yard was a big thing and here we
26 are in these post-war years I was wondering how that impacted the local area.

27 DW: I would think that, again I was so young, but there was stuff going on. We
28 had active Navy bases on Bainbridge, we had three of them, one of them was Ft. Ward
29 Navy Base, the other was [Battle Point Naval Radio Station, and Yeomalt.] Those were
30 still active when I was a kid. That would have been probably ten years after the war that
31 I remember that stuff, so I was five to ten. So, you still had people there doing stuff.

1 They changed them to Nike bases, there was a Nike base in Eagledale and what they
2 called Strawberry Hill. Those were active and then there was an active anti-aircraft
3 facility the Army had in Yeomalt, which was, they were living in (unintelligible). They
4 were active on the island when I was a kid. It didn't appear things had died. It appeared
5 that they were still going. It was just a transition period. They didn't have to build, that's
6 when commercial aviation was going so Boeing was starting to ramp up building the
7 commercial airlines. That was a good thing for the economy. I can remember as kids we
8 were still doing, watching for aircraft. What did they call it? I remember we'd go up and
9 they had a site that you could identify every aircraft that flew over. That was all
10 volunteers; my parents were volunteers that did that. You'd go for a couple hours and
11 you'd sight and identify them, and pinpoint their location, direction they were flying.
12 There were still things going on after the war. Which is kind of startling to me now, to
13 realize how close I was after that, World War II.

14 JM: That's interesting. So it was kind of like a coast watcher program where you
15 identified aircraft?

16 DW: Yeah, yeah.

17 JM: I haven't heard of that. I didn't realize that was a post-war activity. I
18 would've thought that would of ended after hostilities ended.

19 DW: Yeah. No, it was still going when I was a kid. I was old enough for me to
20 remember that. I would have been at least five or six if not older. We were doing it then
21 so it would have been into the early '50s.

22 JM: It sounds like the area you grew up, even though it's just across the water
23 from Seattle, its sounds like it was a small town, rural environment.

24 DW: Yes, yes, and that was the plus of it. Now, of course, it's become an,
25 there's no big properties, I mean there's very expensive properties on Bainbridge, but no
26 large farms or any of that anymore. It's still rural comparing to downtown Seattle but it's
27 essentially a bedroom community of Seattle because it takes like a thirty-minute ferry
28 ride and you are downtown. If you work downtown you can get to Seattle faster from
29 Bainbridge that you can from even out to say, [Bellevue], Issaquah out that way. You get
30 on the ferry and you are downtown. But it's nice. You get out and breathe and it's much
31 more rural.

1 JM: As you got a little older you got into school. What were the schools like?
2 Were they large, or small?

3 DW: They were small. I can remember they may have had two, three classes in
4 each grade, I suppose. I started at one grade school and then they built another grade
5 school out closer to where our house was so went there after that. At each school you'd
6 have one grade. They were okay. I was not a kid that was real excited about school. Not
7 really happy with school. I did all right but I didn't do that well until I got into high
8 school. We had metal shop, auto shop, and industrial arts classes that were more
9 interesting to me. Neighborhood kids had pals with your own neighborhood kids in
10 grade school well I didn't have any neighborhood kids to stick with. You kind of just
11 fend for yourself and be the odd man out. Pretty much that was the way it was through
12 grade school. Because my folks moved to Sequim with a dairy farm when I was in the
13 fifth grade, of course I was the odd person out. I'm sure Charlie would tell you the same.
14 Then they moved back to the Island, when my grandmother died, for a year for sixth
15 grade and then seventh through junior high was back in Sequim. And then my older
16 brother Charlie graduated from high school and he played basketball and he was more
17 student than I was. He did well. The basketball was a big thing that kept his focus. Of
18 course I would go and watch his games because that was fun.

19 JM: So you guys stuck together, it sounds like.

20 DW: Pretty much. We shared a room as kids. And it was a big loss for me when
21 he went away to college. That was life.

22 JM: You've got 4 years between you.

23 DW: 4 years of what?

24 JM: The age difference between you and your older brother?

25 DW: 3

26 JM: 3 years, ok. You were in high school; you had just started high school when
27 he graduated.

28 DW: Yes. He was a senior and I was in ninth grade.

29 JM: What was that like? Were you one of those kids that had to walk in his
30 shadow or did you guys get a long OK?

1 DW: We got along OK, I mean I was in his shadow. I had some of the same
2 teachers that he did going through school. I think they were pretty savvy on that. They
3 realized he was different than I was. I got along with him so it didn't bother me. I was
4 my own self in that regard. And I was happy for him that he could do what he could do.

5 JM: You didn't have any of those teacher that would say things like, you brother
6 understood this how come you can't get it?

7 DW: I had some but they really didn't push it.. They learned that I was
8 different.

9 JM: You mentioned that your high had these industrial arts courses. Kind of
10 vocational type classes that was available. It seems like you were attracted to those types
11 of courses?

12 DW: Yes, that more where my bent was. My bent wasn't sitting and studying
13 books and trying to figure things out that way. Mine was more of a hands-on thing. I
14 could learn to weld or build stuff out of wood, work on automotive. That was a fortunate
15 thing about my folks move during my senior high years. I tried purposely not to move my
16 kids in school but when Charlie graduated my dad got work back at Boeing so we moved
17 to Snoqualmie, and I graduated from Mount Si high school. They had a good industrial
18 arts program, better than Sequim. Sequim didn't have that. I took mechanical drawing
19 one year, and metal shop another year and then I took automotive shop my senior year.
20 Those were courses I excelled in and I got good grades in. I could push the top of the
21 scale in those courses. Obviously I did learn to read so I could read and do math and
22 those things. We also had a good bookkeeping class in high school which I enjoyed. I
23 can do math. Sitting down doing algebra and geometry where not my thing but I could
24 do bookkeeping and math. Those I didn't mind and got good grades in. It was
25 something that I could use. Learning how to balance a checkbook, how to keep track of
26 your expenses was something that I could use and needed and interested me. And the
27 same with the industrial arts classes, all I used later on in life. That was a good thing that
28 happened in that move.

29 JM: Outside of school did you pursue some of those, maybe pick up a job or
30 something doing that type of work?

1 DW: I eventually became a carpenter so yes I certainly did. In the summers I
2 worked as a volunteer at a bible camp over on Lake Retreat which is south of Seattle I
3 worked the summer as the caretaker's helper. I did wood working as part of taking care
4 of the facilities there, so I got to do that. As in every summer job I didn't get paid much
5 but still it kept me busy in the summer with an activity to do. After high school I went to
6 Prairie Bible College in Alberta, Canada. The next year I started trade school in Seattle
7 in a carpentry course and got drafted immediately because that's what was happening. If
8 you changed any program or schedule you immediately got placed on the draft list
9 priority. I had about 4 months in that course and then got drafted.

10 JM: You graduated high school in 64 then you went up to a Bible College in
11 Canada. Then you came back to a trade school. What was the name of that trade school?

12 DW: At that time it was Edison technical school in Seattle and when I was in the
13 military they changed the name of the school to Seattle community college. But they still
14 had that same carpentry course.

15 JM: So, uh, in 1964, if we could just circle back to around the time that you
16 graduated high school. There's a lot of things going on, I mean the 60's were a pretty
17 interesting time... not only in our country, but in the world. I was wondering, what does
18 the high school senior talk about in 1964? Are you concerned about all of the things that
19 are happening in the world? Like Kennedy? Let's see I think the Cuban Missile Crisis
20 had already been averted.

21 DW: Yeah, I can remember in current world problems my senior year, we had
22 talked about Kennedy and the Missile Crisis, that type of thing. But, you know, that was a
23 passing moment. You think, 'Oh man, we don't want anything to happen as far as wars'.
24 We of course were still in the age where you ducked under desk, and hid under your
25 desk...which they don't do anymore. But as seniors in high school, current world
26 problems, we discussed it because it was a current world problem. You remember it
27 happened but we didn't worry that much about it.

28 JM: So I assume you probably listened to the Beatles, maybe? Any music?

29 DW: Well, yeah it changed a lot when I was into the service. Didn't get good
30 radio reception where we lived. I never went to any concerts. I didn't have the desire or
31 accessibility or the passion to go. But I liked listening to Rock and Roll radio.

1 JM: What was the number one song when you graduated High School in 1964?

2 DW: Oh, I don't know. The one I remember most the Battle of New Orleans by
3 John Horton.

4 JM: Wow! I would've thought that would have been on the country charts.

5 DW: Oh no, that was a lot of the music when I was in Jr and Sr High. It wasn't
6 like Rock and Roll. that happened 10 years later. Those were the popular songs that we
7 had when I was in high school. Like on KJR was a big station for kids...we liked more of
8 the country stuff. You know we had Elvis Presley and we could understand him, but
9 others you just couldn't understand.

10 JM: Yup. Well, you know you had Seattle and you could look at the things that
11 were important around Seattle and they were pretty representative of what was going on
12 around the country. Was anyone in your high school talking about Vietnam?

13 DW: Yeah we really didn't talk about that, until I was out of high school and I
14 was in college up in Canada when that was starting to happen. I can remember when
15 President Kennedy got into that conflict, and started sending people to be in that country.
16 But my one year away at school, we weren't allowed radios. I was in central Alberta.
17 We just didn't get the information of what was going on in the war. I knew there was a
18 war. We didn't get a lot of information then and I don't recall getting a lot about it other
19 than it was going even when I started trade school. I was out of the loop in that regard.
20 In the summer I didn't really hear any news or hear any radio so I didn't really know
21 anything or pay much attention to it. Other than that I knew I was draft age but I didn't
22 watch it on a daily basis.

23 JM: So having Sunday evening dinners around the table, Mom and Dad didn't
24 listen to President Johnson ramping up the troop load or anything like that?

25 DW: No, . I don't recall that. My mother did actually get upset when I actually
26 did get drafted and she said 'well they can't take you'...and I said well I got the letter I
27 have to go! And she said well you'll be back. And I was back after two months when I
28 had my first leave after I'd been in basic.

29 JM: What did Dad think when you got that card in the mail?

30 DW: He really didn't say a whole lot other except to keep a stiff upper lip when
31 he took me to the ferry...keep your mouth shut. And I didn't have too much trouble

1 doing that anyway. I wouldn't take on anyone. Just do what you're told? My philosophy
2 was to be as inconspicuous as possible so that's what I kind of did through school and
3 during my tour in the military. I got called out for some things on occasion and my
4 Christian faith was good for jokes, other making fun of religion, and getting laughs from
5 other people and I got the brunt of that several times, but that's just the way life was.

6 JM: So when you got the draft card in the mail, what was the time between
7 getting notified that you had been selected and getting on the bus and heading to Basic.

8 DW: Well it's seems like I had about 3 weeks. And I was just notified to report
9 to the induction station and become prepared to not go home. Is actually what the letter
10 said. You have that in mind and you don't take anything other than your tooth brush.
11 You didn't need anything because you mailed your civilian clothes home so you didn't
12 even have those. You were just doing what you were supposed to be doing. That's what
13 you were asked to do and you didn't really have a choice so you just kind of go with it.

14 JM: Did mom or dad take you down there and hang out with you down there or
15 did you just go ahead and head down.

16 DW: Oh no they weren't allowed to come. My dad just took me to the ferry.
17 They were living back on Bainbridge at that time. My dad just took me down to the
18 ferry. The induction station was just a couple of blocks from the ferry dock. So I got off
19 the ferry and walked down there and signed in. I heard from my one sister all she heard
20 about was David of course when I was gone. She has memories of that where I don't.
21 All it was, was me at the dinner table so she was sick of hearing about me. I remember
22 getting some of that because when Charlie was in Okinawa, they didn't hear from him,
23 and why wasn't he writing? When I was in the service I tried to write every week no
24 matter where I was at least say hi I'm fine. I figured the least I could do was that.

25 JM: You have actually a very, very interesting military service with the little but
26 of research I was able to do I was just fascinated with what you got to do. It looks like
27 you went to basic, and then they sent you to the Huey school.

28 DW: Yes.

29 JM: The Helicopter certainly was around. It started off at the end of WWII and
30 became a pretty viable platform in Korea but it really, the world changed when Bell made
31 that helicopter as far the military mobility goes. Did you realize at the time, I think they

1 call it an RMA, Revolution in Military Affairs. At the time did you realize you were on
2 the cutting edge of something huge when you walked into that school?

3 DW: I knew it was new. Of course you learn after you get out how new it was.
4 We were just learning, kind of an OJT learning process for the military. You know it
5 was, doing rescues and bringing in troops and taking out troops.. We saw pictures of that
6 when we were in training. When I was in basic we had taken tests to determine our skills
7 and likes to position you in your MOS. In basic I was offered the chance to go to OCS.
8 I was also offered the chance to go to flight school. Flight school was a real temptation.
9 As I look on it now I should have done both. But at that point in time I remember Charlie
10 coming back and telling me, whatever you do don't sign up for 4 years, when you can do
11 2 years and get out. Because you are not going to get what you sign up for anyway. I
12 kind of maintained that philosophy. I was drafted and was put where they felt I fit and
13 just went with that. I can remember only once being a volunteer following the quest of a
14 volunteer job just simply because I had nothing to do. Other than that I let them guide
15 where I was going and it worked quite well I was pleased to be in the helicopter. I
16 thought I would like to fly and enjoyed the machinery. You look back on it now, you
17 were just a glorified service station attendant. The training, was a 19 week course that
18 was shortened to a 12 week course because, of the war and it could have been down to a
19 one week course. We might have been better prepared for the job that we actually did as
20 crew chief. You fueled the aircraft, you saw that the maintenance was done. They
21 could've instructed you how to do that in a short period of time and then given you about
22 two and half days of training with the machine gun. Load the chopper supplies and
23 operate a machine gun and how fix a jam. It would have saved them money and it
24 would've helped us be better prepared for what we actually did. Although we learned
25 that fairly quickly once we got in country. We really didn't use most of the training.
26 They training trained us about jet engines and aircraft hydraulics and all of these different
27 applications which we were never allowed to do once we got in country. We spent a lot
28 of time on stuff that was interesting and we were glad to spend time in school rather than
29 in Vietnam. We could've spent two years on school as far as we were concerned at that
30 time, rather than go to war. That was just the nitty gritty. My first experience with my
31 aircraft at Ft Bragg, was to Red-X it. They had flown it, apparently without any crew

1 members other than the pilot and co-pilot. And they had flown it with the cowling cover
2 on, and the cover was sucked in around the drive shaft out of the engine. I went and got
3 my platoon sergeant to show what I found. He's the one that said yes go ahead and Red-
4 X it. Then I missed out on all the hands on training in the USA, as my aircraft was sent
5 to the maintenance division. Which was a 615th maintenance co. a part of 57 aviation co.
6 My platoon sergeant said that's their job not your job, you are not supposed to help.
7 They were grumbling because the crew chief was never around I was disappointed
8 because my sergeant wouldn't let me go around. They didn't even want me to go near it.
9 It was kind of a weird thing and I missed, some practical flying in the US and I only flew
10 once back in North Carolina. If I even flew that. My training was very short. Charlie
11 gets upset when I say my training was very skimpy. And it was very skimpy. I did fine.
12 I came back alive.

13 JM: Lets go back just for a minute. I'm looking at the way you started. You had
14 basic you started in March of 66 it looks like. Then there was no break you graduated in
15 May and went right to single-engine, single-rotor helicopter repairman school. That
16 looks like that was at Ft. Eustis, then you graduated there in August and went straight to
17 Ft. Bragg in September. There wasn't a lot of time. You got in and got trained and
18 ended up at Ft. Bragg. Did you get any time off at that point to go home?

19 DW: Oh yea. I got 2 weeks off between basic and going to Ft.Eustis.

20 JM: Ok

21 DW: Yea. Everybody got 2 weeks off. You just came home and then you went
22 to Ft. Eustis and direct from there I went to Ft. Bragg and then everybody got a week or
23 two off before we left for Vietnam. We went as a unit to Vietnam. Some went via ship.
24 Some went with the aircraft, motor pool and supply and went by ship, so they got time
25 off first. Most of us flew over, in C141 from Pope air base to Pleiku. Via Alaska and
26 Japan.

27 JM: If you don't mind me dragging you back to your 2 weeks off. Just out of
28 curiosity. What was that like? Did people treat you differently or think you've changed
29 since you were in the army, anything like that?

30 DW: You know I don't remember at all anything about that. That 2 weeks I just
31 remember that I was going clear across country to school and that was interesting to me

1 but I don't remember anything about that 2 weeks. The only time I remember is when I
2 was home on leave before going to Vietnam,
3 my Aunt and Uncle were over and my Aunt looked at me right in the eye and asked
4 aren't you afraid to go? I can still remember the look on her face and her saying that she
5 was trying to be nice and of course I said yes. You do what you have to do. It's not a
6 matter of being afraid. Your apprehensive for sure. You should be. There's something
7 wrong if you aren't, I think. Afraid, no you just do what you have been taught what to do
8 and do what you got to do. My mother, I don't remember her, I know she was unhappy
9 that I was going. She thought it was all my fault I should have stayed in school in
10 Canada. But I didn't feel that was my place, I felt like I should be going to trade school.
11 . I couldn't protect them from her emotions. They weren't happy that I had to go. I
12 wasn't particularly happy to go but I knew that was what I was supposed to do.

13 JM: Dad was handling everything OK?

14 DW: He just didn't say much. I'm sure it bothered him but he didn't say much.

15 JM: You finish your pre-deployment leave and went back to Ft. Bragg. This is
16 the part I found really interesting. You were building a brand new unit, and air mobile
17 unit that's all packed up and going as that unit forward. I was fascinated to read about
18 the unit history, on the 57 Aviation Company in Kontum, Vietnam. Is that how you
19 pronounce it?

20 DW: My connection is not well. You are breaking up a little bit. Yea, building
21 the unit took a long time. I went to the 69th Aviation and of course you went through a
22 transition company and then we spent a lot of time doing nothing just waiting for people
23 to get there through September. We really didn't get serious about the unit until probably
24 march we started to get more people in the unit. I was probably about the 15th or 16th
25 person into the unit initially. We had a cook that was our highest ranking person in the
26 unit when I first got in, he was like an E-3. It was an interesting proposition building the
27 unit which I know that has to happen, you have to start someplace. When we went to
28 Vietnam you of course lose part of your unit right away because they want experienced
29 personnel in the unit. I think it was about a third of the unit transferred into other units
30 and then we got a third of people that had been in country for a while. That was an
31 interesting transition.

1 JM: When you arrived in Pleiku it sounded like the 141 took you into Pleiku?

2 DW: We arrived, the 141 didn't shut off they just landed and opened the back
3 door and our immediate gear and weapons were in the back so that was unloaded first
4 along with a supply of ammunition and we were pushed out the back and the airplane
5 took off and were left standing on the runway.

6 JM: Welcome to Vietnam.

7 DW: Welcome to Vietnam, and the smell was something else. That was my first
8 remembrance of being in the zone. It was definitely a third world country, maybe even
9 fourth or fifth.

10 JM: How long was that flight from Pope to?

11 DW: It was a long, long flight. I think 17-18 hours. We flew from Pope to
12 Fairbanks, and then from Fairbanks we flew to Tokyo, and then from Tokyo we flew to
13 Pleiku.

14 JM: I'm sure you didn't get any awesome layovers, go downtown in Tokyo or
15 anything like that.

16 DW: No, no. We were just allowed to stretch our legs and walk into the restroom
17 and then walk back out to the plane. We were only there for an hour and half. Just
18 enough to tank up with fuel and we took off.

19 JM: When you loaded up in Tokyo and you knew your next stop was going to be
20 in country. You've got your unit with you. What was the mood like knowing the next
21 stop was going to put you in country?

22 DW: It was quiet. Everybody was rather subdued. Most of our people had never
23 been in a war zone before so we were all apprehensive wondering what's next. You just
24 don't really know until you get there what your reaction is going to be. It was a little
25 uneasy.

26 JM: You are on the ramp watching the 141 fly away. What happens next?

27 DW: Well it seems to me they brought us a bus and we were all loaded on buses
28 and taken to the air base for the army in Pleiku and then we had to process in there. We
29 were filtered around some of other units, we were there for a day or two. I don't
30 remember how we got to Kontum. I just don't remember how they ferried us all out
31 there. We didn't have any aircraft, they weren't in country yet. Then once we got

1 processed, then they split us in units were they told us who was going to stay where and
2 who was going to go on to Kontum. I lost a couple of my friends that I had been become
3 friends with at Ft Bragg, to the unit in Pleiku. There wasn't any action right there at that
4 spot at that moment. Its real likely you can be in a war zone and its quiet, you got people
5 working on guard duty all around so hopefully everything was OK.

6 JM: When they finally started transporting you up to your final location were you
7 part of actually having to build up the location. Were they still putting together buildings
8 and helipads and things like that?

9 DW: Kontum airfield had revetments for aircraft to park in. They were an L-
10 shaped frame with dirt packed in the center of it. Those were built by the French when
11 they were in that country. We had places to park the aircraft but we had just an open
12 field otherwise. So we were busy putting up tents to live in and building wood floors,
13 and sand bagging around your tent. Yea, we had to build from just a flat field. The
14 advance party had already started some of that but that's what we worked on the first few
15 weeks. Built a common shower off from the tents for privacy. We had guard duty at
16 night. Actually what it was, you were out on the perimeter with a couple sand bags in
17 front of you and that was guard duty. We were cautioned, be careful because the
18 Vietnamese locals have been walking through here and they didn't want to kill a civilian.
19 How do you know whose coming through at night if their civilian or friendly? You don't
20 speak the language and I can remember the first time we encountered a mama-son
21 coming through and she was just walking through on this road. She probably walked
22 through there a thousand times before coming at night. It was just dusk, what do you do?
23 Your heart was in your mouth and you wonder I don't want to kill anybody, or you have
24 a dog coming through, you are kind of on edge, uneasy on anything. We started from
25 scratch and when I left we were still living in tents. The engineers which were next to us
26 had built a wood building for a dining hall and mess hall. I worked quite a bit on that
27 when I wasn't flying. Captain Smith who was over the mess part of the operation knew, I
28 don't know how he found out, I had some carpenter experience. Anytime that I had that
29 I wasn't flying, even when I was supposed to fly sometimes he had requested that I work
30 on that building, building shelves, cupboards and cabinets in the mess hall for the kitchen
31 to use. Then another fella and I put an addition on it for the back part for storage. All the

1 tools wear and hand saw and a hammer. Where he was able to scrounge the material I
2 know, but he at least got some material and tools which left lot to be desired. But we did
3 fine we managed.

4 JM: Looking back on your timeline again. You arrived in Kontum in October?

5 DW: Yea, the middle of October.

6 JM: You had to do a little build up and eventually your aircraft showed up.
7 When did that happen?

8 DW: That was probably a couple of weeks after we got there. So probably into
9 November.

10 JM: This is where you found your aircraft that had a problem flying with the
11 cowling off and you had to Red-X it.

12 DW: Yea.

13 JM: That was back in Pleiku.

14 DW: They brought them up to us in Kontum. From wherever they came in
15 country, I don't know where they off loaded them. Then there were a bunch of our pilots
16 that would fly them up there. Half of our unit were pilots with that many aircraft you got
17 to have two pilots on each one.

18 JM: Sometime probably in November they showed up. You had your Red-X'd
19 and they had to take it back?

20 DW: No it was red-X'd when I got it in the states.

21 JM: Oh, OK.

22 DW: They rebuilt the engine so it was ready to go. When it was sent in.

23 JM: OK. I got you. So your aircraft arrived. I'm sure you have to do some
24 acceptance checks and things like that. How long from the time they arrive until you
25 guys are ready to do your job?

26 DW: Oh we started flying right away. We were transporting people around from
27 place to place. Usually it was pretty tame, going to check on something. That was the
28 flights that I got. I flew one day like 11 hours and when we got back my platoon leader
29 said you don't have to fly tomorrow. You are going to be here to get a chance to clean up
30 your aircraft because it's getting pretty trashy. Then another guy in our unit had a bad
31 helmet. He had a bad helmet and the radio didn't work in it. They told us never to loan

1 anything even your bandage pack. This guy was flying and he had a pretty hairy mission
2 to do. Nobody believed him about the bad helmet. Whenever they tested on the ground
3 it worked fine, whenever he got in the air it wouldn't work. He could hear but he
4 couldn't communicate. Of course a crew chief's got to communicate all the time with the
5 pilot when you are flying because you are the eyes on the side of the aircraft. I figured
6 I'm not supposed to fly, he was a nice guy, I got a brand new helmet. They told us not to
7 do this but here. I gave him my helmet. Low and behold they were sending me off
8 somewhere else. I was out cleaning the aircraft because I figured I had the day off and
9 the secretary came out and said the Major wants to know when he can fly? Well I
10 wasn't supposed to fly today. I got to clean things up and care of things here. Well he
11 wants to know when you are ready to fly. I don't know, he can tell me when he's ready
12 to fly. He comes back with the executive officer, I pretty much told him the same thing
13 the same way. He said, Williams you get down here, how do you address an officer? I
14 went down and saluted him, I said well sir this is what I was told. You can do whatever
15 you want to do. He was a black fellow but he was good. We had a good mix of blacks
16 and whites in our unit the blacks usually dealt with the blacks and whites usually dealt
17 with the whites. I got along well with him. We talked a while about some things how to
18 get stuff done. He said if you have any problems with any of this stuff I want you to
19 come and talk to me. Talk with the pilot first then come and talk to me. I said ok I can
20 do that. I want you to come in and see me in a little while. I went in and saw him and
21 said we want your aircraft to be the command aircraft. Kind of like the old man's driver
22 only with the aircraft. I didn't figure I was strack, I was never what you call an iron
23 fatigues fellow. I was just a clean fatigues fellow. I just took care of the aircraft, I'd
24 keep it clean but anyway so that was kind of my introduction to flying. We did fly that
25 day. I flew with the first sergeant on the other side. I don't where they got the weapon or
26 helmet for him because they couldn't get one for this other fella but they got him one. I
27 had no way to get that. I was just an E-3. They didn't pay any attention to what you said.
28 He took care of it. Where they got it I don't know or why they couldn't get it for this
29 other fellow. Anyway I got the broken helmet. Found out for sure it didn't work. And
30 of course I heard all the comments when they didn't hear from me. Finally I just
31 climbed up because I had a tether that you wore, and you could walk around the aircraft

1 safely. I just got up and walked over and said this helmet is not transmitting. I can hear
2 what you are saying but you obviously can't hear what I'm saying because of the
3 comments I was getting. And when we got on the ground they tried it and it worked fine
4 and I said what can I say take it and fly with it and you listen to it. That was just one of
5 those things. It happens and it worked well. Once you figure out the systems and how to
6 make things work. They started to pay attention if an officer said something to them.

7 JM: Did you ever get your helmet back.

8 DW: I did and it was broken. Of course I got harassed over that. There was a
9 shield on the front like sunglasses only it was a shield to protect your face. That had been
10 lost. Someone tried to adjust it or something and it fell out. So that was another issue.
11 Those are just things that you have to deal with; it's not a simple solution when you are
12 way off in the middle of nowhere.

13 JM: The black officer, you said he was the XO. What was his name?

14 DW: you know I can see him but I don't remember his name. He was a really
15 nice guy. I can't think of it.

16 JM: That's OK I just thought try and record that. So you are flying it sounds like
17 they are turning your aircraft into the command aircraft. Did it stay that way for the rest
18 of your tour?

19 DW: It stayed that way until it got blown to smithereens! I got a picture of it all
20 blown up. On January 10 it was blown to smithereens when we got attacked. I went into
21 the history on the 57th aviation and the history that I found they don't know what
22 happened to that aircraft. I thought I know what happened to that aircraft, I got pictures
23 of that aircraft. But I haven't said anything to anybody. It was totally blown up.

24 JM: January 10th was.

25 DW: That's when we were attacked. The first attack that we got on our own
26 compound in country. We flew other places and came under fire but that was two weeks
27 before the Tet happened. It was a good thing actually; it was saved us during Tet. We
28 couldn't have handled it because we spent the next two weeks fortifying around the
29 whole perimeter and building bunkers on the corners. They brought in some troops to be
30 guards and so when we were hit on Tet where had a mass outside of our border, we could
31 hold them off. If we hadn't had that they would have run over us. No question about it.

1 Our commander wanted to be number one in the country on maintenance and they were
2 running night crews that's were all the guys got killed down in the maintenance area
3 working on maintenance at night.

4 JM: How many aircraft were destroyed on January 10th?

5 DW: I'm not exact on that. I think probably, I have pictures of several so I would
6 say 5-6 completely destroyed. Some weren't completely destroyed, mine was
7 completely destroyed. All I have a picture of is the tail section. The whole body was
8 gone. It was full of fuel, when you get the fuel cells going then that's just going to totally
9 wipe out everything. There was some that were just the just body, the skin was gone.
10 We lost 5-6 that night and most of the motor pool was wiped out. The generator was
11 blown up we had the for the mess hall. They were trying to run a night shift and of
12 course they were running the cooks all night too, so people could eat. They had
13 everything all lit up in the wrong places.

14 JM: I guess in the end the January 10th attack was probably a good thing.
15 Something that probably saved a lot more lives.

16 DW: Yea, we lost like 11 that night. Then we had 25-30 that were wounded that
17 night. It only lasted for like 2 hours. The guys we were fighting were kids. The armor,
18 ,from Aberdeen ,Washington shot two guys with a pistol that were coming in his hooch.
19 The fella that was the gunner on the other side of my aircraft my gunner shot two with a
20 machine gun in between the mess hall and the hooches. That was quite an ordeal. And
21 I've got pictures of that to, I've got pictures of messed up vehicles and pictures of some
22 of the ones that were killed, just kids.

23 JM: Your aircraft was destroyed on January 10th are you hot swapping with
24 another aircraft now or are you waiting for a replacement.

25 DW: I didn't do any flying after that. Captain Smith he was in the unit from the ,
26 from the start. He had me working in the kitchen building stuff. I was kept pretty busy
27 there the rest of my tour and we were fighting a lot during Tet. That's all you did was
28 fight, we were awake all day and all night 6-7 days straight day and night. They finally
29 told us after the third day that somebody has to go in and try to get some sleep because
30 we couldn't go indefinitely without sleep. We were defending ourselves on our own
31 base. We had used our own gunships on our own perimeter. They didn't relish doing

1 that but they did and I guess we had some other units come through doing that. We lost a
2 lot of our equipment so we were pretty limited in what we could do. Our maintenance
3 capability was down to zero at that point. Because it had just been totally destroyed with
4 the earlier attacks. We were just defending ourselves we were even to point where we
5 had a C-130 come in a drop ammunition because we were getting low on ammunition
6 which was kind of interesting. They came right down on the ground and they just tipped
7 up and let it fly out the back. They did fine you just go out and get what you needed.

8 JM: I think they call that a LAPSE extraction. Where they came down low and
9 there's a chute pulls the pallet out the back and it just goes sliding across the ground.

10 DW: Yea.

11 JM: That would have been exciting to watch.

12 DW: Oh yea. They brought in a tank. I'm not sure where the tank came from
13 but we were constantly getting rocket fire. Because we were in a very pretty valley but
14 we were getting rocket fire from the hills. They finally brought in a tank and then the
15 right people would hone that thing. That finally cut the rocket fire out once they did that.
16 They could hone that on the right sight and it slowed that down so that was kind of
17 interesting. I think it was the 173rd that was going to Dak To coming through had a
18 fuel truck sitting inside of our compound where they had parked it for the night. They
19 picked that off with a rocket right away, blew that thing up. Fortunately it didn't have
20 any fuel in it. They got the truck.

21 JM: When you finally had some down time. I'm just curious. You said you tried
22 to write a letter every week. Did you happen to talk about this or did you just let that one
23 slide.

24 DW: I don't remember. I might have said it's not fun here. But I don't recall, I
25 sure my mom saved all the letters. I don't care to read them. I might have said some of
26 that. They were reading in the paper they'd save the paper about what they read about
27 what was going on and of course watched the News. I was alive that's why I kept
28 sending those letters. In the midst of that my Grandfather died the day before the Tet
29 offensive. And of course I didn't find out but they knew about that. He died on the 28th
30 of January the Tet happened the 29th of January. They had several things going.

1 DW: I think I read when I was doing some of your unit research I think they call
2 your Camp Kontum , didn't they call that rocket city at one point. They probably did, we
3 got the history of rockets. In fact I looked at that sheet that you had, which each time I
4 get into that it's different. Some of them have the history from the beginning and that
5 one didn't from the beginning of Vietnam. But it listed the rockets that came in and then
6 yea they were definitely rockets and you could hear them for about a minute before they
7 got there. You heard the whistle, you didn't know where it was going to land but you
8 heard the whistle. That was just kind of a hope for the best when you heard that.

9 JM: Before you lost your aircraft on the 10th did you have any extractions that
10 were kind of hostile or at least you thought might be hostile pick up?

11 DW: Oh yea, our units mission, why we got it right away I don't know but it
12 was what was called across the fence. We were flying in before they labeled my aircraft
13 the command aircraft trying to insert some troops down along the trail. Actually it was
14 on the side of a hill and the special forces with their expertise and stuff, we were going
15 into land. We took on fire then. We didn't leave these guys, they stayed on board and
16 we took off. That was the only time I can recall that we ever went straight up because we
17 had to go straight up and the thought was we would empty our load and go straight up. It
18 pulled the machine to the max until we got to the top of the trees and then we just tipped
19 sideways so we could get out of there. But yea, we were inserting troops and they had
20 full packs and we had a full load but they decided it wasn't a good idea to leave them
21 there. Yea we pulled them out.

22 JM: I was reading an article this was just an army grunt. He was talking about
23 helicopters coming in to pick them up he was talking about he would always look at the
24 gunners face. That was his cue he would watch the gunners face for whether this was
25 going to be an easy extraction or a tough extraction.

26 DW: Well that's because you know where he's seeing something going on, so
27 yes that was a smart thing.

28 JM: I was just curious is that something that you tried to not have a look of shock
29 on your face because you didn't want to upset the folks you were picking up...that you
30 were just trying to keep that neutral expression?

1 DW: No, No. It's just like looking at a quarterback. You see where he looking.
2 So you know where he's going aim that gun so you don't get shot.

3 JM: I thought that was an interesting perspective. When he said the only thing he
4 looked once we started running into the clearing was the gunner's face.

5 DW: We were just told. Usually the pilots would tell us when to fire and when
6 not to fire. They would tell us what we were going into, a live or safe a zone or what
7 they thought was a safe zone which we always had our eyes open to, we just didn't want
8 to kill any of our own people.

9 JM: The crew chief, as a crew chief position in the aircraft, did you sit behind the
10 pilot or the co-pilot?

11 DW: Well the pilot was on the right side and you sat behind the co-pilot which
12 would be on the left. Probably the only reason the put the crew chief on the left side is he
13 was supposed to be the one to fuel the aircraft. The fuel opening was on the left side.
14 That's probably the reasoning for that, I never heard the reasoning but that's probably the
15 reason. The door gunner on the other side kept watch for any other activities or helped
16 the crew chief.

17 JM: Who was the door gunner? Was he another crew chief or was he just
18 assigned to the aircraft as a gunner?

19 DW: He was assigned to the aircraft as a gunner. He had an infantry MOS or he
20 could have had an 67n20 MOS but not necessarily, it could have been an infantry person.

21 JM: On January 10th when you lost your aircraft and you got reassigned to the
22 base functions you obviously got to put some of your carpentry skills to work, is that
23 something like hey where can you pitch in? and you just said hey, I'm a pretty good
24 carpenter. Or did they just tell you Williams pick up a hammer and start heading over
25 that way.

26 DW: They knew that, and how they knew that I'm not sure. I think they must, yo
27 put down all your education and training. I'm sure Captain Smith knew that before they
28 ever left country. That this is who you could call on. I didn't volunteer for that but I was
29 happy to do it when they asked me to do it. That worked, it helped them, and it was
30 probably the most productive thing I did in country was help them make it a little easier
31 on the cooks. And it helped for the crew to. I remember when I was working there once

1 for some reason I had helped cook the chicken we had this cook that was noted for not
2 cooking the chicken through. He warmed the chicken up . I had cooked a little one
3 summer and I learned that you cooked stuff through. He had the recipe for the chicken
4 which was good and the right seasoning but he just needed to cook it a little longer. One
5 time I was cooking and he came in and said what are you doing to my chicken? I've
6 never gotten comments like this before. I said I'm just cooking your chicken making sure
7 that it's cooked through. He said well they sure do like it. Which was a good thing.

8 JM: So you kind of did that the rest of your tour it sounds like what happened as
9 you started getting closer to the end of your tour? Was the whole unit going to rotate out
10 together?

11 DW: No, no. That was the intent of taking some of us who had only 90 days
12 left in the service to be shipped overseas in a unit. The idea was that you would get
13 replacements to a unit that had experienced personnel. No the whole unit didn't come
14 out. There were several of us that got out, that came from the same class at Ft. Eustis that
15 were shipped over. We were short going over actually. The sad thing is we lost a crew
16 on an extraction and they were shot down and both killed. Griffith had just come with us
17 and had a wife, and Melvin Dye had three weeks left to come home and get married .
18 And they were filling in for somebody else who was sick and couldn't go. . Because they
19 were killed across the fence so to speak they were listed as Missing in Action. Which
20 they know they were killed because the chase ship above saw the crew get hit. And
21 ultimately only one, I guess the pilot only survived on that. They are now listed on the
22 wall. I have gone to the wall and both their names are on the wall.

23 JM: It looks like the information I'm looking at with those two. That was on the
24 19th of February 1968.

25 DW: Yea.

26 JM: Does that sound right to you?

27 DW: Yea.

28 JM: Where was that? Was that north of your location when that happened?

29 DW: It would have been west of our location. We were really close to the
30 border. It's not very far from the border.

31 JM: The Loas border?

1 DW: Yea.

2 JM: Did that crash happen in Vietnam or Laos.

3 DW: In Laos.

4 JM: Alright, so that happens. You are getting ready to pack your bags it sounds
5 like. Just a couple weeks later.

6 DW: Yea.

7 JM: Tell me about how you leave country. It was a C-141 that kicked you out
8 the back coming in. What was it like going out?

9 DW: Well, it was, we were tending to business. We didn't have a lot of time for
10 anything else. We were still getting rocketed. It started in January and it didn't really let
11 up. For those guys that had a full year of that I can't imagine what it would have been
12 like. Your nerves are on edge constantly. I went to Pleiku to transfer out. They didn't
13 send me by helicopter, they sent me by truck. Which is 30 miles. There had been attacks
14 on that truck. So here you are riding in the back of a duce and half and the driver will tell
15 you I drive like the dickens so just hang on. Because they are not about to slow down for
16 anything along the road. It's a supply truck and they had probably brought us something
17 on the ground and he was going back so it worked that they had me go back on that.
18 They drive the like the dickens and you spend about a week at Pleiku processing out the
19 different places you had to go. They were getting attacked still at that time at Pleiku,
20 randomly. It was like in our mess hall we no longer had mess lines usually we always
21 had mess lines but they finally eliminated the mess lines because it was just asking for
22 snipers to snipe at you. They had mess hours for longer and you just went in and ate and
23 never stand in a line. You didn't want to be in a line any place. That was the same way
24 at Pleiku. Then we went from Pleiku ,via chinook down to Cam Ranh Bay and you held
25 out there for a couple of days until they got you a flight back to the states. That was via a
26 commercial airline. You flew, I can't remember who it was but it was a commercial
27 airline. We flew to Hawaii from Hawaii to Ft. Lewis or McCord AFB. Then we
28 processed out there.

29 JM: I guess with all the living in rocket city and then Pleiku with the situation
30 down there that you never got see Ann Margaret or Bob Hope?

1 DW: No. We didn't have time nor the occasion to see that. In Pleiku they had a
2 club where you could go and get a beer, had music, people came in occasionally but we
3 were kind of an outpost. It was fine. We were busy all the time. We didn't have time to
4 sit around and really think about things a whole lot. One of the best meals I had was
5 when we flew to Dak To and that was also when, I first realized you could survive being
6 in the conflict where mortars were coming in. So we sat it out until the mortars quit
7 coming. We were up to check out a C-130 that had been blown up on the runway. We
8 were taking somebody up to look at it. Dak To as I realize now was Special Forces camp
9 then. You were pretty much kept in the dark about where we were going or what we
10 were doing. We just knew we were going to Dak To. The pilots probably were briefed
11 but we didn't. Which I look on as a good thing and a bad thing because if you were
12 down and by yourself you wouldn't have clue where you really were. But then in that
13 country you don't have a road map with signs to tell you where you are going anyway.
14 You always hoped there was a chase ship coming after you if something happened. We
15 didn't get a lot of information usually we didn't even know where we were going other
16 than if it was a relatively safe or could be a live situation. We always prepared for a live
17 situation.

18 JM: Once you got at Cam Ranh Bay and you got on that aircraft heading home I
19 can only imagine it was a significantly different environment than the feeling on that C-
20 141 going in.

21 DW: Oh yea. As soon as we lifted off and got up to cruising speed. There was a
22 big hooray that went on aside from that we just wanted to get home. And that was a long
23 flight. Cam Ranh Bay got hit the night before we landed down there to take off. I
24 literally got blown out of the country. It was a big relief. I had written my instructor at
25 the school that I was coming back. I think I had written him in January that I was coming
26 in March and asked if he would he save me a place in the class so I could finish the
27 course that I had begun because it was a year cycle. When I got home I checked with
28 him right away, he said you take a little time off, you don't need to come back until
29 summertime. I got back in March he said just start the summer quarters you've got a
30 good grasp of all the rest of this stuff. Start in the summertime and give yourself a little
31 break. But while I was at home there was a fire station kind of up around the corner from

1 where we lived across the bay and around the corner. Every once in a while the siren
2 would go off, when the siren went off I automatically just headed under bushes ..It was
3 just took a while to get over that reaction.

4 JM: I've heard some people say that a car door slamming or things like that, that
5 were unexpected loud noises it would take a few months to sort of settle down from that.
6 Is that kind of the experience you found?

7 DW: Oh yea, and certain sounds even now. All of a sudden it's all right back.
8 Yea it's amazing how quickly that happens. I got over the sirens eventually; I'm not
9 heading to the bushes now. It took a few months but even now the Indians have some of
10 these loud things that sound just like air bursts and when I hear them one of them...I
11 don't particularly enjoy the fourth of July. ...the big flowery things are fine, a little of
12 that goes a long ways. The Indians have some that are really pretty powerful explosions.
13 There's some that must have the same sound because where I live they just echo down
14 the channel here from our place and for some reason it must be similar to the echo that
15 we had in the valley in Kontum. Brings a bunch of stuff back that I don't care to
16 remember . When you got off that airplane in McCord mom and dad, brother and sisters,
17 were they all waiting for you there? What was homecoming like?

18 DW: Uncle Sam didn't allow that at that time. My dad was working at Everett at
19 Boeing at that time he had somebody that he knew that was watching my flight come
20 across. They knew I landed, we landed at like midnight. They asked us did we want to
21 process out or did we want to sleep and then process out and they gave us the choice and
22 the choice was to process out immediately. It was the afternoon of the next day that I
23 was able to contact my folks and they came and picked me up. Some place at Ft. Lewis.
24 I don't remember where it was, a holding area that they have for when you are were
25 cleared they could come get us. My dad and mom I think one of my little sisters might
26 have been with them.

27 JM: What was that like?

28 DW: It was just good. Good to be back. Great to be on terra firma where they
29 weren't shooting at you.

30 JM: Did you have any big homecoming celebrations, coming home, bring a
31 bunch of family in?

1 DW: No. Not that I recall. I just pretty much got back to the daily routine. I
2 didn't have a routine at that time. There was no big celebration nowhere, it was kind of
3 you were just back home. : There's been a lot of folks that we've talked at the oral
4 history program here they didn't go back to a base. They were put on a commercial
5 aircraft in like LAX and they had some, they had a lot of protestors they had some bad
6 experiences usually the local police would have to take them aside before they got off
7 and said look there's a lot of people out here that are causing problems. I'm just going to
8 warn you right now if you interact with these people I'm going to arrest you, not them. I
9 was curious did you see anything like that in Seattle or in the local area, did you hear
10 about anything like that?

11 DW: No I didn't I heard about that kind of stuff and I of course wasn't wearing a
12 uniform around. I saw that on TV and was probably thankful that I got out at a military
13 base and my parents were able to come and get me. I think they are misdirected, they
14 ought to go to Washington DC and talk to those people not the troops that did what they
15 were asked to do and defend our country. It's not their choice, I would have no trouble,
16 just not give them a lot of attention. The best I have felt as a veteran was a veteran's day
17 that happened 3-4 years ago where we had a good speaker , a military officer that had
18 something good to say and included all the branches of service. And that was a good
19 celebration and appreciation for what they had done. It didn't matter what they had done
20 in the service. That was the best that I have ever heard since getting out of the service
21 that was a normal type ceremony. There have been others that have been good like we
22 take our vehicles, Mark and I have which is my son and restored some old military
23 vehicles we are in it mainly for the vehicles but we show them at the Veterans Day show.
24 That was good for me one time just to be with other veterans and that somebody said
25 something appropriate to us which was good. That was a positive thing.

26 JM: You took a little time off and went back to school in the summer?

27 DW: Yes.

28 JM: And then what happened?

29 DW: Well, then I went to work. They helped you get your first job after you
30 finish up trade school. I worked with a contractor over in the Seattle area for about 6
31 months. At the end of that 6 months had met my wife, during that 6 months . We got

1 married at the end of that December. At the end of that time which would have been in
2 December of 68 or the first of 69 I started working on Bainbridge with a contractor
3 working as a carpenter. .I worked for him for about 6 years then after that I had gotten
4 familiar with the whole process, how things work and the whole process of building and
5 contracting , I started working on my own . I worked the rest of my career pretty much
6 self-employed working as a carpenter.

7 JM: You stayed true to your roots. What interested you in school and even
8 through your Vietnam experience you were able to find use for those skills.

9 DW: Yea.

10 JM: They say if you love what you're doing, you never work a day in your life.

11 DW: That's right, you don't work a day in your life until your body is worn out.
12 Then it becomes work. Your body says I don't want to do this anymore. I have arthritis
13 and it makes it a little more difficult and still enjoy it. I missed it when I stopped doing it.
14 . I still enjoy it and work with my son some but usually driving a machine for him or
15 something like that. You are not putting quite as much stress on your body.

16 JM: Let me back up just for a second, you got married to this young lady during
17 your first stint as working as a contractor in Seattle. What's her name?

18 DW: Terry

19 JM: And you have how many kids?

20 DW: Two. I have a daughter and a son.

21 JM: And what's their names?

22 DW: Sarah and Mark.

23 JM: Sarah with an H?

24 DW: Yea.

25 JM: Mark with a K.

26 DW: Yes.

27 JM: Ok.

28 JM: Alright, well when you got back and you had a certain number of years from
29 your Vietnam experience the 60's were kind of a crazy time it even continued into the
30 70's. What did you think about this whole Vietnam experiment that we had for 10 years?

1 DW: Well it really makes me feel bad when I think about all of the lives that
2 were lost for nothing. They eventually turned it back over to them. I don't know what, I
3 think some of the south Vietnamese people would have been favorable to Americans.
4 But it seems like such a waste to do all that and have that much time that people lost and
5 served. What happened with what we were trying to prevent and we didn't prevent it, it
6 ultimately happened and we lost a lot in the process on both sides. I'm sure those young
7 people that were fighting us thought they were doing right because their government had
8 convinced them to do it. And we thought we were doing right because that's what our
9 government told us to do. And then our government turns over and lets it go. I'm
10 satisfied that I did what I was supposed to do, that I was required to do, probably to the
11 best that I could've done it. I could've done it better now. Maybe we should have old
12 guys fight rather than young guys. Anyway, I'm confident in that way, but I'm
13 disappointed in the outcome. I was really concerned the first time we went into Iraq I
14 thought that went well and they did a good job but the second time I thought they had no
15 business going there. I was concerned about all the people because of the crazy way
16 some of our leaders act.

17 JM: That's exactly what I was going to ask you next. Looking at Vietnam to
18 where we are with Afghanistan today. Just recently within the last couple of years
19 Afghanistan has become a longer war than Vietnam has. I was curious if you left a
20 Specialist-4, that an E-4.

21 DW: Yea.

22 JM: If you had a young E-4 gunner crew chief going in a Blackhawk in
23 Afghanistan on his first rotation, what would be your words of wisdom to pass on to him
24 or her?

25 DW: Go AWOL. No, I never was that, but boy make sure you know how to use
26 that weapon and make sure you speak up, I guess. But you know speaking up doesn't do
27 any good. That's the sad part and it's in a lot of things that speaking up doesn't do any
28 good. Yea, you just got to prepare for everything and protect yourself, and your friends
29 and your comrades.

30 JM: My last question for you, I was curious, I didn't see it in your file or
31 anywhere, there seems to be a lot of Vietnam veterans in your year group that served in

1 those mid-60's years that are actually getting together quite frequently now when before
2 they were not. I was curious if you have found any organizations like that where you've
3 been able to reach out and talk to maybe an old bunk mate or somebody you went
4 through school with, maybe somebody you flew with a couple of times. Or built the
5 chow hall with?

6 DW: I would like to and I think that is an age thing. I think you get to this point
7 in life and you go back. I would like to contact and get connected with some of the guys
8 I spent time building the unit in North Carolina and I've seen when the initial comments
9 came out about the 57th that I started reading about 10 years ago I looked at. There was a
10 lot of the people that actually built the unit and were the ones I was together with
11 Vietnam. It would be interesting just to touch bases with them. But that would take me
12 about 30 minutes and I would have covered everything so it hardly seems worth it to go.
13 Now a lot of the information is on the later years of what happened so you really don't
14 information. It's a common thing but if different from when we first rotated and started.
15 Yea, I would like to contact with some of those but I just don't see that happening. I've
16 only talked or met one other crew chief since I've gotten out, in all my years, I've been
17 out over 40-years. He actually goes to church where I go to church now he was much
18 more aggressive than I was and he doesn't seem to want to talk about it. So I don't talk
19 with him. I had the guy that was my door gunner on the other side. He actually did that
20 full tour and then did another tour in Vietnam and he came and saw me and left me his
21 number but I haven't been able to connect with him since. I would like to connect with
22 him. He was supposed to have lived over in Richland Washington. I would like to
23 connect with him. And I may try to do that to, try to search him and see if I can find him.

24 JM: OK, I lied I said that was going to be my last one but I've got one more.

25 DW: OK.

26 JM: I was flipping through your questionnaire real quick and they have that one
27 question toward the end I'm struggling to find it right now. There's a lot of folks that
28 have gone back to Vietnam. To just to visit and I think you indicated that yea you might
29 be interested in that. If you were to do that where would you go? Would you go up to
30 Kontum? Oh that's where I would want to go. Yea. I would want to go and see if I
31 could see that place where I was, yea. And again that would take me probably 15

1 minutes and leave so realistically yea would I like it to go see it again yes. I thought I
2 was very fortunate in my whole tour actually to be in the highlands versus down in the
3 delta or on the DMZ in the north. I thought the central highlands was a lot like the
4 northwest here. It has valleys, and is very pretty country. I had a lot of empathy for the
5 people I felt so bad when I left I got to come and then go away those poor people had to
6 stay there. The south Vietnamese people, I just felt so bad for them. Its just really nerve
7 racking. They just shot up the whole town, yea, that was something else. I guess that
8 why I don't like the fourth of July because the night of the 10th when it happened its
9 sounds like firecrackers but you knew it was rifle fire going on in town, they we killing
10 everybody. I felt so bad for those people and I still do. I worked down in Katrina, after
11 Katrina for about 6 months I was down there with Presbyterian disaster assistance. One
12 of the homes that we worked on was a Vietnamese family. Dad and his daughter and her
13 son were Vietnamese. And they had come to Biloxi, getting out of the country. That was
14 kind of interesting and that was a good thing. That was a good thing to be able connect
15 with them. They knew where Kontum was, she was his mother, the son of course was
16 raised in this country. The mother knew Kontum. The grandfather how didn't speak
17 English he said oh yes I'm sure he knew where Kontum was. And they appreciated that I
18 had been there.

19 JM: Alright, David I didn't think we were going to make it and go through this
20 your whole things in just slightly over two hours but it looks like we did.

21 DW: Yea. I think that's good.

22 JM: I'm going to go ahead and turn the recording off but before I do I'm going to
23 say one more time thank you very much for taking the out of your day to pass this
24 information and talk a little but about your Vietnam experience.

25 DW: Yea, well you're welcome I was glad to do it with you.