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Oral History Project
Interview with Darryl Nelson
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
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Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

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.

STEPHEN MAXNER: This is Steve Maxner, conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Darryl Nelson. I am at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas and he is in Kingman, Arizona. It is the 18th of July, year 2000 at 12:10 p.m. Alright Mr. Nelson, would you please begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

DARRYL NELSON: Okay, my name is Darryl Nelson. I was born in Prosser, Washington, in November 1940. I grew up in the Yakima Valley. I grew up with my uncles and my aunts and my grandparents. I didn't have a father. I went into the Army when I was 24 years old and I was being drafted for some reason even though I was married and had two kids. So, rather than be drafted, I decided that I would try to have some say over my own career. I enlisted and went into the military police.

SM: What year was that that you received your draft notice?

DN: 1964 for the 21st day of January 1965.

SM: Okay, now had the Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred yet, do you recall?

DN: I don't recall.

SM: So, you conducted your basic training, your boot camp, yeah, basic training, at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri? Is that correct?

DN: Yes sir, Company C, 5th Battalion, 2nd Training Regiment.

SM: What was that training like?

DN: Well, the training was almost adequate. I say almost adequate because I went through a cycle. We had a lot of new drill sergeants, if you will, and my drill sergeant, great man

by the name of Sgt. Glen Falls. It was his first cycle and he was young. He was younger than I was, and he was a good instructor on some things but other things he sort of let slip.

SM: What were the things that he let slip, do you recall?

DN: Yes, the combat end of the training; most training we had - the marksman ship training - was hampered by a lot of fog and one of my problems from that day until this day is they taught us to shoot for a score, not for kills. Their idea was knock the target over to make sure you hit the target; shoot in front of it if you have to to kick rocks into it.

SM: Okay, so to knock the target down you could kick up debris?

DN: Yes. You could shoot these so-called kill targets.

SM: Yeah.

DN: They have a problem with them now with the 223 because they're so rapid they'll go right through them, but with the old M-14 if you hit them they went down, but also if you shoot in front of them and hit rocks and dirt you had a much better chance of knocking the target down.

SM: Which is not very realistic training for combat. Did you talk about that kind of stuff with the other trainees?

DN: Oh, a couple of us did but in those days about 80% of the people were draftees; they could care less.

SM: They were in for the two years of…

DN: "I'm going to do my two years, whatever it takes to get through and I'm out of here."

SM: Do you recall about how many were voluntary enlisted like you versus the draftees; an approximate percentage?

DN: I can't. I can tell you this; my company was made up of a lot of draftees. I think there was, in my platoon, there was a young man by the name of Livingston and myself, there were two, three prior service people, and the rest I think were draftees, enlisted reserve, and enlisted National Guard.

SM: Did they…by the time you got into training, what year or what month and year did you begin your basic? Do you recall?

DN: Yes. I began it in February because I went to a week leadership school and my basic training I was a platoon guide.

SM: So it was February ’65?

DN: Yes sir.

SM: So the Gulf of Tonkin incident had occurred, talk about escalating the American presence in Vietnam was occurring. Was there much talk about Vietnam during your basic training?

DN: There was quite a bit of talk about it but there was only one person, one drill sergeant, that had been to Vietnam.

SM: What did he say about it? Did he mention it much?

DN: It was the war story type thing and he was hard to understand and he talked about it and the main thing I can remember him talking about was the great M-60 machine gun.

SM: Did he say what his position was while he was in Vietnam?

DN: I don’t remember, sir.

SM: And what about how well the training prepared you for what you would eventually encounter in Vietnam?

DN: I say very poorly. One thing that I would like to emphasize on this in the training; we had a young man from Chicago by the name of Tom O’Hara who was an enlisted reservist and he was a type of record miler runner. He did not have to do the physical training the rest of us did because push ups evidently slow down your running and when he took his combat proficiency test, the PCPT test, he ran the track by himself; he didn’t have to…there was nobody else out there. They were out after numbers and records. They weren’t really…how well were we trained?

SM: Were there other examples of, you know, you mentioned already the marksmanship issue, now this one with this individual in terms of running versus push ups. Any other examples of where the emphasis seemed to be more on generating good statistics for the unit rather than emphasizing training?

DN: Yes. We had a football player for short time in the unit. He was a professional football player and I cannot remember his name or what team he played for, and everyplace he went or everything he did he got sort of specialized service shall we say. In the mess hall he didn’t have to go across the horizontal ladder before he went in to eat. He didn’t have to know the general orders or any of that stuff, his chain of command. He’d just sort of take you to one side and slip through the line. He got recycled because of he got pneumonia or an upper

respiratory infection. Most people's upper respiratory infections, unless it was real bad, they went to training, but not him. This gentleman was taken out and taken in and put into a special unit. I understand he went to the hospital and was in some kind of unit up there for four or five days and then was recycled into another unit.

SM: What did you and the other trainees…did you talk about this special treatment that some of these people were getting?

DN: Nope.

SM: No? Well, what about your AIT? After you finished your basic training you went on to, since you went MP, the MP training?

DN: Yes. I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia. I went to a two week leadership school and I was destined as a squad leader. The military police training in Georgia was…I always felt geared toward, "How pretty can you look?" We had very little combat trainings or tactics. We were taught basic convoy driving and items like this. Every week we had a pass and review and we practiced that three times a week. I always felt that my training could have been better. The use of 45 caliber hand weapon; could have had a little bit of training in that. Could have had more time in the physical aspects of what combat training is like.

SM: What about things like, you know, population control, riot control; the kinds of things that you might expect to encounter in a country that is at war where you have refugees and you've got people moving around, milling around, the types of things that you would expect to encounter. Did you have training that addressed those types of issues?

DN: Nope, our Bivouac Company, just to give you an idea, the platoon sergeant came around and told us, "Don't fire the blanks in your weapons because you have to clean them so meticulously after firing. Just don't fire."

SM: Now what weapons were these again?

DN: M-14.

SM: They felt that way about the M-14?

DN: Oh yes.

SM: Don't fire blanks because you have to do too much cleaning? Well, when did you finally get introduced to the M-16? Was that in Vietnam?

DN: That's quite a story, sir.

SM: Okay, was it in Vietnam? If it was, let's wait until we get to Vietnam, then.

DN: I was introduced to the M-16 very briefly in class 6513 OCS.

SM: Oh, OCS? Well let's finish with the MP training and then we'll move on. Did you go to OCS immediately after MP training?

DN: No.

SM: What did you do in between?

DN: Well, after I finished my military police AIT I was sent to a special weapons depot in Germany.

SM: Okay, that's right here; the 556th MP Company? Is that correct?

DN: Yes sir, it was in Sieglebach, Germany.

SM: Okay, and then after that you went back to the United States for OCS?

DN: Yes, I was chosen by my commander because of my scores and my gung-ho attitude as it was said because I wanted promoted. I wanted more money.

SM: Well you had a wife and two children, right?

DN: Yes sir, and that's the reason I wanted promoted to better their quality of life, so I tried to be a better soldier than the average and I caught my commander, a Captain Gerald Fix, and he sent me to an OCS board and at first I was going to turn down the OCS board and I was told, "You don't have a choice, you're going to go and you need to pass it." So, I did. Then I was sent to class 6513 at Fort Benning, Georgia.

SM: Now the…get back to the MP training real quick, just to make sure that we've got everything that's relevant. Was there anything else that occurred in your MP training that was noteworthy or important or that did help when you finally got to Vietnam?

DN: I can't think of a thing, sir. We were trained more for stateside or European duty. In 1965, '66, early '66, there was not a lot of military policemen in Vietnam. I think that if I remember right, one of my platoon sergeants later in life told me in 1965 there was one company of MPs and they were in all of Vietnam; one company. I don't know if he's right or not.

SM: Well yeah, I wouldn't be surprised by that number, given the small size of the force at that time. Did they talk about Vietnam during your MP training at all?

DN: Very briefly. One of the instructors at Fort Gordon mentioned Vietnam and then the training on traffic control points, he was telling us that vehicles going toward the fighting or the front had the right of way, and if you were on a traffic control point, vehicles coming down,

you waived them through when you could and then he made the little joke and he said, "If there's one with a red star comes on, you best start running."

SM: So not very constructive construction?

DN: Nope.

SM: Anything else that you'd like to talk about with the MP training?

DN: I kind of thought it was a farce. I was really disappointed.

SM: So you went from AIT to Germany? What was your duty assignment when you were assigned to the 556th MP Company in Germany?

DN: I was a security guard. I worked towers and being that I wanted to better myself and take more pride in my uniform I was also a main gate guard. I was also on the limited access gate and a couple of three times I was on the what they called the passive-active security where we drove around the inside of the installation, the controlled area, with a jeep and a machine gun.

SM: With ammunition?

DN: Oh yes. We had live ammunition every time we went on duty.

SM: What were the biggest concerns or threats that you as MPs faced in Germany?

DN: Boredom. Well, you go into a tower for ten hours a day, sir. You can't have any reading material, you can't have…you know, any material has to pertain to your post. You can't have cigarettes, you can't have a lighter, you couldn't have a radio, and the only thing we had for communication was an old crank telephone that worked occasionally.

SM: But I mean threats in the context of criminal activity; terrorism or communist infiltration, typical cold war type of scenario in Germany in the '60s. What, as MPs, were you briefed on things that you were supposed to be looking for or potential threats that existed?

DN: Potential threats was people trying to sneak into the installation, into the secured area, people trying to submerse us, like one time a guy in a bar got to asking a lot of questions so my partner and I that was in town, we went back and told our CO. Come to find out, he was from military intelligence and he was trying to do his job and see if we were going to talk to him and we did our job and reported him. The biggest threat, we had people that got confused where they were at and once in a while would wander toward the fence. The most exciting thing we had was an unauthorized helicopter flight came in one afternoon and it was an American helicopter and they were bringing something down to the restricted area. They were not cleared to land. They did not land on the helo pad; instead they landed right out by my gate at which

time I promptly locked and loaded my 45 and put them both on the ground, took their weapons away from them, and the pilot of the helicopter said, and this is a quote, "Christ I just came back from a year in Vietnam and this is the closest I came to dying yet!"

SM: What was it that they were actually there for?

DN: They were on an authorized mission to bring something into the restricted area. I have no idea what it was. I was never told what was in the bunkers and I never wanted to know.

SM: Any other interesting events while you were in Germany?

DN: Yeah, there was one of our people in our company went to one of the little villages outside and got fired up, drunk if you will, and he decided to come back and take a shortcut and head straight into our fence area and he came pretty close to getting shot. For his antics he was court marshaled and sent to a white hat unit where he could patrol town.

SM: How about any incidents of actual subversion?

DN: None that I know of.

SM: And any particular criminal activity that was a problem either in the base or in the community just outside of it?

DN: There was some black marketeering that went on, nothing spectacular; a few cartons of cigarettes I knew of. Some guys sold some film one time. They bought 35 millimeter film in the PX and sold it to some Germans down at the guest house.

SM: But the film had nothing on it?

DN: Nah. It was blank film. It was just film to be taken. It was higher speed than the Germans could get or cheaper or something, I don't remember. There was one incident that happened, an accident that really stuck in my mind. Two of the gate guard were practicing their quick draw and one of them sat down at the desk to do something, the other one was continuing his quick draw and some way or another the 45 discharged, hit the gentleman sitting at the desk in the back of the head, and while we all figured he was dead when we heard about it the bullet did not enter his skull. It did fracture the skull and put pieces of the skull into the brain, but the bullet traveled around the right side of the skull and came out almost directly between his eyes. The only thing that happened was after his recuperation, of course he was discharged, but he lost part of his memory, the things that had happened. I have never run into him since so I don't know what it was in later but the individual that did it was court marshaled and given a general discharge.

SM: Any other major accidents while you were there?

DN: That's the only one I can think of that was a major one. There was some minor accidents with vehicles that some people got messed up a little bit but nothing like that.

SM: What were the rules about your interaction with the civilian population outside the base and what was the relationship like between the German civilians and the American military personnel?

DN: Well, I always thought that they were pretty good. The relationship, we could go to town, we could do anything we wanted, we were just told, "Keep your mouth shut about what you're doing," and we did.

SM: There wasn't any kind of tensement…there wasn't like a tense relationship or any animosity or anything like that between Americans and Germans that you witnessed?

DN: Well, there was some problems between the Germans and the Americans but the problems I could tell you about were because of the American GI's way of doing things. We were in a foreign country but some of them, they acted like they were better than anybody else, the GI's did and they'd go get drunk and want to fight and stupid stuff.

SM: And that was just kind of the biggest problem that you saw, some Americans that just misbehaved or acted arrogant?

DN: Yeah, one case was across the road from our depot or station, whatever you want to call it, was a German concern that had engineers, German engineers, in it and it was guarded by a civilian type. They wore a uniform and they had dogs and things like that. They weren't like our guard dogs or our sentry dogs. They were more of a Shepherd, but not a German Shepherd type. So, a couple of our heroes as I call them got drunk one night and was going to go over there and hassle him and they wound up creating quite a little incident for us and everybody involved because they were in an area that they were trespassing. It wasn't a restricted area, it was some type of building equipment, and they were over there and the guard caught them and they were arrested by the German poliezi and it was kind of interesting. Again, they were court marshaled and sent out of the unit.

SM: Were there a lot of court marshals in your unit?

DN: It seemed…I was naïve. I thought that the military police, there would never be any court marshals, but there were three or four special court marshals and two or three article 15s in about nine months. The article 15s, most of them was for going to sleep on duty. People get up

in the tower and they just…boredom takes over and they just stand up in the corner and go to sleep.

SM: Anything else striking about your duty in Germany?

DN: Not a bit.

SM: What were the major things that you took away from that experience, especially as it related to what you would eventually experience in Vietnam?

DN: I think the first thing it taught, or one of the things that it taught me and it stuck with me even today is know what's going on around you; be aware of your surroundings and anything that seems a little out of place, investigate immediately.

SM: Were there specific…was there a specific or other specific examples of where you did that in Germany and it paid off, that it was important?

DN: Well, I don't know that it was ever anything that ever paid of or not but we had a lieutenant that used to try to sneak up on us on the towers and I heard stories about it, so one night he was coming up between the fence line which he was authorized to and I called for him to halt and he just looked at me and I told him to halt three times and he didn't halt so the 3rd time I yelled and he didn't stop I locked and loaded my M-14 and I had his undivided attention.

SM: What was his response when he heard you lock and load your M-14?

DN: He stopped immediately and he complied with my instructions and I had never seen the man before. I knew who he was but as far as meeting him or not, I hadn't. So, when he was part of the challenge was senior man, advanced forward to be recognized. When he came forward I didn't recognize him and it was raining so I put his face in the mud and I did everything by the book and he, from that day on, he had this strong dislike for me but he never messed with me and that is another thing that I took away from…took with me for the rest of my career. If you're right, be damned of who they think they are, you're the boss.

SM: Alright, well you went from Germany back, I take it, yeah, you went back from Germany to OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia?

DN: Yes sir.

SM: How long were you there, what was that training like, and what prompted you to leave?

DN: I left because my TAC officer and I, my senior tac, a Lieutenant Darryl Lackey and I did not see eye to eye. I made a comment about…he said that he thought that I'd make a good

tac officer and I told him I wasn't chicken such-and-such enough to be a tac officer and he took offense to that and he asked if I was calling him chicken crap and I said, "Well sir, I guess if the shoe fits, we have to wear it," and I was relieved from OCS for disrespect toward a superior officer.

SM: How long were you there before this happened?

DN: Oh, about 14 weeks.

SM: How was the training up to that point?

DN: Highly intensified, rapid, a lot of harassment involved, and a lot of it would come back with a lot of benefits. I was introduced to the M-14 E2 which was a fully automatic rifle. I was introduced to an M-60 machine gun that I'd only seen and fired one time before. I was introduced to the M-16, the AK-47, the SKS, and other assorted weapons.

SM: What did you think about the M-16 when you first fired it?

DN: When I first fired the M-16, I thought, "Wow, a super 22." No recoil, not a lot of noise, and fairly accurate.

SM: What did you think of it compared to the fully automatic M-14?

DN: Well, I preferred the M-14 because I seemed to shoot better with it. The M-14 was heavier and you couldn't carry as much ammunition so there's trade-offs on it. I preferred the M-14 over the M-16 to start with.

SM: In terms of what you thought about the M-16, if you needed it in a combat environment, were you concerned at all about the smallness of the round or anything like that?

DN: I was concerned about the M-16 on many things; one it's got a composite stock, a composite forearm not conducive for butt strokes. Put a bayonet on it and you've still got a fairly short weapon. If I'm going to have to use a bayonet, I kind of like to be a little ways from my work. I heard some nasty stories about it and some of them were definitely true. I had malfunctions during my qualification phase for the M-16.

SM: That complied with some of the rumors you'd heard about the weapon?

DN: Yeah. It was firing, I was going into the last phase of my qualification with the M-16 when the bolt ripped the head off a cartridge and I had a stuck cartridge in my chamber. I couldn't chamber another round, so I was bolo'd and had to start all over again.

SM: How about other problems? Anything else with the M-16?

DN: Well the training M-16s, every now and then we've had, I say we, other people have problems. It would fail to feed. The magazine just wouldn't put another round up to be picked up. Once in a while they jammed. I don't know if it was due to bad ammunition or just sloppy cleaning. Since these were weapons that we picked up from a weapons pool, I don't know who cleaned them before we got them. I imagine it was a group of trainees or people waiting for discharges, and of course that is not the type of individual that shall I say does the best work.

SM: And what else was important about OCS as far as lessons that you learned, things that you were able to take away from that training that would be important to you later on?

DN: One of the most important things I picked up in OCS was some infantry tactics, basic tactics that would come in very handy and one of the things I learned was cooperate and listen to other people's ideas. It was a real, shall I say, class and teamwork.

SM: Now just out of curiosity, and if you don't want to talk about this, that's fine; you had spent enough time in the military to know that by saying what you said to your senior tac, the outcome would very much be like what it was. Was this intentional on your part? Did you just want out?

DN: No, I didn't think he would do it.

SM: You didn't think he'd push to have you removed?

DN: No, I didn't because there was other people that did things a lot worse and he kept them, but I will say this; it was the biggest favor anybody ever did me.

SM: You think so?

DN: Oh yes.

SM: How so?

DN: Well, if I had continued I would have went to MP basic officer and I would have been a platoon leader in the 101st Airborne or 101st Air Mobile in Vietnam. If I had survived Vietnam the first time, in the '70s I'd have been rifted and I'd have probably been thrown out of the Army because when they rifted officers that were OCS grads that went in as privates, privates first class, they didn't have the choice of staying. They were rifted back and then, "We don't need you."

SM: And you ended up staying in the military for how long?

DN: Excuse me, sir, I didn't get that.

SM: How long did you end up staying in the military?

DN: I ended up staying in the military 20 years and some days. I retired.

SM: Yeah, so you made it a career…

DN: Oh yes.

SM: …and you would not have been able to if you had finished OCS. Interesting. Can you describe some of the worst things that some of the other OCS candidates had done that didn't result in their removal?

DN: One had four violations of the honor code, he lied. You were never supposed to wear civilian clothes. He was in a swimming suit and left a place called Calaway Gardens so he put on a T-shirt and a pair of shorts; civilian clothes. He'd been drinking and he was driving and he had an accident and he was at fault but the young lady that was with him said it was her car, she was driving and he let her take the fall for his quote "military career." Another one threw a kitchen knife, you know, a flatware knife, at the TAC officer one day and told him, "Get the hell out of my face!"

SM: He didn't get kicked out for that?

DN: No.

SM: Yeah, that's just a slight…

DN: Of course I think maybe his daddy being a full bird colonel may have had some insight on that.

SM: Yeah, so those are some pretty serious infractions.

DN: That's assault.

SM: Yeah, with the second one, an arrestable offense.

DN: Yeah.

SM: You left Fort Benning, Georgia, went to the 1st MP Company…

DN: Dian, Vietnam.

SM: In Vietnam, '66 and '67. Now when did you find out that you were going to be going to Vietnam?

DN: August the 20…I'm going to say the 24th or the 25th of August, 1966.

SM: What did you think?

DN: Well the reason I got picked to go to Vietnam, I had doubts about the Army then. I went in and I told this lady in assignments, I said, "I'm supposed to be going to Bremerhoven,

Germany I believe," and she looked at me and she said, "You're a damn MP, you're going to Vietnam," and I said, "Excuse me?" That wasn't a good phrase in those days, but that's what I said and she said, "One of your damn white hats just gave me a ticket! All MPs go to Vietnam." So I looked at her and I said, "Where we'll be, we'll be. Let's get it on."

SM: Did you file a complaint?

DN: With whom?

SM: I don't know. She had to have a boss.

DN: Well, I'd been in the military long enough to know then that civilians weren't God, but they talked to God and filing a complaint against a civilian in 1966 was a waste of pen, and ink, and paper.

SM: Alright, so you're going to Vietnam. Did they give you some leave before you left?

DN: Yeah, they gave me 14 days.

SM: What did your family think about you going to Vietnam?

DN: Mixed emotions. My wife was scared, my mother was scared, my step-dad said he thought it would be a good thing, my dad said, "Oh well, you've got some survival skills. You'll make it."

SM: Did your wife and your mother actually voice their fears very much with you?

DN: Yes, yes, my mother did. My mother was not real well and I was real concerned about her.

SM: How did your wife handle it?

DN: She voiced her fears one time and then after that it was a taboo subject; we didn't talk about it anymore.

SM: How about your kids?

DN: They were pretty young, they didn't quite understand. All they knew was daddy was going someplace, they didn't know where.

SM: How old were they at the time?

DN: Let's see, my oldest one would be about six, my youngest one about four.

SM: What was the hardest part for you?

DN: Getting on the plane, leaving them at the airport to fly to California.

SM: Well, you found yourself in Vietnam in, let's see, what month in '66?

DN: October.

SM: October '66? What was the first experience? What do you remember most about when that door opened?

DN: The heat. I got a welcome to Vietnam that most people don't get; I was on a 707, one that I probably helped build, and we were coming in for a landing, gear was down, flaps and everything, and we just were ready to set her on the airport when all of a sudden the throttles went to the firewall and a 707 climbed out steeper than I thought it could climb. We came from probably about 40 feet off the ground and we went to 10,000 just [makes flying noise] and the pilot never said why. We just went up and we orbited Tan Son Nhut for about five or ten minutes, we came back and he started down again and somebody said, "Hey, we going to set it down this time?" and we landed and the gentleman came on the plane and he said, "You carry your own baggage. You're not to give these Vietnamese any American money," and the usual threats. We opened up that, we got on the tarmac and oh my God, what have we got into? It was 100 degrees out there. The people looked a little different. They were…there's all kinds of yellow complected, and they were small.

SM: Anything else that you remember from your first experience on the ground?

DN: Just everybody was trying to tell me they wanted to carry my bag and I was scared to death to let anybody even touch my bag.

SM: So you found yourself at a Replacement Company at that point?

DN: Yeah, the 1st Replacement Company in Dian.

SM: Okay, and how long did you have to stay there?

DN: Well I stayed there for seven days and its kind of interesting because the first day I was there…well no, let me back up here a minute, sir. I went through Long Binh before I went to the 1st Replacement Company. When I got to Long Binh they were just building Long Binh and I had got processed in and they were talking about all these great duties and replacement companies are slave companies. They've got unlimited supply of labor and they were telling that so many people would be on KP, so many people would be on burning detail and guard and something was said about a guy, I can't remember his name…his last name was Gadston. Gadston and I was in the replacement Company at Fort Benning together. He was an OCS drop

out and he had been formerly in the 173rd Airborne Brigade and somebody said something about Specialist Gadston was the commander of the relief and I went over and I asked the sergeant of the guard where Gadston was at. He told me so I went over and Gadston was asleep and I woke him up by yelling at him, yelling that he was on his way back to OCS and he came awake and he came up and he said, "I'll be damned!" So immediately I was on the security force. That night, armed with an M-14, two other guys and I were on patrol. We had somebody try to run the gate and I fired my first shots in anger in Vietnam.

SM: Did you actually hit anybody?

DN: Yes, I did. We had…they were cowboys and they had been coming in and stealing stuff and they were chasing the gate guards clear out of there because a lot of the gate guards, they didn't want to be in Vietnam and these guys come out there and throw a string of firecrackers at them and they were gone. Well they threw the string of firecrackers and this one was in the wire and I can't remember if I shot three times and yelled, "Halt!" or yelled, "Halt!" three times and shot. All I know is I fired three times and I had two of them laying in the wire.

SM: Killed?

DN: KIAs.

SM: Did that help I guess send a message that that type of activity was no longer acceptable?

DN: It sure did for some people. All I know is that after I did it I was so sick for about three hours I couldn't believe myself.

SM: What were the things that went through your mind? Were these the first people you'd ever killed?

DN: Yes. That's the first time I'd ever fired at anybody in anger or in duty, and it's amazing, it was amazing, that I hit because I was probably 200 yards away and I was just standing. I just jumped out of the truck and came into a standing position and fired, and I took two of the three out and the other guys didn't even fire.

SM: What happened to the third person that tried to come in?

DN: He left. I don't know if it hit him or not, but of course the sergeant of the guard, the officer of the guard, and everyone else was out there immediately, took the M-14 away from me, and I think one of the things that probably helped me a lot is one of these people had a grenade on them. The practice there before had been they would throw stuff at the gate guards, the gate

guards would run, they'd come in, and steal whatever they could because at that time Long Binh was not well guarded. They were just building it.

SM: Now what kind of instructions had you received in terms of the rules of engagement and things like that before you actually went on this patrol? Were you given a briefing?

DN: I wasn't given a briefing. I was just told anybody that tried to come in through the gate I was to stop. They didn't say how.

SM: So they didn't talk about use of deadly force or anything like that?

DN: That subject never came up. They said, "Anybody tries to come through the gate or come through the fence are considered enemy and they are to be stopped."

SM: What did the officer and the NCO in charge, what did they say to you? I take it you probably went through some kind of a debriefing?

DN: I was immediately taken back to the guard shack and they started to say something and I said, "People, you folks are going to have to excuse me because I am sick," and I went outside and I upchucked everything that I'd eaten in two days, I'm sure, and I came back in. There was an old master sergeant around there and when I say old I mean old. He gave me a canteen of water and he said, "Go wash your mouth out, son." I washed my mouth out and I came back and he said, "Did you drink some of that?" and I said, "Yes, sarge," and he took me to one side and out of his side pocket he pulled a little flask and he gave me a shot of whiskey and he said, "There you are." He said, "By God, you're a combat veteran now. Go talk to them." I went over and they asked me to give them a statement. I gave them a statement, I told them exactly what happened, what I had done, and the sergeant of the guard called the vehicle back in and put me back on it. The officer of the day or the officer of the guard said, "Definitely put him back on there!"

SM: Now did you, before you went and were questioned, did you go up to the fence and see the people that you had killed?

DN: Oh yes. The first thing I did was went up to check to make sure that one, if I checked them both for signs of life. I also checked to see if they had weapons. I checked to see if they had weapons first and that's when I found the grenade in the guy's pocket. I took the grenade out, ensured that it was safe, and handed it to one of the other people and told him, "Go back over by the truck with this and just stay there." I then checked the pulse and I couldn't feel the pulse. I then put my hand close to their face to see if they were breathing and one of them

sort of…I guess a twitch would be a good way to say it. I backed off and then the next time I went there he was expired.

SM: How did that affect you knowing that that was…I mean, you acted as you had to act? They were a threat, and you shot. What kinds of thoughts were going through your mind?

DN: I was afraid I'd be court marshaled. I'd heard rumors and whatnot, and then I got sick. My biggest fear right then was I was going to be court marshaled for shooting these people.

SM: And what about the other soldiers that you worked with? Did you talk with them at all? Did they ask you any questions?

DN: Not really because when the vehicle came back, there was a new driver and two new people in it and the only thing that was said was the driver said, "Oh, you're the new guy that just greased two of them?" and I said, "Yes, I was forced to shoot two people tonight," and he said, "I hear you're a damn good shot," and that was the end of the conversation and then the next day I went to the 1st Replacement Company.

SM: And you were there at the 1st Replacement Company for a week?

DN: Yeah, I was selected by an individual as an escort to the people going to Tan Son Nhut to fly home as what we called the run. We would take the people that were going home, we'd take them down to Tan Son Nhut and then we'd go to Long Binh and pick up replacements and bring them back. Since I'd had experience with an M-60 machine gun and an M-14, each morning I'd go an M-60 and put it in a pivot mount right behind the cab of the deuce and a half and then I had an M-14 when we got into crowded areas where automatic fire would not be acceptable or prudent. I had an M-14 for that. While I was there, one thing that was kind of strange was I went down to Tan Son Nhut and went up to Long Binh and we picked up these officers and of course I had a little briefing that I had to give them, "If we have a problem, we get shot at, everybody down on the floor and just stay down until I give you the all clear. I'll do the shooting," and one of the lieutenants there was an engineer and of course they didn't stay in the Replacement Company long. The next day after we escorted him back he came down to the 1st Replacement Company with his battalion commander and they wanted me assigned to the 1st Engineer Battalion as a battalion commander's driver, and I asked the lieutenant, I said, "Sir, why would you want me to do something like that?" and he said, "Because you have a positive attitude, you act like you know what you're doing, and you're not afraid." Anyway, the commander of the Replacement Company nixed that idea and sent me to the 1st MP Company.

SM: Now while you were at the 1st Replacement Company, did they give you any kind of in country briefings, you know, what to expect, things to be careful of, what are certain Vietnamese customs and things like that?

DN: The only thing they did was they told me that I was going to be the escort. I didn't get any briefing. They gave me the M-60, they gave me an M-14; it was a different one everyday, and the second day I went out I was checking the M-14 that I was issued and I discovered that part of it was missing.

SM: What part?

DN: There's a spring in there that the…the recoil operating spring. So, I took it back and never having been a meek and laid back person – I'm pretty boisterous and pretty forward – I took it back and I was going to whip the individual that cleaned this M-14. The sergeant told me he didn't think it would be a good idea and I said, "I won't hurt him bad, I'll just hurt him," so sarge said, "No, no, no. Here, you take the M-14." So after that, anytime I went and checked out a weapon I could go behind the 1st Replacement Company and there was a place there and it was a free fire zone out there and I could fire five rounds to make sure the weapons worked. As a matter of fact, that practice started then. Everybody that got a weapon and was on escort duty would go back and fire at least five rounds out of a weapon to make sure the weapons were combat functional.

SM: Pretty prudent?

DN: Especially if I would have needed it without that recoil spring.

SM: So what was your reception like when you went to the 1st MP Company?

DN: The first thing that happened when I got there was the usual hooting and hollering and I went over to my…I was assigned to a tent. My platoon sergeant was a gentleman by the name of Lynholm and they called him Rock, and he took me over to the tent and introduced me to a couple of E4s and one of them, his name was Steineger. Private Steineger looked at me and he said, "I used to be a sergeant, but," he said, "I came here and I'm a private and I'm going home as a civilian," and he said, "They don't even make calendars as long as you've got to do in this place," and it was just good natured ribbing and a couple of them took me to one side, a Specialist Bond who was a Korean veteran; kind of interesting thing, his name was James Bond, and him and a young man by the name of Scott took me to one side. They told me a lot of

things, they fed me a lot of BS I'm sure, but they told me some things that I needed to know and they definitely gave me some tips that later saved my life.

SM: Do you recall anything in particular?

DN: Bond told me, "Never, never just go out with a 45 and one magazine. Always carry three or four magazines."

SM: Okay, any other lessons?

DN: Excuse me?

SM: Any other lessons that they tried to impart on you?

DN: Yeah, they told me that I would probably start out as a driver. We'd work a week on gates and a week on convoy, and when I was on convoy or patrol if I was fired at, and a jeep would run, get the hell out of the area quickly. If I was a gunner and we were fired on, get behind the gun, return the fire if I could see where it was coming from. They told me about, well, they reinforced some of my training from OCS; observe smoke, and if you hear a bullet go over your head, count until you hear the crack, if you see the smoke, count until you hear the crack of the weapon, not to trust anybody and to pay particular attention to people along the road or in fields when you went by because some hoes and shovels were actually single shot weapons.

SM: And did that happen a lot where people would just take pot shots at you?

DN: Oh yeah. When we first got there we had a guy we called four o'clock Charlie, and everybody's had a Charlie. Anyway, every afternoon about four o'clock, the east gate, excuse me, the west gate or the south gate of Dian would get one or two rounds, and one afternoon I checked out a sniper rifle. The armor and I was good friends and they had a sniper rifle - why, I don't know - and I went out the south gate and I made myself a pretty good rest on top of the bunker there and the sergeant of the guard came out and he said, "What are you going to do, Nelson?" and I said, "I'm tired of this guy shooting at us. I'm going to get him." And he said, "You know, I really admire your thought, but just remember he's never hit anybody yet and his replacement might be a better shot," and I thought that was kind of odd, but then I got to thinking about it, you know, this guy, he's harassing us but he never hit anybody so we could take an incoming round every now and then. So, I didn't shoot him but I think somebody got him with a helicopter at a later date because a helicopter came by one afternoon and there was a shot fired and they came around and they had four 60s on the outboard riggers and I mean they chewed up that area out there pretty good. We didn't have any more shots at four o'clock in the afternoon.

SM: Was there ever a replacement?

DN: Nope.

SM: And he never did hit anybody?

DN: Nope, not to the best of my knowledge. He never did hit anybody. He did hit the gate, the bunker at the gate, occasionally.

SM: Was it always just one shot that he'd fire or would he fire a couple of shots?

DN: Oh, once in a while it would be two. Most of the time it was just one. We always figured it was a homemade weapon.

SM: What other…what did you find yourself doing primarily? You put in the response on the questionnaire that, "A lot of convoy escort and patrolling armed reaction rifleman," you were an M-60 gunner and an investigator. What did you find yourself doing most on a day-to-day basis?

DN: Well the first, oh, four or five months I was there; well the first two months I was there, I was at Base Camp Dian. At Base Camp Dian one week I would work gates. It would be either nights or days, and then the next week would be patrol or convoy duty and it was…you never knew what you were going to do. We had five patrols that was called Alpha patrols. Alpha three was you just patrolled Dian, and I can't remember where the others were but we patrolled the town of Dian out to the Dian bypass, the Dian strip. The other one went down to a place called Tu Duc and we patrolled that place looking for the usual stuff; AWOLs, drunks, people that weren't supposed to be there. It was all off limits. We had another one that went out to a place called Phu something.

SM: Phu Loi?

DN: It was west of Dian.

SM: Was that Phu Loi?

DN: No, Phu Loi was north of Dian. This was west. It was a little town, Phu something and it had an advisor group there and Australians and everybody in the first MP Company was armed with either, well, most of them were issued M-14s. Some of them were just issued 45s, and it's very hard to control an M-14 in a jeep so I went out to the advisors at this Phu whatever it is and I talked to the advisors about some things and they gave me three pistols. I took the pistols back and did some horse trading with 701st Maintenance Company and got me an M-16 and it was a new one that just came out. It was made up for me. I got a regular M-16, the group,

you know, the magazine…the part with the serial number on it. I got that out of a scrap pile that was serviceable, and the first one I got I took it out to the advisory team and this sergeant had it made into an M-16 and the problem with it, there's a pin that wouldn't stay in but he found out by putting green tape on it, it would work. So, I went back and got me another action and I took it out there and they made what became known as a carb 15 and so when I was on my patrol or on my convoys I carried this carb 15 because I could carry so much more ammunition and I could control it in the jeep. Regulations said, "You are not supposed to have your own personal weapon." Well, we kind of overlooked that from time to time.

SM: Did MPs, you or other MPs, like to carry weapons, smaller, more compact, automatic weapons like say the grease gun or anything like that?

DN: Grease guns, Thompsons. We used to take an M-2 carbine and saw it off right in front of the gas cylinder, cut it off right at the back of kind of the pistol grip and as a matter of fact, somebody over there came back to the United States and started making them. They called them the enforcers. They were used by law enforcement people in the mid '60s, early '70s.

SM: You said that you went over to this group of advisors. Were these military advisors, civilian advisors, did you know?

DN: They were US advisors to mobile units. They had some things called V something 100s; they were kind of a big-tired, armored car and they had twin 30 caliber machine guns in the touret. We're going to have to take a quick break here for a sec.

SM: I was just going to say, we've been going an hour, so you want to take a pause?

DN: Yeah, I'll be back with you in a second, sir.

SM: What were the primary units in the base area around Dian, as far as infantry units or…I take it it was infantry units that were there with you?

DN: Well it was a support unit, the 1st Support Battalion, 701st Maintenance, Engineers.

SM: So no infantry units?

DN: Oh, we had infantry units around us, yes.

SM: What were the biggest problems and what were your primary responsibilities in terms of patrolling and policing? As a military police officer working in Vietnam, what was your function?

DN: Traffic control and apprehending people that had violated regulations and laws, watching people that were…I hate to say messed up, but yeah. We had drunks, we had people

on drugs we had to apprehend. We had to pick up prisoners, we had to pick up prisoners of war. The MP company, to give you an idea of some size, had nine platoons in it. We had our own mortar section that were all MPs, we had our own infantry platoon that were all MPs. As a matter of fact, some of them went through AIT with me. We had our own guard and escort platoon that did nothing but handle the prisoners of war. We escorted people around, we provided information to people coming through the gate. If somebody came from some place and said, "Hey, we're coming through here and we're looking for the 1st Replacement Company," or, "Could you tell us where to get some food," or "Do you guys have a PX? Do you have a service club," things like that.

SM: Now were there a lot of…you mentioned one of the things that you guys had to do as far as apprehending soldiers who had problems either with alcohol or with drugs, was that something prevalent while you were there, drug use? If so, what drugs?

DN: There was drug use. I don't know how prevalent it was, but the drugs that I was aware of on my first tour in the MP Company was mostly marijuana. We had some big time dealers. They'd buy a refrigerator and take all the insulation out of it, fill it with marijuana and try to send it home. Another thing was they'd buy these dolls, fill them with marijuana, and try to send them home.

SM: Now how did you detect these, like the refrigerators, the dolls; did you have dogs?

DN: They were detected by customs people and they would send us an undeveloped lead and we'd go back after them. Another thing that we had to do later when I became an investigator was watch for the black marketing of money.

SM: American currency?

DN: Oh yes.

SM: What was the…how did that work? How did they filter American dollars through the black market?

DN: Well, the dollar MPC, rate of exchange on base, I think was about 100 piaster to the dollar for MPC. That was the going exchange on post. The green, back off post, could get you two to 3,000 piaster. Oh yes.

SM: And that was against Army regulations?

DN: Oh yes. You weren't even supposed to have green backs in Vietnam, but there's ways around that.

SM: Why was that, do you know?

DN: Excuse me?

SM: Why was that? Why were soldiers not allowed to have green backs in Vietnam?

DN: Because of the black marketing of it. We were paid in military payment certificates, MPC, and it was illegal to give that to the Vietnamese, even.

SM: Okay, well did you actually have to arrest people that were engaged in this activity?

DN: Oh yeah, several times. One of the ways that they would get it was let's say that he was in a unit and you're ready to go home, you're DEROSing. Well, if I'm somebody like the 1st sergeant or a squad leader or a platoon sergeant or a Company commander and I have got all this MPC that I can't really account for how I got it and I'd like to keep it but I don't want to throw it away and you're going home and you've got maybe $20 to your name, I'll come up and say, "Look, I'll give you $350 in MPC. You cash it in, and then you give me $300 back and you keep the $50." So just before you get ready to get on your aircraft you go up there and you cash your MPC in for green backs and then of course you turn around and you say goodbye to your whoever it is there or his driver, whoever brought you up there, and you give them the money and they take it back and then they do things like put it in film canisters and send it home or just put it in an envelope and two or three twenties and around three sheets of paper, send it home.

SM: What was the highest ranking person, that you recall, that was found and arrested for that activity?

DN: A lieutenant colonel.

SM: And what other major problems, law enforcement problems, did you encounter as an MP in the first MP Company?

DN: Drunks.

SM: Was this something that was prevalent amongst support personnel as well as the ground combat units?

DN: Well we had this thing called division forward which I was also part of at one time after a couple of months at base camp and we went out and we were out for, well, it depended, two months, three months. You come back in and you get all your pay and the first thing they did was head down and see how much of that booze I could drink and I always felt, "There's a guy who's been out in the field for three months. He came back, he got drunk. He's not a bad drunk. Take him down, turn him over to somebody with some authority and say, 'Put him to bed

and tell him to shut up.'" If you want to go that way, that's fine. I don't know how many times on the evening patrol I've hauled drunks back to their unit. They used to call me the taxi, well that's okay. These guys might get shot tomorrow, what the hell if they're a little bit drunk tonight? Why bust their chops? But, now if they got stupid, then it's all over. You want to fight me, you want to get dumb, you want to pull a knife, you want to pull a gun, we go through the paperwork drill. We had a lot of vehicles with questionable operators. The jeep, you know, doesn't have a key or anything. It's just got a switch on it. Well they took and welded a chain on the jeep and put a pad lock on it and they pad locked the steering wheel. The problem with that is you could take and break that little bar on the seat and you had you a jeep; a little hard to steer with that chain whipping around, but you could do it. I busted a guy one night. He was drunk. He was outside the Red Cross compound and he was yelling at the top of his lungs to a young lady in there professing his love to her and she wasn't interested and she called the MPs and of course I went down and he was drunk. He had a 5th of whiskey and a case of beer in his jeep and he also had a pound of marijuana; it just wasn't his night.

SM: You mentioned before that sometimes they would get dumb and pull a knife or a gun even. Did that happen very often?

DN: Yeah, probably once a week. They had one guy pulled one in the NCO club and when I was trying to talk him out of the knife one of the bartenders just reached over the bar with a bottle and laid him out with it.

SM: Now when something like that happens, does the bartender get charged as well?

DN: Nope. I didn't see who did it and nobody would tell me. I didn't really try to find out.

SM: And you mentioned POW processing. Now, on the MP side of that, did that involve interrogation at all or was it just actually physically holding and processing POWs that had come back from the front?

DN: We never interrogated any POWs. We had a compound within our MP compound that was there. We'd take them down there. We had one for men and one for women and we just put them in there and we guarded them. If anybody came down to interrogate them, one of us was always around to ensure that they didn't use those tactics like the telephone and things like that. We never had to worry about it. The 1st military intelligence Company were professionals; they wouldn't do something that dumb.

SM: Did you work closely with them, with the military intelligence people?

DN: When I was a military police investigator, I did.

SM: What kinds of work did you do with them as an investigator?

DN: Excuse me. Mine was mostly information that I would develop from my informants. We'll say that one guy's trying to slip arms and ammunition off post to his friends that are Vietnamese. They would give me tips about people that were AWOL and things like that.

SM: You say informants; are you talking about Americans, Vietnamese, or both?

DN: All of the above.

SM: Did you work much with Vietnamese people?

DN: In the 1st MP Company when I worked on post as part of the Alpha three we had a Vietnamese national policeman assigned to us.

SM: How did you get along with him?

DN: That depends on the national policeman. Some I got along fine with. I had one one time that I felt like…kind of a funny story. We were at a traffic control point and his name was Yung and Yung was noted to be pretty heavy handed with the kids. You'd go set up a traffic control point and you'd have 50 kids around you. "Shine your shoes, GI? You give me cigarette? I buy you beer?" You know, they want to sell you their sister, their home. Anyway, this Yung was kind of a bad dude at times so one time we were setting up a traffic control point and it was hot and I drank a lot of water and there's supposed to be two MPs but there wasn't, it was just Yung and I that was out there and I told him, I said, "You stay here with the jeep. I've got to go over here and make a latrine call," so I went over to relieve myself and when I came back he said he was going out to relieve himself and he walked out in the woods, out in the rubber tree plantation and he wasn't probably 30 feet out in the rubber trees and all of a sudden I heard a grenade go off. I grabbed the M-60 and ran out there and there's Yung. He's bleeding from the mouth, bleeding from the ears. He's got this wild look in his eye and all's I see is kids running everywhere so I grabbed Yung, made it back to the jeep, called for reinforcements and a Medevac and Yung couldn't…was excited and he was speaking Vietnamese faster than I could understand him. So, when the Medevac got there they had an interpreter. What happened, Yung had been out there and he threw a concussion grenade at some kids. Well what happened was

the grenade hit a tree and bounced back and went off about 15 feet from him. Never did see him again.

SM: Any other incidents where people were injured or killed?

DN: Christmas Day, 1966. We was supposed to be having a cease fire. We went down to the orphanage and we brought two truck loads of Vietnamese kids out and they were going to have Christmas dinner with all the troops and everything. Bob Hope was going to be there – Bob Hope was there – and things like that, and I was the rear security. I was a gunner and so we weren't supposed to show any aggressive action so by aggressive action you tie the 60 down and there's a strap for that. It's a real quick dismount. If you need it, you just slide out of the seat back up behind the 60. You don't stand behind the 60 or anything. We went down to the town of Dian. We came back and right at the crossroad of the Dian bypass the road to Dian and to Base Camp Dian, as the first unit went by, there was a round fired and the leader of the convoy was a sergeant in the MPs, I can't remember his name, and he said, "Sniper in the woods to the north." We'd just got on the road. I reached back and got hold of the M-60 to pull myself up. A second round went, went through the radio in the back of the jeep. Part of the bullet caught me in the arm, and the driver swerved and I was flipped out of the jeep at about 25 miles an hour. I rolled off the road and into the bar pit and I looked up and all's I could see was dust of the vehicles headed for the gate. While I'm trying to make myself invisible along the road the sniper fired again. He fired a total of 17 rounds, I fired a total of 22. I was hit in the arm. I have pieces of rock where he got pretty close that penetrated my skin. My 45 made contact with him twice; once in the left shoulder, once just above the navel.

SM: Now how far away was he from you?

DN: About 60 yards. Had I only had one magazine that could have been a different story. When I heard the second shot, the second round that I heard hit, a rifle fell out of the tree and when there was no more shooting I went over and he was just hanging there so I reached up and pulled him down and he expired. Not knowing a lot about it, but I believe I hit his [phenol] artery or the [aorta] down in the stomach cavity there someplace. I used my good arm to pull him over to the road and I captured the weapon, of course. It was an AK-47 with a folding stock, the first one I'd ever seen like that. He had on a tan pith helmet that had a red star on it and he had on a canvas belt that had a buckle with a red star. I pulled him back to the road and I can remember parts of that and some things that aren't there but I do remember that I had a headache

so bad that my eyes ached. I had blood on my arm, I had blood on my legs, I had blood in my mouth, my ears, and I looked up the road and I seen two columns coming out and there was a gun jeep in front and two gun jeeps in the column. I recognized them as MPs and I got scared then that they were going to shoot me. I waited until they got close and I held up my helmet as high as I could with both hands above my head. The 1st sergeant came up and he said, "You're the livest corpse I've ever seen!" I looked at him, put a cigarette in my mouth, and I said, "Top, have you got a light?" and he said, "You're supposed to be dead." And I said, "Sorry to disappoint you." At about that time my platoon sergeant came up and he said, "Here, let me help you." And I don't know how he helped me, because when I woke up I was in the hospital. I was in the hospital for two days, and when I got out my partner that had went back and told them I was dead, I'd been shot and knocked out of the jeep, was no place to be found.

SM: Did you ever hear about what happened to him?

DN: Strange thing; I found out six years later that he was sent to a place called Ban Me Thout.

SM: Did he survive?

DN: Oh yeah. He now lives in Kansas City, Missouri. I'm going to stop by and see him one of these days when I'm back that way. I'm going to call him up and ask if he'd like to have a beer and talk about old times. I think he'll probably decline.

SM: Well, what else happened while you were with the 1st MP Company? What other major activities? You mentioned in your questionnaire that you were, I guess after the fact, you realized that you were part of Junction City?

DN: We were part of Junction City, Operation Drake, Operation Mallard.

SM: What was your role in those types of operations?

DN: I was security for the commo installation.

SM: Were there ever incidents of attempts of infiltrating by the Viet Cong?

DN: Well once in a while we'd get a stray, running in and out of the compound at Lai Khe or [Med Town] but nothing spectacular you know. I don't know that they were really VC or just Vietnamese looking for something to pilferage.

SM: Did you have a live interaction with civilian Vietnamese?

DN: Not during my first tour, no.

SM: What did you think of the Vietnamese people?

DN: My first tour I didn't have a lot of thought about them. I thought they were all, 90% of them, were VC and I didn't understand them, I didn't understand their problems. I got along with them. I wasn't outwardly aggressive. I didn't think, "Now can I shoot one and get away with it," or anything like that, but I just didn't have a lot of interaction with most of them. I had a lot of interaction with police force and officials but as far as individual, not a lot.

SM: Well based on your experiences and based on what you heard in your unit, what did you think the United States was trying to accomplish in Vietnam?

DN: Well, at that time I was kind of naïve. I thought that we were trying to accomplish pushing the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong out, setting up a free government run by the Vietnamese people.

SM: Do you think that the tactics fit that particular strategy?

DN: Some of them did, some of them didn't. We had what was known as search and destroy and it was a real estate swap. We'd take the hill today and after we'd fought to take the hill, why we'd go back to base camp, drink beer while Charlie moved back in.

SM: What did you think of those particular operations, search and destroy missions?

DN: Well, during the search and destroy operations what people don't realize is when we went out and searched and destroyed some things, we tried to get people to come into villages and build what we called strong points. However, we took medics out with us and we had sick calls, we had dentists out there. We improved the average Vietnamese life, I'm sure. You know, the people that were influential in Vietnam, they had access to doctors, and dentists. The people who were less affluent, they didn't have this access to the doctors and the dental and some of the other things. The doctors, most of them used herbal medicine and I hate to say it but almost like witch doctor treatment, some of them.

SM: It's a part of what you did was support civic action?

DN: Yeah, I was there a lot. We had…they were first called Lom Som operations and we did a lot of that.

SM: So you left your first tour was…

DN: '66-'67.

SM: '66-'67, you left, came back after the United States went to Aberdeen. Now, what did you think about your experiences upon leaving? When you left Vietnam, what did you think

in terms of did you feel you had accomplished anything, did you feel like you had learned anything?

DN: I was, I guess I was overwhelmed. I'd learned a lot, I had viewed another country like most other people never have the chance to, like a developing country and see things that have been done and I took a lot of pictures and I thought I really did something this time, and I really felt I did. I didn't particularly ever want to go back. I learned a lot of lessons and one thing that I did do, it gave me a real strong belief in a superior being.

SM: While you were in country the first year, did you correspond a lot with your wife?

DN: I wrote a letter every night.

SM: Did you receive a lot of letters in return?

DN: I received a letter probably…well; I didn't receive them on a timely basis, but yeah. The mail sometimes was a little slow getting through and sometimes I wouldn't get any mail for a week, maybe week and a half, and then I'd probably get three or four letters. I got letters from my family, I got letters from my friends. Interestingly, I found out I was in Operation Junction City was a democratic senator from Washington State wrote me a little note and he said, his name was Martin Dirkin and I'd met him one time a long time ago and we'd corresponded throughout the years and he wrote me a letter and said, "I'm so proud of you on Operation Junction City." I thought, "What the hell's he talking about?" So I talked to one of the colonels that came into the Commo thing, he was a pretty cool dude, and he came into the Commo area and said, "Nelson, you got any coffee?" "I always got coffee, sir." I had a little kerosene stove and so I poured him a cup and I said, "Sir, can you tell me something?" He said, "Yeah," and I said, "What's the name of this operation we're on?" and he said, "Shhh, its Junction City," and I said, "Well, a senator in Washington State already told me that."

SM: So keep it to yourself?

DN: Yeah, but about letters, like I said, I wrote a letter every night. I put most of the letters like, you know, "Nothing real exciting happened today but I want you to know I'm okay."

SM: Yeah, did you find that that helped a lot, writing and receiving letters?

DN: Yeah, it really did, and I found out another thing; we had a lot of support there from older people. There were some people in Ohio I believe it was that sent a letter to the USO for any soldier and they told us they thought we were great people and all that so I sat down and wrote them a short note and they wrote me a couple more letters and one time they asked me if I

smoked and I said, "Yeah, I smoke Pall Mall," so about a month later I got this package in the mail; I had four cartons of Pall Mall cigarettes. There was a young lady in Georgia that used to write to me weekly. That was her class project; she was in the 3rd grade. I'm trying to think of some others. We got letters…a lot of the people, a lot of the GI's would never take the time to participate in something like that but I'd go and the USO guy would say, "Hey, you think you could look through one of these letters and talk to some of these people?" and I always had time to write a letter and talk to somebody.

SM: Now you mentioned earlier that you left Vietnam with a stronger sense that there was a higher being. Can you elaborate on that? In what way did you feel more strongly in your spiritual convictions?

DN: I always had a saying; God protected fools and soldiers. I should have been dead on the Dian bypass Christmas Day. January 26th, 1966 I should have been dead when they shot the tires out from under the jeep and we hit the ditch and I rolled out over the top of the jeep, over the top of the hood, down on the road, picked up fragments of my legs. I mean, I couldn't move out there for a minute; I was target, and bullets all around me but nothing hit me. In February when the armored personnel carrier blew up when I was within 20 feet of it, I should have been killed. The only thing it did was I think it contributed to my hearing loss, it put shrapnel in me, and I survived. Somebody had to have been looking out for me, and it had to have been…there were 14 people; there were 13 people in the armored personnel carrier - shows you 13s an unlucky number - and myself and the driver and I was the only two that survived and the driver was discharged because he was stone deaf after the explosion.

SM: What was the cause of the explosion?

DN: A B-40 rocket.

SM: And you and he survived and everybody else was killed?

DN: It hit through the side of the armored personnel carrier and it just like a torch in there. I don't know what it hit, how it hit, it just popped him right out the driver's hatch, just poof!

SM: And how did you survive it?

DN: I don't know; God, I guess. That's what I always said it was. I was outside. It knocked me down. It actually pushed me down the road. I was Medevaced. They pulled gravel

out of my face, out of my legs. I had a piece of shrapnel in my back. The only thing I can think is God was looking out for me.

SM: Anything else you want to add about your first tour?

DN: Yeah, I think that I was one, very lucky, and two, I must have made a real good impression because I went over a PFC and I came back a buck sergeant.

SM: When you got back, you found yourself in…where did you come in through as far as you left Vietnam, you came in to the United States. Did you land in an open terminal?

DN: San Francisco International.

SM: San Francisco? How were you greeted there?

DN: Well, there was a few hecklers, and one of them, a young lady, yelled and said, "Baby killers!" and I turned and looked her right in the eye and in a very low voice said, "Too bad somebody didn't do that to you! You wouldn't be here to bother me today, would you?" and there must have been a look or something; she left. From San Francisco we went to the Oakland Army Terminal. We were fed a steak dinner, given a recruiting command lecture, "Anybody here want to re-up right now? Does anybody here want to be a recruiter?" We were fitted for a new uniform and got 30 days leave.

SM: And you found yourself after that in Aberdeen, Maryland?

DN: Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

SM: Standard MP duties there?

DN: Yep; white hat duty and kind of an interesting thing, a sergeant from my unit in the 1st MP Company by the name of Wally Hicks was in charge of traffic there.

SM: Anything interesting happen while you were at Aberdeen?

DN: Nope, just we were sort of a replacement center. The first time I realized how bad things were in the States, I was a squad leader and I had a platoon sergeant. We had a platoon sergeant who was an E6, we had two E5s, and our platoon consisted of ten people. Platoons should be 28 to 32. We had ten people counting the two sergeants.

SM: So seriously understrengthed?

DN: Very much understrengthed.

SM: Was that primarily because of the drain that Vietnam caused?

DN: Yes.

SM: Did you ever find…was your unit ever activated to deal with any kind of demonstrations or problems with student activists or anything like that?

DN: We had a contingency plan. We closed the post a couple of times and during the riots in Baltimore we took items from Aberdeen to the Baltimore police; flak vests, steel pots, 36 inch white oak batons.

SM: But you yourselves didn't have to actually engage any kind of riot control or anything like that?

DN: Nope.

SM: And then you went from Maryland back to Germany?

DN: Yep, A Company, 385th MP Battalion.

SM: From '68 to '70? Was that pretty much a similar duty to your previous experience in Germany?

DN: Nope. When I first got there I was Schewabis Gmend as the NCO IC of the Schewabis Gmend detachment.

SM: I'm sorry, would you spell that for me?

DN: I can't spell Schewabis Gmend, sir. But I think its S-C-H-E-W-A-B-I-S-H, I think. Gmend is G-M-E-N-D. My company was at Kornviesthien between Ludwigburg and Stuttgart at a place called Wilkins Barracks. My platoon leader was a Gorrerigien Germany and my platoon sergeant was a Schewabis Gmend, and Schewabis Gmend and Gorrepigen we had an NCO IC. I was the one in Schewabis Gmend and a Sergeant Webb was the one at Gorrepigen.

SM: And what were your primary duties there?

DN: My primary duties were patrol supervisor, desk sergeant, and insuring that the detachment was run militarily with housekeeping and classes and things like that.

SM: Were there any additional problems or potential threats that you had to deal with on your second tour in Germany as far as threats from communist East Germany or Russia or Soviet Union or anything like that?

DN: Not while I was in Schewabis Gmend. I was promoted…I got there in October and in January I was promoted to staff sergeant E6, four years and eight days in the Army, and I was taken from Schewabis Gmend to Wilkins Barracks where I was made the headquarters platoon sergeant, the CBR NCO, and the communications NCO. We didn't have the NCOs for communications so I was it. There we were, let's see, one time we were on alert to go to

Lebanon to remove American civilians, and we went as far as the Ramstien Air Force Base and stayed there on alert for two days. Another time we were on alert for a demonstration in Frankfurt and we were kept in reserve in case they overwhelmed the German police which they never did. There were a couple of marches and they threw rocks and whatnot. We were out of sight but we were armed and ready to go.

SM: Did you work a lot with the German poliezi?

DN: Not a whole lot; a case now and then and we knew them and we worked with the German military police, the field Yegers and we competed in a competition with the German military police, the English military police and the Canadian military police. The demonstration we put on was more infantry than MP because the platoon sergeant for this project was an ex-special forces man and all the squad leaders had Vietnam experience so we sort of, shall we say, stacked the deck on them.

SM: And so the Americans faired well in that competition?

DN: Oh yes, very well. Our demonstration was so outstanding the colonel of the English contingency came over and said, "I say ol' chaps, you sure you won't come back as a colony? We could use you!"

SM: Were there other country forces in Germany with you besides the Canadians and the Brits?

DN: Yeah, there were French there but I'd never had much contact with them at this time.

SM: And what did you take away from I guess both your time in Aberdeen and your time in Germany? What were the most important things you took away especially as it relates to going back to Vietnam?

DN: Nothing actually that could have got me in trouble.

SM: So you went back to Vietnam in 1970?

DN: Yes.

SM: In a Civil Affairs company capacity, MACV team #15 in Hoi An?

DN: I was assigned to the 29th Civil Affairs Company at Camp Horn, Vietnam with duty assignment to 2nd Platoon, Hoi An, MACV team 15.

SM: What were your primary duties there?

DN: I was an advisor to the correctional and detention centers of Quang Nan province.

SM: Now did you volunteer to go back to Vietnam or was that something that was forced upon you?

DN: I never volunteered for anything in the Army, sir. It was sort of a mutual agreement. I couldn't get promoted in Germany because first of all I've been in the Army less than five years, or just five years. I'd just made E6 and I hadn't been there, and my 1st sergeant said that he couldn't force a waiver like that. The battalion sergeant major told me that I was being short changed because the waivers could be done if they wanted to do them, but I think that my 1st sergeant was I don't want to say envious but maybe feared me because I was an E6 and during the Christmas time of 1968 he was sick. He had a profile; he had a lot of profiles, and on holidays you always had these problems and so I was a senior E6 in the company and I was the 1st sergeant during the Christmas holidays of '68-'69 and I had a reputation that if you want something done, give me the assignment, it got done. My first assignment at Kornviesthien after I made E6 and came back was to refurbish the gym for a brigade basketball tournament, and the sergeant major said, "I don't know where I'm going to get the bodies, but I'll give you what I can." I was lucky that 48 new recruits came in and they were all assigned to me for the first week they were in Germany and I worked them from seven o'clock in the morning to midnight every night. I refurbished the gym, we had the floor resanded and polished, the bleachers were fixed, there were 117 broken windows replaced, and then to top it off I formed my own color guard and was the NCO IC of the color guard. When they presented the awards I was called up and given an award and there was a colonel by the name of Holt, a real gentleman, he looked at my uniform and he said, "Sergeant," he said, "I'm going to have to talk to you about your decorations," he said, "You don't have them all on your uniform," and I looked him in the eye and I said, "Which one don't I have, sir?" and he said, "Well, your good conduct medal doesn't have any clasp in it," and he said, "You've only got one hash mark." I said, "Sir, that's all I'm authorized, like I told you when you promoted me. I only had four years and six days in the Army then." He looked at the sergeant major and he told them, he said, "Sergeant major, you better watch this man. He'll have your job," and the 1st sergeant I think took note of that. Anyway, there was something about somebody…they had to furnish somebody a name for a possible exchange on a roster to go to Vietnam and the 1st sergeant said, "Would you feel bad if your name was on that?" and I said, "I wouldn't feel good because I've had one tour," and he

said, “But you wouldn’t really feel bad?” and I said, “Well, I don’t know.” So maybe I kind of volunteered, but not, “Here, take me.”

SM: Well, going in at that time period, ’70 to ’71, I’m sure you were aware that as far as for the American side of things we were trying to wind things down, Vietnamization was in place, or how well aware were you of those issues?

DN: I was very much aware of the Vietnamization of the plan. As an advisor, the only thing I was to do was to assist and the problem previously to that I understand was it depended on where he was at and who was the advisor. Some advisors gave their counterparts everything. You know, their counterpart come up and say, “I need three sheets of tin for…” and the advisor, “Yeah, no problem,” and he’d go get them. Another type of advisor was, “Yeah, you need three pieces of tin? I need three million dollars; good luck.” My attitude and my philosophy was, “You’ve worked as hard as you can and as long as you can on your side. If you don’t get it, then I will assist through the American side.” I wasn’t giving them anything. Don’t give them a handout, give them a hand up. I helped them coordinate a lot of things, like one of the things a correctional center had was a well that, well, frankly, in the United States today, whoever in charge would be in the jail and all the inmates would be suing because the well was…the water was used right around the well. That’s where they took their bath at, and it was no place for run off, it was just right back into the ground. Part of the hooches didn’t have tin on them. They had the joist there but they didn’t have the roof and things like that. The detention center, they cooked their meals in two big pots down in this place that was infested with flies, rats, and everything else and one of the first things I did was tell my counterpart at the detention center that we need to upgrade that, and its kind of a strange thing; both of my counterpart’s names were Luu, spelt L-U-U. The man at the detention center, elderly gentleman, fought during World War II with the French, remembers the Japanese occupation, he was a member of the [John Dong Maries], the French military police type thing, and he was in charge of the detention center. He spoke fair English and he, the only thing he could think of was to make himself look good in my eyes, I think, because if I made a suggestion he’d start working on it. If he couldn’t get it finished he’d come over and, “I beg your pardon, but I need to talk to you.” We had a lot of people that were in the detention and the correction center that were craftsmen and they were just sitting around and my suggestion to them was, “Why don’t we use these people to do things?” and, “Like what?” and I said, “Well have them…well, they clean up a little bit, but have

them to clean up, have them to build." "We can't do that!" and my question was, "Why can't we do it?" and they said, "Because it's never been done." So, one of my projects was getting a real kitchen built. I went and talked to Luu and I said, "I think we can get the concrete because RMK dumps concrete every week or every day," that they were building a humongous sight out there in Hoi An and sometimes they'd dump a half a yard of concrete, sometimes a yard. My first project had been to cement around the well at the correction center and the chief out there's name was Luu and he was a young guy and he didn't like to do, you know, he liked to think about things a little while. So, our first bucket load of cement, we lost. But, the second one we brought down and we poured a floor in what was going to be the kitchen of the detention center and I found out we had a couple of people who had worked with cement or claimed they had in the detention center and they put the floor in, they put a drain in, I mean they did an outstanding job. We thought, "Now we'll just go up a ways with the walls," being cement, and I wasn't much of an engineer but what is it to making a form? You take some plywood and put some 2x4s behind it and you pour cement in between it, right? No, that's not the way you do it because when you do that plywood will bow at the bottom. So, the walls were supposed to be two inches of concrete, about four feet high. The walls at the base were about a foot and a half thick, two feet and at the top about two inches. Excuse me [coughs]. I worked a deal with RMK where we could go out and sort their blocks for them and the detention center and the correction center would take all the bad blocks, stack the good blocks on the pallets so it helped us both. We built a kitchen and the Marines gave me screen and things and we made a professional kitchen out of it. We finally covered 2/3 of the correctional center with concrete on the ground.

SM: Would you like to take a break to [tape skips]

DN: They're criminals.

SM: Okay, so all of them?

DN: Yes.

SM: Now the…your principle role was to help advise and I guess make this a better prison, upgrade the, like you said, the kitchen and things of that nature? Do you think that your recommendations were pretty much taken to heart by your Vietnamese counterparts consistently?

DN: With Luu at the detention center, if I made a suggestion, it might as well been written in stone. With Luu at the correction center, he had to discuss it. He attended school, he attended some type of school in Philadelphia and he was more of, "Let's talk about this."

SM: What did you think about the Vietnamese that you were working with generally, in terms of did you think that they were doing a good job or adequate?

DN: All the Vietnamese I worked with as an advisor were outstanding citizens, they were great people, they did a good job. Some of them were a little slower than I…they weren't as aggressive as I am on getting things done, but they were…I would enjoy having them around me today, even.

SM: What other Americans did you work with during this time period? Were there a lot of other advisors, American advisors that were working with you or were you kind of alone out there?

DN: I was alone in my department. I worked with the public safety. My boss was Mr. Jack Nelson who lives across town from me right now, 70 some years old, Staff Sergeant Martinez, another Arizona resident that he was sort of an office manager for us. He took care of paperwork and tracked things and kept track of projects and made briefings and things like that, Sergeant 1st class Gene Mills was the national police field force advisor and that was the three of us in the public safety office. Sgt. Martinez and I were assigned to the 29th Civil Affairs, Sgt. Mills assigned to MACV team 15. I had a platoon leader and two or three other platoon members from the 2nd Platoon in Hoi An. We had advisors down at the district level from the 29th. The platoon leader was a captain and he had a driver that was a medic and the medic and he was a private. He got promoted up to Spec 4 rather rapidly and he told me one time that he was really concerned because he wanted to be a medic and so sort of got a wheel rolling in my head and I went to Mr. Nelson and I said, "How about we have a medic come out and hold sick call at the correctional center a couple of times a week," and Mr. Nelson looked at me like, "You need to change your brand of cigarettes," and he said, "Well, it won't work," and I said, "Why?" and he said, "Well I just don't think it will work." He said, "Try it." He gave me a lot of latitude, a lot of, "Do it and tell me what the results are." So I went and talked to the captain and the first time I talked to him he was luke warm, so then my colonel came down, a colonel by the name of Gieger, a lieutenant colonel, a fine gentleman and Colonel Gieger and I had quite a discussion over a cup of coffee and he told me, he said, "Well," he said, "I'll support it," but he said, "I

don't want anything bad to happen," and I said, "Well sir, I don't know what could happen, but we'll give it a try." My hardest sell was Luu. I finally convinced Luu we should do it and we did and Specialist McConnell came to the correction center, went under my direction and my personal escort. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning from eight until ten o'clock he would hold sick call about two months into the program; we got a doctor who allegedly was from North Vietnam and he seemed to be a pretty good doctor. He spoke fair English, and he was complaining that the American shouldn't be treating the Vietnamese; Vietnamese should be treating the Vietnamese. I asked him if he would work with Specialist McConnell and he didn't think that was a good idea and then he thought about it and then Luu and him talked about it and then Luu and I talked and we agreed and McConnell helped him until McConnell rotated out. He worked two days a week, sometimes three at the correctional center with the North Vietnamese doctor. We got everybody vaccinated; I wasn't real popular for that. We got a med cap team to come in and they vaccinated everybody for a couple of things, I forget what they were right off hand, they ran a TB test and also had a dental check.

SM: Now when you finished working at the police force, I guess it was an academy…

DN: I went from the correction center in Hoi An, or correction detention, to Danang and I went to…I was an advisor for the in service police academy at Tin Shau which was south of Danang.

SM: You mentioned that you conducted operations where you went along as liaison with the national police and that in the event, did you encounter American personnel?

DN: Yes.

SM: One of the things you said that one of your jobs would have been to apprehend American personnels caught during those sweeps and return them to military control. Did that actually happen? Did you actually have to apprehend Americans during those sweeps?

DN: Oh yes.

SM: What were they…why were they away from their units? Were they just AWOL?

DN: Well, they were young American males and they were in desire of female company and companionship. They would go to the villages and whatnot and…for a fee, I guess that's…

SM: Gotcha. Anybody that was there for anything other than female companionship that you recall?

DN: Yeah, I caught a guy that was a deserter, been a deserter for four and ½ years. I caught a black marketeer. I caught a lieutenant that was assigned to a military police Company.

SM: What was he doing?

DN: Same thing as the rest of the guys were.

SM: Oh, okay, the other guys…that is seeking companionship?

DN: Yeah, companionship. We caught a money launderer one time. He had six or 8,000 dollars in American green backs on him. I don't know how much MPC he had and a lot of piaster. He cried all the way to jail.

SM: Anything else interesting happen while you were assigned to either the correctional facility or to the academy?

DN: I was assigned to the academy. The second weekend I was there, a typhoon came through and it leveled…it didn't level the academy but it did multiple, multiple building damage and then I find out that three weeks after the typhoon I have an inspection by the deputy commanding general from the 24th corps, General James Hollingsworth who ironically enough was my DCG while I was in the 1st infantry division and had also been at Aberdeen with me. I called upon; I did a lot of liaison work with the Navy. I got to know some Navy chiefs real well, got to know some See Bees real well and they had engineering and skills that I couldn't even think about; carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and they were more than willing to come over and not only lend a hand but to help the Vietnamese, they'd instruct them, because the Vietnamese that were at the academy were all Vietnamese police. They're no carpenters out there. We didn't have any carpenters aside, we had policemen; same with electricians, plumbers.

SM: So you had the other services pitched in in terms of providing both expertise and also training, cross training them? The Navy, the See Bees, they were volunteering to do this?

DN: Yeah, I'd go talk to them and they'd get four or five people, they'd ask people to volunteer and these guys always wanted…I don't know, I think they wanted to get out and see what we really did.

SM: And at the academy, did you find again that the Vietnamese were very receptive to you as an advisor?

DN: Very receptive; also eager to please. The one that spoke English as well as I spoke Vietnamese was Captain Yung; rather tall gentleman, and he thought that I should live at his house with him. Every place we went, he always assured that I had a body guard and I told him,

I said, "[Dai We], I don't need a body guard." "Oh, if anything happened to me, my chief will cut my head off." I said, "What?" and he said, "If anything would happen to my [co van]," and that's Vietnamese for advisor, he said his chief had told him, "If anything happens to your co van, I'm going to cut your head off." I don't know if he did or not. It may have been just something to make me feel better.

SM: And nothing ever happened to you your second tour? You didn't get injured or anything?

DN: Nah. I got shot at a couple of times.

SM: Did the compounds that you worked in, the prison or the academy, did they ever get mortared or rocketed or anything like that?

DN: Well, at Dian, excuse me, at Quang Nan, the detention center took three direct mortars one night. The MACV compound took a lot of mortars. We had three or four people Medevaced for wounds from MACV.

SM: But that was not a normal occurrence, or was it?

DN: Oh, about once a month Charlie let us know he was still out there.

SM: So that's not very frequent; I mean, once a month?

DN: Nah. It wasn't always mortars. One night they threw a 75 pack howitzer at us and it hit a truck parked at the local PF compound and it just so happened that that was one night that the PF advisors had come to MACV where we were having a show that night and they were up there and when it hit the corner of that truck it put shrapnel all through the mobile home that they usually lived in. If they'd have been there, it would have killed them all. That was the night that I went to combat in shower shoes, a flak vest, a pair of shorts, and a helmet. We wound up in a bunker with all the female entertainers. Funny things happened. A thing went off, I'd just come out of the shower. I grabbed my rifle and my stuff and into the bunker I went and of course I was one of the first ones to take up a firing position and pretty soon it was all in there and this colonel came in and he said, "Everybody okay?" "Yeah," and he starts to have a little role call in there and this gal lights a cigarette and she says, "There's three guys in here in their shorts!" and the colonel says, "What are you guys doing in your shorts?" and I said, "Sir, I heard there's a come as you are party when the first round went off," and he said, "Where was you at?" and I said, "I just come out of the shower with a towel wrapped around me," and he said, "Well," he said, "I guess that's acceptable."

SM: Let me go ahead and stop this. I'm about to run out of space on this CD and let me put a new one in real quick. Alright, this ends CD #1. Alright, this is CD #2 of the interview with Mr. Darryl Nelson. Okay, the incident in the bunker there with the female entertainers, that raises a question for me. You also mentioned previously the use of some of the Army services in USO and things like that. Did you utilize a lot of those services and did you see many USO shows while you were in Vietnam, your first and your second tour?

DN: The first tour I saw quite a few; to name a few Bob Hope, shook hands with Mr. Hope and he…I was a part of his guard around Dian and he told me that we better start getting a better rating on TV or they were going to cancel us. When I was at Phu Loi I met, I can't tell you his name…Hugh O'Brien and the Korean Kittens. Mr. O'Brien invited me to a party after the show. I was an investigator and I was part of the entourage of security and he was intrigued by my call sign. My call sign was Gunfighter and he invited me to a party and we talked and I got autographed pictures of him. While at Dian Base Camp my first tour, Lai Khe I met a young lady by the name of Nancy Sinatra and she sang, "These Boots Are Made for Walking," and I've seen her show two or three times. I've also, you know, there's certain shows I've seen; some shows I didn't care for. The second tour I didn't see many shows, big shows, because they were the big names like Mr. Hope when he came back, he gave a show in Danang and of course we could go but it's a 50 mile ride and Charlie could own the roads because I remember these so called cease fires; I don't like them. Every time I got hurt it's been a cease-fire. But, we had shows at the compound at MACV compound. We probably had four or five shows every couple of months. They had USO services, they had classes at the USO, they taught you how to pour gold so you could make gold jewelry, gold rings, whatnot, they had crafts like leather, they had…you could go sit and read. I'm kind of an avid reader and I used to go up there and I'd read four or five books and I'd take them up and trade them for four or five more. They had first rate movies. I never attended any, but one time one of the radio operators came back and told me about this movie and it just so happened that it was playing in Georgia the first week and in Atlanta and they were seeing it in Vietnam two days before they seen it in Atlanta.

SM: Did you find that those services were helpful?

DN: Oh yeah. It sort of got your mind off of what was going on and relax. I carved a leather…a set of twin leather holsters while I was there and I still have them around today just for nostalgia I guess.

SM: And what did you think of the actual entertainment that you witnessed in some of the USO shows, you know, Nancy Sinatra or Bob Hope? Did you think that they put on a really good show for the soldiers?

DN: They put on excellent shows, and I'd be amiss if I didn't say Colonel Martha was one of the best, Martha Ray.

SM: Did you happen to see any shows that featured Chris Noel?

DN: No, I didn't.

SM: Anything else that you want to add about your first and your second tours?

DN: Just that my second tour was much more productive, much more educational, and I formed longer lasting friendships with the people from the second tour than I did the first tour.

SM: Now, by the people do you mean Americans or Vietnamese or both?

DN: Both.

SM: Did any of the Vietnamese you worked with come to the United States after '75?

DN: Yep. Captain Yung is, excuse me, Mr. Yung and I are supposed to get together September 30th in Anaheim, California.

SM: Oh wow, the Co Van, the Counterparts reunion?

DN: That's right.

SM: Oh excellent. Okay, I'll be there.

DN: I'll be there, too.

SM: All right, wonderful. Anybody else that came over?

DN: I understand that Yung Luu is in the United States. I have never been able to track him down.

SM: Now you said you learned a lot more; what were the major lessons that you took away from that second tour?

DN: To be a little more laid back, more patient, listen closer to people. You know, the Americans have this problem; we – I say we, and I used to be real bad about it – but somebody would say something and I'd only hear about half of what they said. I didn't pay any attention. I learned to listen very careful to what people told me. I also learned to go the extra mile to help people. I used to think, "Here it is, here's what you do, here's your tools, here's your equipment, go do it. I'll come and check on you. You don't do it right, you're in trouble." You don't do that. You give a person…you tell them how to do it, you show them how to do it, you give them

the tools, and then you go check on them and if they're not doing it right you ask them, "Did I make a mistake in my explanation? Is there something you don't understand?" I think patience is something that it taught me.

SM: That's an interesting lesson. Do you think that in terms of our strategy and our tactics and how we implemented our strategy and tactics in the war in Vietnam, do you think that we displayed patience?

DN: Speaking from experience, no. Some of our advisors, I hate to say this, were the worst offenders. They didn't have any patience. Vietnamese are very patient and they very…they worked things through. They're very inventive and they will do about anything but don't be impatient. Don't be overbearing and above all. Don't ever be arrogant with them. If you do, you've lost them.

SM: Any other major lessons that you took away from that second tour?

DN: Yes, stay in good physical shape.

SM: Something in particular that brings that up?

DN: Well, I don't know if I mentioned it before or not but I started the first prison farm with Luu's help in Quang Nan province and we had to sweep it and the first time we swept it we ran into somebody that didn't want to leave and the fight started and there wasn't a whole lot of cover out there. So, I had a pretty good run and after that I found out if I'm going to be in a combat situation, I'm going to have a good set of legs on me. I'm going to be able to run, I'm going to be able to jump, and I'm going to be able to duck.

SM: All right, well how was your reception coming back from your second tour?

DN: Well, I came in at McCord Air Force Base.

SM: What month and year is this now?

DN: I think it was about March of '72, sir, and I came home because I had a growth in my hand, in my ring finger on my right hand that had broke and they could not take care of it in Vietnam. The doctor told me that they usually wound up with something like this with removing the finger completely and I said, "You know, doc, that's kind of a match set. I'd like to keep them," and he said, "How long do you have to go?" and I said, "About 44 days," and he said, "Yeah, we'll send you back." So they sent me back. They didn't Medevac me, they just gave me an early rotation and the first place I went was McCord Air Force base and when I got there I immediately went to the hospital that night. The doctor in the emergency room took some X-

rays and he said, “Do you live close to here?” and I said, “No, I live in northern Idaho, my family does,” and he said, “Okay,” he said, “How about if I set you up to have this taken care of at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane?” and I said, “That means I can go home?” and he said, “That means you can catch the next thing smoking.” When I went out the gate there were some people out there and they spit at us and they did different things and being meek and mild like I am I got right back in their face. We loaded up on the shuttle bus and somebody yelled something and I yelled right back at them. I told the bus driver, “Hell, stop! Let’s get out and take care of them! There’s 15 of us ‘Nam returnees here and there’s only about 70 of them. The odds ought to be about right.” He wouldn’t do it. The only real problem I had was at the airport in Seattle, [Seatac] International, when I went down to get on a Hughes Air West I don’t know if the person was being smart, being funny, or what but she said when I…and of course I was in uniform and wearing all my decorations like I’m required to, and as I walked up to go down the jet way she said, “Oh, are you one of those ‘Nam killers?” and I said, “Yeah, I got seven body count in the last three days. You want to make it eight?” And the crew kind of shied away from me. But, I don’t know if she was trying to be funny or what but I just wasn’t in the mood for her humor. A guy at Spokane said something as I was walking out. I had my wife and my children in tow and he started to say something and I said, “You know, I think it would be best if you started whistling and walked the other way and I’m going to do the same, because if you say what I think you’re going to say, we’re going to have a problem.” And he looked at me and he said, “You’re serious?” and I said, “You’re about two minutes away from an ambulance ride,” and he said, “You have a good day,” and walked off. I didn’t like protestors. I would take nothing from them and I enjoyed nothing more than popping one right into the ground.

SM: Was this something that you talked about with other soldiers that you came into contact with shortly thereafter?

DN: Oh yeah. We, several of us, had talked about it when we were changing into our dress uniforms at McCord. We discussed it. We had a pact. This one guy says, “Sarge, if you hit somebody you’re liable to break that thing in your hand worse!” and I said, “What the hell, it’ll be worth it,” and we agreed that we weren’t going to take anything off these people. I mean, these are Americans. The Vietnamese treated us better. Why should we take this guff from these people?

SM: What did you think about that type of activity in terms of here you are, you've gone to Vietnam twice now to fight for your country, to do the service that you've been called upon to do and you come back and you've been mistreated twice now?

DN: It bothered me. I didn't know what to think about it. I thought they were all criminals and should be locked up. The people that poured the blood in records and things like that, I thought that should be a capital offense.

SM: Okay, and when you finally did make it, your surgery, I take it went well?

DN: Yeah, I went up and seen the doc and he said, "Oh yeah, I heard all about you," and he had an ax razor," and I said, "Oh?" and he said, "Tell you what, I'm just going to take and open up the finger from the first joint all the way up under the finger nail bed," and he said, "I'm going to lay it back and just try to scrape it off." And he said, "If that don't work, I'll just bring out the saw and take it off no shorter than I have to," and he had me check in the hospital on a Monday night and Tuesday morning they took me into surgery and Wednesday morning I was released with seven stitches and a big old shank of steel around my finger.

SM: And that did the trick? That worked?

DN: Yeah, there's only one problem with it; I have to be very careful that the bone in the end of my finger is probably the size of a pencil lead and it's got a hole through it.

SM: And when you went back onto active duty, when you went back to service after you recovered from your surgery and you got your leave, was there much talk about Vietnam and some of the problems that you'd encountered upon your return or did you kind of just get on with life, get on with your military career?

DN: I just went to Westpoint, New York and I just went on with life.

SM: What did you think about the Paris Peace Accords that came about in January of '73?

DN: I thought we'd sold out the Vietnamese, I thought we'd sold out every American that had been killed over there.

SM: And then what did you think about the events as they unfolded in 1974 and 1975 as north Vietnam advanced south?

DN: Just like I said it, told people it would happen. I had a very good friend that was a Vietnamese that worked for Cords. She was a waitress at the Cords restaurant in Danang where we used to eat quite often. I used to go in there in the afternoon and drink coffee once in a while

and I'd go in there and there wouldn't be too many people in there and this young lady was very well educated and we were talking one time and she told me that, "Well, when the Americans leave, you will see a different side of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam." And I said, "You bet." I said, "You'd be better off with your police force because most of the ARVNs I've seen would run." And her and I used to have long discussions about this and she thought that the Vietnamese Army, because they'd' been so well trained by the Americans and everything, that they would hold up and I said, "Nah." I said, "They're going to roll over this country. It may be one year, it may be two," but I said, "I don't think it'll last longer than two." Well, I was wrong. It took almost three.

SM: Just out of curiosity, when you worked with the police, now one of the problems that other soldiers encountered when they're working with ARVN units, they were a lot of communist infiltrators, a lot of Viet Cong or even some north Vietnamese infiltrators into ARVN; did you find, were there ever any incidences where you had Viet Cong or north Vietnamese infiltrators into the MPs of the Vietnamese police force?

DN: I never did find one. We had one one time that we questioned a lot because he had come from the ARVNs and the chief decided, the Danang chief of police sent him back to the ARVNs as unacceptable. He was shaking people down, and there's some things that…my last assignment in Danang was as deputy advisor to the deputy chief of police and we had just…he had an intelligence section and they were just getting a good start and he was one of the first ones that they were looking hard at. But, they got rid of him before they could ever make a determination.

SM: Well, how did the war most effect you? When you came back from your second tour you went on with your military career. How did the war affect your career? How did the war affect you personally?

DN: Personally, it made me a lot more cautious. I tried to take a middle of the road approach to everything. My military career, I don't think it hurt it. It didn't make it exceptionally helpful, but it didn't hurt me any. I think it…I can't say that it didn't help me because I was promoted to E7 ahead of my peers even though they took me out of the military police field to do it.

SM: Where did they put you?

DN: Infantry.

SM: Did you find it difficult to transition from the wartime Army to the peacetime Army?

DN: Not as hard as I did from the military police to the infantry.

SM: What was hard about that transition?

DN: As a military police NCO, I was never questioned. My superiors, they told me to do something or said they needed something, I did it, and that was it. My first encounter with the infantry, I had a Westpoint lieutenant who was younger than me. He was more in a class with the spec 4s and the PFCs and the young sergeants. He was more or less their buddy. I mean, you're not supposed to fraternize; this guy'd go out drinking with them! I made a comment one time about I was putting them in a the deuce and a half and I told the guy, I said, "Hold the gate while I lock it down up there, put the chain in." and he said, "Why?" and I said, "So none of you fall out." And I put the strap up and he said, "You don't trust us?" and I said, "I trust everybody, I just don't trust the back of a deuce and a half," and this was a big controversy; they told him I didn't trust him. He told me one night I was in the barracks and I thought I smelled marijuana. Its pretty familiar what marijuana smells like and so I went to try to track it down and he told me that that wasn't my job, that he'd rather see people use marijuana than booze because marijuana, the next day they had a clear head; booze they didn't.

SM: How did you deal with that?

DN: Well they dealt with it for me. They transferred me to another unit as a correctional custody NCO IC and then I thought that, "My God, I've died and went to heaven," because I had a job that was from seven to three and no extra duties and all that. Then my 1st sergeant quit and they made me the 1st sergeant of the unit. Reality shock.

SM: So you really didn't have a difficult time transitioning from Vietnam to the US, from wartime to peacetime, but there was a bit of a difficult situation there getting situated in the infantry and I guess in the correctional unit that would have been…custody, I'm sorry, is that what you said?

DN: Correctional custody facility. That's where the commander will send people. They stay in their unit during the day and their off duty hours is very close supervision and again, a slave labor market; all the painting that needs done on post and all the raking…

SM: To all the guys that are assigned…that are given an article 15 and given correctional duty?

DN: Well not everybody…

SM: Or something like that?

DN: Yeah. That's part of judicial or nonjudicial punishment.

SM: What do you think we should take away from the Vietnam War itself as an experience as a nation? What are the most important lessons we should learn?

DN: If we're going to do something, do it right. Keep the civilians and the politicians out of it and keep the money people out of it.

SM: Anything else?

DN: The reason I say that is the Alaska Barge and Tug Company was making one million dollars a day, and of course we all know who owned the Alaska Barge and Tug Company.

SM: Anything else you'd like to add?

DN: Well, lets put it this way; I wouldn't go back through my 30 something months in Vietnam for a million dollars. I wouldn't take 50 million dollars for my experience.

SM: Well, do you have anything else you'd like to say?

DN: Yeah, I've got one thing I'd like to say and I really mean this from the bottom of my heart. I never thought that I would live to see discrimination in the United States against American soldiers. I am a witness and I have been discriminated against by the United States government, by the state of Arizona, and by the Mojave County, Arizona. When I say discriminated against, I have been denied employment where they've taken people that were less qualified, less educated, and put them into the positions. One incident I made a complaint to the National Labor Relation Board in Washington, D.C. who in turn sent it to an office in Phoenix, Arizona and a gentleman called me up and he told me he was going to have it investigated, and I thought it was kind of ironic that he was going to have it investigated by the same man I made the complaint against. I just don't think that Vietnam veterans always get a fair shake. It doesn't really bother me by not working. I retired from the Army as a master sergeant E8 of 20 years. I have a partial disability. I retired from the state of Alaska as a correctional officer. So, I make a sufficient…I make a living. I don't make a great living, but I live comfortable.

SM: Have you talked to other veterans about this discrimination that you've experienced and have they experienced similar problems?

DN: Yeah, I've talked to a lot of them and it's funny; until the shoe is on your foot and pinching, you never think about it. In Alaska, I talked to a lot of people while I worked at corrections and they told me about how they were singled out and I said, "Yeah, right. You're in jail, so you were singled out?" But now, hey, I'm on that side and I see it.

SM: You're talking about the prisoners in Alaska?

DN: They said that they were singled out because they were veterans, and now I kind of believe it. There are people that have a mindset that all Vietnam veterans are drunken, dope smoking, lazy bums. Case in incident, or incident in point is the Saturday before Labor Day, 1996 or '97, I guess it would be '97. On a Friday I had an appointment at the Veteran's Medical Center in Prescott and they did a procedure that required that I be given a sedative and some other things and I couldn't drive for 24 hours so I stayed at Prescott that night. The next morning I got up, Saturday morning, and it was starting to sprinkle rain. It's about a 100-mile drive back to my residence. As I came over the hill in Prescott I seen three Arizona Department of Public Safety Highway Patrol, whatever they call them, vehicles; white and some motorcycles, and they were coming down a gravel road. I thought that that might be their headquarters. Seven o'clock is about shift change time, so I just…I was within the speed limit but I slowed down a couple of miles an hour and slipped over into the left lane so that they could go out without having to stop. I'm aware of what happens when the roads have been dry for a long time and they get just a little bit of rain; they get very slick. When I pulled over like that the individual in one of the cars pulled a laser out and popped it right on my front bumper and I always say its because I had a sign there that says, "Veteran, Vietnam War," on my front license plate. Since I wasn't speeding I didn't care about it. I just continued on my way. A motorcycle officer pulled in behind me trying to stay in my blind spot and he followed me from Prescott through Chino Valley, Arizona; probably about 15 miles, trying to stay in the blind spot of my pickup all the time. I counted seven sightable traffic violations the time that he was back there. He never did a thing to any of these other people to include the one that was passing on a double yellow line and forced us both to the side of the road. He had a mindset that I was a bad guy and he was going to get me. He never stopped me, but he followed me all that distance and all these other things went on around him. That's why I say they're still prejudice against us.

SM: And what about the…you mentioned that there's some of your fellow veterans that live in the Arizona area where you live now and you have interactions with them on occasion.

Have you discussed this with them? Do they display or have they experienced similar problems or discriminations?

DN: Yes they have, and some of them will admit it but some of them won't. But, we have another problem here in Arizona; everybody here wants to tell what they were in Vietnam. The common thing around this area is, "I was special forces, I was a Navy SEAL or I was a Marine Recon," and I don't know if I put it in my other thing or not, but one night in a local restaurant here that is also a bar, a young man got up and told how he helped raise the flag on Mount Serabachi and he thought everybody owed him a drink. The only problem is I'm 59 years old and when they raised the flag on Mount Serabachi, I was four years old, three or four. This guy's five years younger than I am. We had a man around town that was quite a local character; claimed to be a gunsmith, claimed to be an ace mechanic, claimed he was a special forces man, testified as an expert witness on weapons in our superior court and when he had a heart attack his ex-wife went to the veteran's administration to try to get help to bury him and he'd never been in the military.

SM: There's a big problem with fraudulent vets, it appears.

DN: Well I tell you what, this place is number one. I thank you for letting me have my say, sir.

SM: Oh, well thank you very much. It's been my pleasure. Why don't we go ahead and cut this thing off real quick? This ends interview number one with Darryl Nelson.