

Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project

Interviewee: Dennis DuPuis, Army

Interviewer: Luke Aldridge

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Transcriber: Jack Shaffer

00:00:06

LA: My name is Luke Aldridge. I am interviewing Vietnam veteran Dennis DuPuis, who served in the Army, completing two tours in Vietnam beginning in 1968. Mr. DuPuis, this interview will have four sections: your Life before service, basic training, your time in Vietnam and your life after service. So, let's get started with your background.

DD: All right. Great.

00:00:29

LA: Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

DD: Well, that's a good question. My father was in the service. Ended up spending 30 years in, so I was born in Kentucky, and we lived in Indiana for a little bit. And then we moved to Japan. Before I started, grade school back to Ohio. We lived in France when I was, like in the seventh or sixth and seventh grade and back to Ohio and then to Hawaii for the ninth and tenth grade, and then finally Augusta, Georgia, for junior and senior year.

DD: So, we moved all around the world and we were just known as Army family. Like, like so many other service dependents.

00:01:13

LA: Can you tell me about your family?

DD: My family? It was [unclear] when Mom and Dad. Mom and dad met each other during World War II in a place called Camp Crowder, Missouri. Mother went from Celina, Ohio, to Camp Crowder, Missouri, to visit her. We call them best friend now. They weren't engaged, but they were they liked each other. And she drove down from Ohio to Camp Crowder, Missouri, which is in the southwest corner of Missouri with her friend who was married to a soldier boy.

Well, dad had been in the Army 1935 and '36 [1936] and then got out when World War II started. He rejoined in January of '42 [1942]. And because he was prior service, he went to a mobilization station in Columbus, Ohio, where for six months or so all he did was he was a runner for the company. And when the orders came down a particular group was going to form, dad would take that to personnel, and personnel would fill out a cadre of maybe 15 or 20 people. He'd take it back to the mobilization company and they'd call guys down and they'd send him off to whatever fort they were mobilized at. When dad rejoined the Army to fight in the war and he was getting a little bit tired of being administrative in the States. So, he put his own name on the mobilization list [chuckle] and ended up going to Camp Crowder because of his prior service. He had a little bit of rank. So, when mom's boyfriend and when that company showed up, when the 2-300 guys showed up to train, dad was walking out the gate one evening and he saw this fella, Jim Roebuck, who was a private in his unit, talking to a nice-looking girl. So, dad struck up a conversation with him wanting to know if that was his wife and said "no, just my girlfriend." And "oh, where's she from?" Ohio. "What's she doing down here?" Women weren't allowed to come on post they had to meet him at the main gate. So, mom was staying at the main gate one night waiting for Jim to come so they could go out on a date. And this sergeant shows up and comes to my mother and says, "are you waiting for Jim Roebuck?" She goes, "why yes, I am. How do you know that?" He says, "well, he's got duty tonight and he knows how much you wanted to go out. So, he's asked me to take you out, and he wants to make it up to you tomorrow night with dinner and dancing." And my mom said, okay, we'll go to the movie. So, they went to the movie, and dad reminded her that, okay, tomorrow, same time, same place, and he wants to take you to dinner and dancing. Well, the next night, mom shows up and dad goes, "I'm sorry, he's got KP [Kitchen Patrol] tonight [chuckles]." Dad was giving him extra duty and making dates with mom, and about six weeks later mom and Dad got married and then he shipped out to the South Pacific. Didn't come home till, I think it was October of '45 [1945]. He had so many points that he was one of the, he could come home quicker than a lot of the other guys did. And so, they got married and was stationed in different places. And that's how Mom and Dad met. Dad, my father was born and raised on the Indian reservation in Kansas. He's a member, we're members of the Iowa tribe of Kansas and Nebraska. Iowa tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, that sounds kind of different, but our original domain was what becomes a state of Iowa and part of Missouri and part of Minnesota. And through the years, it just got smaller and smaller and we ended up on reserved land that is on the border of Nebraska and Kansas. So, we like the Cherokees, we have a one band or part of the tribe that's Kansas, Nebraska, one part that's in Oklahoma. And dad's military service was World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He had cousins that were in World War II that flew. Peter William Atkinson and Robert Edward Atkinson, and Alec Atkinson. Al flew for the Navy and he survived the war. Peter flew with the Chennault's Flying Tigers in 19 summer '41 [1941] till and died in October on a test flight, he was a test pilot. And then his younger brother ended up also flying in China and Burma and in '43, March of '43 [1943], he didn't return from mission. He was listed as MIA [Missing in Action]. The end of the war, they found Robert's airplane and a grave right next to it,

so they knew Robert. And when they went to look for Peter, the graveyard in Taungoo, Burma, had been all tombstones and everything had been pushed aside when the Japanese invaded and Peter was not accounted for until 2017 when we finally brought him home.

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LA: I'd love to circle back to World War II with you in a second. How many siblings did you have?

DD: Two.

LA: Okay.

DD: A brother and sister. An older brother, Bruce, [chuckles] who, him being older, you know, he was always played sports first and he was in the Boy Scouts first, and he always did everything first. And usually did it better. Flying helicopters was the one thing that I did before him and better than him and my sister, ten years younger than I am, and she's a doctor. She's retired, she's retired M.D. Bruce is retired post, post office.

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LA: Do you have any specific memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War II?

DD: Oh, absolutely. My father never said much about what he did, he was signal construction. I know that when the Army showed up Guadalcanal, he and his unit, that's what they did, they were construction signal. They ran telephone lines and set up call centers and maintained them. And he about the only, he talked about a few things. He talked about setting up phone communications for the five aircraft or five airfields that ended up being on Guadalcanal. And through the war, they moved up the island hopping and talked about, arriving in Batangas, the Philippines, and in Tokyo three days before the peace treaty was signed. He helped put together a radio relay station that would relay the ceremony back to the States. And there were still Japanese soldiers walking around Tokyo with rifles and everything, but there wasn't any trouble or any problem. And dad got to come home in October, which was much earlier. My friend George Mason's father was a Marine, he got to the South Pacific in '45 [1945], and he didn't come home till '47 [1947], so. And dad used to read to me about his cousin that flew with the Flying Tigers because there was a number of books read or written and he was so proud of his cousins that flew. I could tell that when he read about them and talked about that, I wanted him to be that proud of me. So that's why one of the reasons why I chose to fly.

LA: And when you say fly, you're talking about helicopters, not planes?

DD: Helicopters in in the service, yes. I tried to [chuckle], you know, fighter pilot, World War II had a lot of, a lot of fame around it and admiration and kind of hero worship stuff. And so, first year of college in, I went down talked to the Air Force and the Navy and everybody wanted a four-year degree and I didn't have that and the Army had a program, all you need to be was a

high school graduate, and they'd send you to flight school. So that's how I ended up flying for the Army, which I don't regret at all. You know, flying helicopters was very rewarding service.

LA: We will circle back to your entrance into the military in just a second.

DD: Okay.

00:10:14

LA: Did you have a favorite World War II movie growing up?

DD: Oh, we saw so many. There wasn't, I couldn't even pick out a favorite. John Wayne did star in the film about the Flying Tigers, but you know, it was just overacted and, you know, it was more propaganda than it was anything else. *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, where they bombed Tokyo, I thought was something that we saw a number of times. And matter of fact, in 2002 I ended up being an escort for the Doolittle Raiders in Columbia and got to know some of them personally, which was quite a reward. Other than that, in the 50s there was, you know it was just war movies and most of the time it was kind of hero stuff. But no, other than that, you know, there were so many of them, there were just so many of them, between that and cowboy movies [laughter].

00:11:20

LA: So, you mentioned earlier, your entrance into the military was around the same time that you went to college. So, before you enlisted, where did you go to college and what did you study?

DD: I went to Augusta College here in Augusta, over in Augusta and business major. It was pretty easy to pick something out. If I had to pick a major, I really didn't know. Nobody in my immediate family had ever gone to college. And seemed like the place to go. And, but Augusta college didn't have a campus life, and it seemed more to me like fifth year high school, and I wasn't very enthusiastic about staying there anyway. So, when my father came home in March of '68, March or April of '68 [1968], right after Tet offensive, and everything. And my brother, there was assigned to go to Vietnam at that time, I just thought it's my time to sign up, so two semesters at Augusta college.

LA: And was that in 1967?

DD: It was fall of '67 [1967], in the spring of '68 [1968], from September '67 [1967] to, maybe May. I was also working a job, so. You could look at, you know, gosh I'm working part-time and if I, if I just could work full-time, I'd be making twice as much and then I'd be able to afford cars and other things [chuckles]. That, that kind of affected my decision of dropping out of college also, so.

00:13:10

LA: So, did you hear anything about Vietnam during your time in college?

DD: Oh, yes, yes, it was well talked about. Some of the guys I worked with, there was one guy named Richard that was getting ready. He was probably a junior college. And he would come to work every evening with, "it's getting close to the draft. I think I might sign up." You know, and then he'd come and no, he didn't. And then it was, "I might get in the reserves." And then it was he didn't. And finally at a point where he was, and I don't know what was going on with his grades or where his draft status was. He finally, after months of waffling back and forth came to work one day and goes, "well, I joined the reserve unit up Augusta college." And two days later the reserve unit was activated [Laughter]. And he did, he didn't want to go to Vietnam, but he hadn't even been to basic training, he hadn't got any uniform, nothing. But they mobilized his unit. He was shocked, he was upset, you know. Darn it, you know. And, but there weren't, at that time, I don't remember any protest locally in Augusta or, you know, anything to that. Of course, Vietnam, we had three, three news channels in Augusta. And every night, you know, it was a half hour newscast, and it seemed like half of it was, didn't matter which network you watched, half of it was about Vietnam. It was thoroughly covered in the press and the news. It was presented to us and also the newspaper always had a section on Vietnam, a lot of times front page stuff. So, yeah, they was, but we were aware of it.

00:15:24

LA: Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your service and basic training.

DD: Okay.

LA: Would you describe yourself as volunteering, being commissioned, or drafted?

DD: Volunteered.

LA: And what were the main reasons you volunteered?

DD: Well, my family, my dad's ancestry, kind of a warrior ethos, and my brother was already in, and I had uncles that served in World War II, and I knew that the draft was out there. And my dad had been in the Army for so long, of course knew that if you were drafted, your job was picked by the needs of the service, and I did not, my brother was an infantryman, and I did not want to walk in the jungles of Vietnam at all. I didn't want to walk anywhere. I knew that flying, well you'd probably be out of a base and have a hard roof over your head and not sleep in the jungle in the rain. So, I chose to enlist so that I could pick what I wanted to do and they would guarantee it at the time. And if they failed to give you that job or train you for that then you'd be released. Of course, then you'd probably be drafted shortly thereafter [laughter]. But yeah, I joined.

00:16:58

LA: And did you expect to go to Vietnam?

DD: Yes, flying helicopters. Yes, we had a cousin's cousin-in-law's brother that flew helicopters that ended up at hospital at Eisenhower. And we would go out to visit him while he was recovering. And he did go into great depth about it, but I thought he was pretty a cool guy. And it kind of reaffirmed that yes, that's what I want to do.

00:17:33

LA: Could you talk about your dad's and brother's service in relation to Vietnam?

DD: Oh, yeah, yes. My brother, we'll start with my brother because that's really where dad's Vietnam service begins. Joined the Army in 1965, He went basic training at Fort Gordon and advanced training at Fort Gordon. And during the advanced training his drill sergeant thought he showed some leadership ability and told him about the officer candidate school and that how in a period of time, I don't know, four months, six months he could be a lieutenant. And Bruce was interested in that. So, this sergeant got Bruce to apply, and the sergeant and Bruce were gonna to go to the same class. Well, my father at the time, 28 plus years in the military, knew what the probability of a young infantry second lieutenant survive in Vietnam was pretty low. And so, dad volunteered to go to Vietnam. He thought that by the time the year that he would serve there that the war would be over. There was the saying said that some of the government folks were saying they could see the light at the end of the tunnel. And dad thought, dad and mom both thought that it'd be over by the time dad had served. And then Bruce wouldn't have to go to Vietnam as infantry guy. So, that's how dad went to Vietnam and again, he was in Singapore and he ran telephone exchanges and, can I just say one other thing about that? He could do stuff like take a toothpick and block a number and then that number would call him back and it would be quartermaster guy and you go, "hey, my phone's out. I'm calling you from Marine." "Who is this?" Dad knew exactly who it was. He says, "well, this is sergeant so and so down at quartermaster." And dad said, "okay, well, give me your number and we'll try to get it fixed in, when I can, maybe 3 or 4 days." Oh no, I got to have my phone right away and he'd go, "if you get my phone fixed today, I've got a case of steaks down here [laughter]." So, dad had been around the Army long enough to know that his job in Vietnam was not going to be out in the jungle, that he would be in a more secure area and he did that. Bruce, when Bruce arrived in Vietnam in April of '68 [1968] and by August and he was a military advisor to the South Vietnamese, in [Unclear] around, Dak To, Kon Tum, and Can something or the other and Bruce worked with the Vietnamese every day. That's what he did. And in August, he was wounded and medevacked by dustoff three seven, Mike Reinhardt, to Pleiku to the 71st back hospital where Bruce met his nurse, Anne. And then the second time Bruce was wounded he had the same nurse, of course because he'd seen her in between those times. And then when they came back to the world, Bruce and Anne were married. So, that ties into his wife also, and she was, forgive me Annie, ten years older than my brother. So being 31 at the time seeing 18-year-olds who, you know, even when you're 31 and a little bit more maturity especially for a woman. Their heart, her heart went out to every one of them as there's a kid. And when, when they treated him in the hospital they would either be able to be returned to their unit in Vietnam, or they would stabilize them and ship them back to Japan or the States for recovery. And Anne, once her patients that went back to the states left, Anne and the rest of the nurses never knew

whether they survived or not, had no idea. And it left a void in her that, it was heartfelt until the women's monument in Vietnam. And I think it was late 80s was dedicated. And then when the hospital staffs would gather there, particular nurses, they would have veterans come up to them and go, did anybody here from the 71st to back, does anybody remember a redheaded nurse that was there in '68? [1968] and they started to make some connection with some of their old patients, which was awesome. What, what the nurses did for us pales in comparison to what I did. I mean they were, emotionally tried to distance themselves. But it's hard to do and they cared and so we always have to remember them and don't let that image of a Vietnam veteran be somebody in a helmet, M-16, and tromping through the jungle when there was nurses and of course other people with other jobs there. So, it's important to remember, remember them too.

00:23:19

LA: Thank you. To back up a little bit on your dad's and brother's story, your father volunteered in an effort to spare your brother from having to serve.

DD: Right.

LA: But it sounds like he had to anyway.

DD: Yes, he did.

LA: What was that like for, for your brother and your father?

DD: It was just duty, you know, it's what they signed up to do. I think it had a much greater effect on my mother. Dad was there for '67 to '68 [1967 and 1968], Bruce was there '68 to '69 [1968 and 1969], and I was there '69 to '70 [1969 and 1970]. I went back in '71 to '72 [1971 and 1972]. So, for 5 or 6 consecutive years my mother had a husband or son in Vietnam. I don't know how she did it. So, what dad and Bruce did, you know, when, when you look at that you got to remember the families that were at home and mom celebrating her 25th wedding anniversary alone, birthdays and all those things which means so much to a mother without that person. So, just think about mom, moms, our wives, and children, too, you know. But that was tough, tough for a mom, I think thank my brother or my dad.

LA: And does your father talk to you at all about the Tet Offensive?

DD: [chuckles] Just a bit of humor. It happened to be his 49th birthday. Dad was born on January 30th, and he thought that the other sergeant, the sergeants in particular, the E7's, 8's, and 9's had their didn't live with troops, they had their own building. And when, when the event started at midnight, dad thought it was his buddies' throwing firecrackers and celebrating his 49th birthday with him. And that's all dad mentioned about Tet, so.

00:25:29

LA: So back to your story. What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted?

DD: Before I enlisted?

LA: Yes.

DD: Where it was, it was covered in the news, that it had been a French colony, that there had been a war of rebellion so to speak against the French, and because of the connection with the World War II American volunteer group that Alec flew with, I knew that some of the Japanese airplanes when they struck China and Burma, actually flew out of Vietnam. That it was a split country like Korea and that the communists were in the North and our allies were in the South, that it was a country that had been fought over for a long time, and we were going to prevent the communists from winning it and starting what they called a domino effect, where if one country in Southeast Asia fell, that meant another one was going to another one, another one, and then communism would spread to a much larger place. That was the, that's what I understood.

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LA: And did your military training include anything about Vietnamese culture or history?

DD: No, not that I remember. Nothing, nothing at all. I think it was a, and I can't speak for everybody, I can just tell you about myself. So, after my service in Vietnam, I thought that was a major failure for the Army that, that they didn't tell us that stuff, now I wasn't supposed to be dealing, every day with the Vietnamese. I didn't have that kind of working relationship. My brother did get some, made aware of some of the customs and culture because he was going to be an advisor. He actually went through a training period setting him up to go to Vietnam that involved working with him and, but for me, it was just technical flying helicopters and navigating here and there and without any really. I didn't think I'd have any contact with a Vietnamese citizen. I thought, I thought it'd all be American, you know.

00:28:17

LA: Well, I'm very much looking forward to hear more about your interactions with Vietnamese people in just a minute. Back to basic training in the time just before your service, do you remember anything specific about the last days before your service or the trip to base?

DD: Had a girlfriend [chuckles] and the, you say before my service? Just that it was, there were guys that were being drafted, there were guys that were going, there were some guys that had been had gone, and a couple of months since high school that had gone and come back wounded. Other than that, I was just 18 years old and trying to go to college, trying to work, and wondering when my dad was going to be home and then finally then when my brother went, so. It's not a fog, it just doesn't seem like there's anything that jumps out at that time.

00:29:27

LA: How would you describe your boot camp experience?

DD: Normal, with a little exception on getting it started. Dad had promised me as he had my brother that when I joined the Army, I would take my basic training at Fort Gordon. Dad knew the agent out there, he had served with him in France in, in the 50s and 60s. And Colonel Hathaway assured dad that when I went to service, he could get me assigned to Fort Gordon, just like he did my brother. And it made my brother's basic training, where a lot of guys maybe weren't allowed to leave the base. Well, with dad being the sergeant there and he was able to sign him out and bring him home and, on the weekends, and bring a friend and eat and, you know, kind of have a break in the training. Well, my dad promised me that and when I went to Fort Jackson to be inducted, it was only about a four-hour event. They called eight of us to sit outside, and they brought a set of orders out, and they told us, gave it to one guy named Sam Davis, and he was going to be the group leader. And we got on a bus, and I thought, well they're going to bus us to Fort Gordon cause that's where my dad said I was going to take basic training and took us to the airport and put us on an airplane. Wow, this is going to flight school is really cool because now they're going to fly us to Atlanta and then fly us to Augusta. And, you know, I have arrived, and we weren't going to Fort Gordon at all, we were going to Fort Polk, Louisiana [chuckles]. And it was, come to find out, that's where the majority of helicopter pilots that signed up called high school to flight school, took their basic at Fort Polk and then went on to Texas. So that was quite a surprise, and we got for Polk and we hadn't been issued uniforms and everything. And that's where we got our haircuts and started basic combat training is what they called it. So, and it was, I imagine it was just like anybody else's. You were, it was very regimented, you were up at a particular time of day, you did physical exercises, if you were fat boy you didn't get to eat as much at the mess hall. We went to classes and went to the range and learned how to shoot an army rifle and march back and finally were graduated, put on a bus, and I must say, probably at least half of that company went to Fort Walters to flight school. And then we were taken to the local airport. This was in Louisiana and we were flown to Love Field in Texas and then got on a DC3, an old prop plane that started flying in the 30s. And it was Trans Texas Airlines, which I understand was owned in part by the Johnson family and then flown to, Fort Polk, Louisiana, on this old rickety World War II aircraft, which was quite an experience. I'd, I'd been on one before, and this was an evening flight and you could see the exhaust, the fire kind of spitting out of it, and some guys were really concerned that the aircraft was on fire, and they mentioned something. And the stewardess said, don't start worrying, till you don't see the fire coming [chuckles]. So, it was, it was a little surprise getting there, but the rest of it was routine for the eight weeks it took to go through basic combat training. The guys that weren't going to flight school, most of them ended up going to North Fort Polk, which was called Tiger Land and that was a, a prep course for becoming infantry and Vietnam. So, there again, I didn't want to walk. Yeah, I met some guys that, in basic that, I knew through flight school all the way through flight school and one of them was George Mason from Oklahoma. We'll talk about him later.

00:33:52

LA: I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam.

DD: Okay.

LA: Before we get into your experiences, could you clarify the dates of your two tours?

DD: Okay. My first tour started I arrived the third or fourth of Vietnam. 3rd or 4th of August 1969. And I believe I left Vietnam on the 5th of August 1970. I came back to the States for a year, I was stationed at the Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, and then I volunteered to go to Cobra School, and I knew that would take me back to Vietnam. And I went to Cobra school and went back to Vietnam and arrived in Vietnam middle of August 1971 until January the 16th of 1972 when my unit, the 101st Airborne, stood down and anybody that had that much time in country was allowed to go home. If you had less than six months, then they just transferred you to another unit. Time out, were we going to talk about my helicopter training before I get to Vietnam?

LA: I think we can, if you'd like to talk about that a little bit.

DD: You know, that's up to you. That's, that's a year or nine months worth of prep.

LA: So, when you're talking about your time flying in Vietnam if there's things related to training that you want to bring up, that would be a perfect time for that.

DD: Oh, okay.

00:35:30

LA: Okay, all right at this point I think we're, we're past that and it would be very hard for Doctor Morris to kind of jump around, so. Did anything stick out to you about your initial flight to Vietnam?

DD: Yes, two things in particular. We had quite a celebration the night before I left, and I got drunk and got on an airplane in Augusta. Mom and dad were there they, and I was going to California and went to Atlanta, changed planes. When we stopped in Dallas the stewardess woke me up, says "we're in Dallas." And I said, "I'm going to California." She says, okay, so I never deplaned and we got to California and I got off the plane. I went down to the baggage check, and I was looking for my bags, and there was some military duffel bags and that's what I had, and my bag never did come across the round. So, I went to the lost baggage and I asked them, and they took my ticket with the baggage claim number stuff, and I said, you know, where's my baggage? guy looked at it says, your baggage is in San Francisco, you're in Los Angeles [chuckles]. So, I was supposed to change planes in Dallas, but they ended up getting me there, and when I got there some of my flight school buddies lived there and his dad, who worked for Caterpillar Tractor, came out, picked us up, took to his house while we waited for our departure date, which sometimes was 3 or 4 days, and we in effect had a flight school reunion there. There were guys that were there that left the day that I came to Mr. Willingham's house and then maybe 4 or 5 guys a day showed up and then 3 or 4 days later, I left and they were very generous to, rather than staying in a hotel or staying on base to come get us and take us and put us there. So, I'm on the airplane and we go through Alaska and Japan to get to Vietnam. And we get to Vietnam, land, and it's, you know, everybody's who were in Vietnam, the

door opens and this Third World stench rolled in through the cabin of the aircraft and the heat and moisture from the tropics rolled in with us. And you know that aircraft had already been shut down and it was humid and hot and a couple of MPs, military policemen, got on board and they gave us a deplaning brief and how we were supposed to move rapidly to bus and we would be taken to the replacement battalion. And it was, I don't know, 15 miles, half an hour 45-minute ride and so when we did that, you know, and it says move hastily to it, you know, don't delay. And so, of course, everybody was scared and we did that and we got on the bus, and they were Army buses and they had this chicken wire over the windows. The windows were up and they said that was to keep people from throwing grenades at you and took off through this Third World country with people in rickshaws and three wheel Lambrettas and bicycles and just a mass of humanity and we just figured every one of them was VC [Viet Cong] and everyone had a grenade and they scared the hell out of us. But it was uneventful, you know. But you just don't realize what you, what you'd gotten after being there while we, we didn't notice the stench, but initially it was quite a shock. And that's two things about getting there from the airplanes that I distinctly remember.

00:39:47

LA: Would you describe yourself as being in combat, in the rear, or something else?

DD: In combat, being an assault helicopter pilot that was our job was to, basically our primary job was to take combatants into a landing zone so they could engage the enemy. Yes, combat.

LA: Could you talk a little bit more about the kind of work you were doing?

DD: You mean flying? We had a number of different kind of missions, and it was all to support the folks on the ground, you know, that's primarily what we were there for, primary mission was an assault helicopter company. We had 20 troop-carrying helicopters called slicks and probably eight gunships that would provide escort and cover for the slicks, for the Hueys, other Hueys. We would go someplace, the pickup zone, load up with troops, take them to a designated spot off, offload them, which sounds very, they'd jump off, whether or not our door gunner shot was dependent on whether or not anybody was shooting at us. And sometimes we'd make, we'd usually make more than one trip into that landing zone until that entire unit was there and then troop-carrying aircraft would go to some relatively safer place and stand by and wait on a called mission. And the next thing that would be scheduled was to pick them up and take them home. If we made five lifts in that we figured we'd make five lifts out and usually we were a flight of ten. In between those times the gunships would provide close air support to them, be with them, and if they got engaged by the enemy, then the gunships would engage the bad guys. We would have, we were on standby and if they needed us again, they would call. And if they did, it was because they had made contact with the enemy and somebody had been wounded and 1 or 2 ships, depending on how many were wounded, would have to go out and pick them up and take them to a medical facility. If the contact was heavier, we would perhaps bring some replacements and pick up more wounded folks on the way in, we'd take replacements and they'd take the wounded out if the, if they needed more ammunition, we would, an extra mission during the day would bring them ammunition. And the last one is usually the worst if they were

just in, if they were outnumbered greatly and just needed to get the hell out of there, then in amongst all that contact and fighting, we'd have to go pull them out. And when we pulled them out, usually the last lift out was where we would receive the most fire because before that there would be a perimeter and our guys would be defending the landing zone, and for the last lift and they would evacuate. They'd dislodge themselves from the defensive positions and then the other guys would occupy those and wait for the helicopters to come in and then engage helicopters on the last lift. That was combat assaults, sometimes we would have an individual, just one ship to support the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] advisors of a province or county, think of it as Aiken County. And we'd go to the headquarters and pick them up and make what we called a mail run to all the outpost and firebases that they had to bring mail, or bring a replacement, or to bring somebody that had been on R&R [Rest and Recuperation], or to pick up somebody and bring them back. It was like a bus. And we do that once in the morning, once in the afternoon, we had usually the operations sergeant for that province would be coordinating and calling ahead and had a list of things that we needed to do and that was a single ship mission that usually was about for us was usually about ten hours flight. We had night missions, later on in 1970, we had night missions. They were called Nighthawk, backing up the combat assaults. They could take place daytime or nighttime. Sometimes if the operation was large or larger than expected, it would be continuous and sometimes we'd be out for 24 hours, which was unusual. But back to the Nighthawk mission, that was two troop-carrying helicopters that had been outfitted with some more armament. We had a low bird that had a minigun which shot a gatling type gun that was designed to shoot 6000 rounds a minute, but usually was timed down in aircraft, either four or 2000 rounds a minute, I think ours was 2000 rounds minute. And that machine gun didn't go "a rat a tat tat," it went "rrrrrr." And even in the daytime you can see the fire coming out of muzzle. And on that same ship we had xenon searchlight that was adapted from a tank and when we'd be out at night, maybe around 500ft or lower, if you saw something that was suspect, the guy running the light would turn the light on and illuminate the target and then decide to engage or not. As a cover ship we had a, another troop carrier that had been outfitted with a, a .50 caliber machine gun which had a lot more range than the minigun or the M60. And they would be up at maybe 1500 feet outside of small arms range. And if the low bird was engaged, then the high bird would cover him with its .50 cal. And a lot of times the high bird also carried flares which could help illuminate. And then we had, kind of ash and trash missions that were administrative or if a particular, maybe a colonel or a general needed to go see something or go someplace special. He could request a ship. But all the requests, whether it's combat assaults or the single ships, were requested through our battalion who was about a hundred miles away. And they would hold the request through the day and prioritize it. And then when we, when our company, and there were four companies in the battalion and a Cav troop, when the assault companies then would in the evening would communicate with a battalion and say, "we've got 15 mission capable Huey's, and we've got so many mission capable gunships." And then they would generate a mission based on our availability and assign it to us and that's what we do the next day. So, some days it was just combat assaults and other days it was a mix of things. And we, the air crews and when I say air crews, I want to say that all the things I did as a helicopter pilot, I couldn't do without an air crew in the back. Crew chief and a gunner. I couldn't do without the guys that refueled and rearmed us. I couldn't do without the guys who turned wrenches on the

aircraft during the night. I couldn't do without the guys that delivered the fuel to the airfields. There were so many people that supported us that really never do get the credit that, you know, when somebody says, "oh, you flew helicopters. Oh, I appreciate it., y'all picked me up, did this." Well, we'd been sitting in a 6,500-pound paperweight if it hadn't been for all the guys that made the helicopter fly and we just flew. So, a lot of credit really needs to go to a whole lot of other people than just helicopter pilots.

00:48:28

LA: Yeah. How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race, or religion?

DD: The Americans?

LA: Yes.

DD: All varied. We really didn't have, [chuckle] the only guys that seemed to be different in the end were guys who had gone to West Point. Not all of them, but I knew a few. One, one guy, Captain Dell was, you'd never be able to tell he went to West Point based on the way the other ones acted. They were, seemed to think they were better than anybody else, or smarter or, they were regular army officers. They had a particular attitude about them that just didn't settle well with a lot of the folks. And based on their rank, you know, they thought quite a bit more of themselves than what other people did and I'm not saying that was for everyone cause I'm sure there's a lot of military academy graduates that, you know, were, we'll say regular people. It's hard, it's hard to pick out economic differences in folks when you're all wearing the same uniform every day and you got the same haircut and you do the same job, and nobody goes, "my dad's a doctor," you know. You know, what are you doing? You know how good a pilot are you going to be? How good of a crew chief, are you? You know, and all those other factors just didn't, didn't fit in there. But like society we did have, we did have social problems. There were some drugs around and there were guys who were, didn't really care for authority and but, you know, you had that all over society. And when people kind of reflect, a lot of those negative traits to the Army in Vietnam, it was reflective of what society was at the time, really.

00:50:52

LA: How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you?

DD: We lived on base. I lived in a wooden building. I had my, being an officer, I had my own room, particularly a pilot. I had a refrigerator and a fan. On the days that I did not fly, well, I wrote letters home or just didn't do anything or just relaxed, or sometimes we were able to catch a hop, catch a flight into Saigon and we'd have a day off. My exposure to so, it was pretty easy life. My exposure to the Vietnamese people, initially it was contact with those who were on base and most of those either worked in the clubs, you know, there were clubs. And I'm talking about like a nightclub. There were civilians who were hired to work in the mess halls and there were civilians that were hired to, if you had a hooch that would clean up your hooch while you were

gone and wash clothes and do that kind of stuff. So, and then the, the girls who worked in the clubs, in the bars and the waitresses, that was initial contact, but on days off when we went into, the city, you know, and you got, got to see their society. And there was always somebody trying to hustle you for to exchange your American script, funny money, play money for Vietnamese money. An exchange rate they would give it to you at a higher rate than what you could on post. There was always somebody trying to make a little extra money. There were people on the black market that sold, a lot of times we would have to buy, flight gloves were hard to get. We'd have to go, we'd go to Saigon and go to the black market and buy them because the supply system just couldn't get them, didn't get them, couldn't get them, bars and bordellos, and stuff like that. I really didn't have any contact with mainstream citizens that worked 9 to 5 in a regular job or went to school or all those parts of society, or definitely not the farmers in the fields in the remote areas of Vietnam plowing with water buffaloes and just trying to make a living for their family living in thatched huts. We'd see them when we'd fly over but didn't really have any contact with them.

LA: And what do you remember about Vietnamese children?

DD: That they always seemed to congregate. They always seem to come to us. When I was there you could wear civilian clothes. We did have some civilian clothes, and it didn't matter whether you're in civilian clothes or military uniform. When, when I say we went in the city I went to Saigon and there were districts, the Cho Lon district which was Chinese, and, you know, it was different parts of the city. And the children always seemed to approach in a crowd wanting something. And I found out later, after the tour started, that if I patted one of them on the head that that was forbidden. From what I was told that was their sacred place. It was some kind of connection with the spiritual world, and you weren't supposed to touch them on the head. Well, you know, Americans patted a kid on the head all day long. And then there were some, some of them little folks that were gangsters and they would pickpocket you, or they would had a sharp object that they would cut the bottom out of your pocket without cutting you and your whatever you had in that pocket would fall out. If you saw a bunch of kids coming up and you, they'd see you taking a ring and a watch and stuff off and putting in your pocket, they'd get it out of the pocket. Stealthily, and you wouldn't even know it was there. There were guys that if we rode in a three-wheel Lambretta that looked like a motorized rickshaw. If you were there with a camera hanging over your shoulder or sitting there with your watch arm hanging out the outside. A fellow on a motorcycle with a rider in the back would come by and they would hook your watch, steal your watch. Or they'd grab the camera sash and your camera was gone. And of course, you were on this three-wheel cart, and they were on a motorbike. They were gone. Yeah, so it was didn't have a whole lot of good things to think about the Vietnamese based on those kind of contacts. I was never really dealing with one face-to-face until after my tour of Vietnam. I worked with a lot of Vietnamese student pilots and other and got to know them on a more personal basis which kind of got rid of that negative ideal.

00:56:40

LA: Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam?

DD: Yes, yes, I did. You know, when I look back, I never thought about it like that, but seeing how primitive the family farms were, open sewers, you know, that relates to the stench that you smell, in the river, for instance, flying up rivers and stuff like that. You may see somebody that had a outhouse on a little pier and all the droppings went in the river. And then just downstream, there'd be somebody out there washing clothes. Had to be careful about the water, you just drinking water on post was okay. And we didn't have bottled water back then, but we had some pills that if you got a canteen full of water, for some reason, you were to treat it. But it just, just it was Third World, you know, it was poor country and very meager and made me thankful for what we have here in the United States. A lot of things, one that there's universities and schools over there and a lot of times, some of the units, what they would have would be an effort to sponsor an orphanage, or to sponsor a school or, the nurses in the hospital sometimes would go out and try to help heal, prevent diseases and stuff like that. But it was all seemed to be very back, primitive, more primitive, given to say Third World. And there was, thinking about it, there was some of the structures in the cities and the stuff of course came from colonial French and they were reminded me of the buildings when we lived in France, the buildings in France, the way they were stuccoed and the color they were painted and tile roofs. And you could see this French colonial culture that had been there. But now some, of course some of the Vietnamese were in those buildings and using them. But the difference between that and the rural thatched huts and boats people that would pull them, if you had a motor, it wasn't like an outboard motor that we had, it was a motor with a very long shaft and a prop. They fished and they had fish traps in the river; it was just, it was Third World. It was Asia, it was Vietnam. It wasn't the exotic Orient that we grew up that was portrayed in some of the movies and stuff, you know. There was a place that we went to a time or two called Vung Tau, which was French Cap Saint-Jacques, and it was French Riviera Vietnam. Big houses, big hotels, beach, a lot of European influence there, and that was like going to another country.

LA: Can you talk about differences between Vietnamese and American priorities in evacuations?

DD: Oh, yes, certainly. There was a fire base that was overrun one time. We were called to as a flight, not as a single ship, but as a flight to go pick up the wounded and the dead. And when we got there the Vietnamese were loading the dead onto the aircraft and we wondered where the wounded were, but, you know, it was here to take those to the place where we offload them for the morgue. And then eventually we got to the wounded and the way it was explained to us was that, I'm not sure whether it was that particular religious sect or whether it was overall Asian culture customs, that where we motivated our troops by telling them if you or your body gets wounded and if we can get to him, we can get him to the hospital and get your wounded guy to the hospital in less than an hour, high probability that he'll live. And that, so to speak motivated them to continue to fight. But the Vietnamese, if you tell them got the same motivation out of, we will make sure if you die, we will make sure that your body is returned to your family so that you can participate in the spiritual afterlife. That meant more to them than being evacuated if they were wounded. And we worked sometimes with the Koreans, Koreans being Asian, they understood that, you know, you threaten somebody from a western culture with death and they start that's frightening, you know, God, you can't kill me what do you want to know? What the Asian mindset, what I understood was, fine I'm just going to my ancestors, big deal. But if you

threatened to cut off a body part and disposed to feed it to the dog or some other part where their body wouldn't be complete when it came time for them to go to their spiritual afterlife, that was a hindrance to them. So, American guy I'm going to cut off your finger if you don't tell me something. Okay, cut my finger off. I'm going to kill you, wait a minute, you know, or I'm going to kill your kids or your mom or dad or something, but with the, with that Asian culture that was just the opposite. And in order to deal with them in that situation you had to know what was valuable to them. Was life more valuable or death, you know, which, which meant least to them. I would have never, I'm sure there was a lot of Americans didn't understand that. And so, and likewise with a lot of other cultures, if, if you know what's valuable to them you can perhaps get them to share their knowledge and share intelligence, military intelligence I'm talking about.

1:03:20

LA: Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam?

DD: Animals? Dogs. We had a dog around the mess hall that hated Vietnamese. I know my brother served some time in Korea and they ate dogs, but and, you know, dog in an America camp was a puppy, a friend, a pal. It was a food source to them. Water buffaloes, I always thought of water buffaloes as being wild and although there were some herds of them that I saw, they were domestic animals. Beast of burdens who help plow fields and move heavy loads and I like that. Fish too. It was just amazing seeing the kind of fish traps in the rivers that they had that were kind of based on the tidal system that they worked, you know, did you have some animal in mind [chuckle]?

LA: Well, you sent me a picture holding a snakeskin.

DD: Oh, okay. That was at one of the missions that we had dealing with the military advisers, and for whatever reason they had this trophy that they'd found a snake or killed a snake or something like that, and it was [chuckles]. Everybody in the Army used to kid around about special forces guys being snake eaters [chuckle]. And it was, what'd you do with it? Did you eat them? He says, "you want a piece?" and no. No, I'm fine. Just took a picture with the skin. I didn't have anything to do with it other than being part of the folks we supported and going, "wow, you know, that's a big snake."

01:05:20

LA: Did you personally encounter the Viet Cong?

DD: Did I what?

LA: Did you personally encounter the Viet Cong?

DD: No, not person-to-person. Of course we did flying. There was, you know, that's whether they were Viet Cong, which were like civilian militia or an organized North Vietnamese regular army folks. There was a time when we did the Falcons, our gunships found three guys crossing a rice paddy and when they flew over them, they stopped and they stripped their shirts off and

they started picking rice. And when they call for clear called for, you know, to relay the intelligence to the command-and-control helicopter who had the military advisor and their ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] partner there. They went back and forth when they asked about them. And they were picking rice and they authorized to us for the Falcons to fire on them because they were picking rice. It was just the wrong time to harvest rice. It was probably time when they would just been planted. But, you know, that's what they decided to do to try to survive and they ended up being Viet Cong folks that were transporting money and papers and they found those in the fields. The other times was in the second tour. There were times when our, and I was an Air Cav scout, Air Cav troop, and we had, we provided reconnaissance and we had one scout, I believe his name was Bartlett, that when he flew around low looking for the enemy, and we were in Cobras at a high cap. And if he found any, we would engage him while he got away from him. He could tell when he saw tracks on the ground if he called them as North Vietnamese regulars. When we finally found him, they had where they were in uniforms. If he called them Viet Cong, or VC, or Charlie, they would be wearing black pajamas when we found them. And how he did that, when we asked him, was he got so close to the ground in the tracks that he could see whether or not there was a boot print, a heel print, and if there was a heel print that mean they were wearing boots and if they're wearing boots they're wearing uniforms or wearing uniforms. They're North Vietnamese regular troops, and if it was a sandal mark, if there was no heel mark, if it was a track without a heel mark and he'd call them Viet Cong. He was amazing to be able to glean that much information by passing over road or a stream crossing or just track them down the road. He sometimes could tell you they've been, I got ten or more guys went by here 24 hours ago and as he tracked them, the time would get shorter and shorter until he found them and they shot at him. And that was his job to get shot at. Scout pilots, crazy. But then again how do you, how do you know Bart? how do you know how long ago that was? He said, "well I have to cross the stream, and I can see the footprints in the stream, but there's no water washed up on one side, I know it's a long time ago. If I come by there and they're still oozing a little bit of muddy color, then that was a little bit shorter time. If the water is still washed up on the bank, that's even shorter time." It was amazing. He was, but other than that, you know, just getting shot at by somebody and it's hard to tell sometimes whether they're Viet Cong or not

01:09:18

LA: Do you remember Agent Orange being sprayed?

DD: Yes. We had one ship that had been used and was used to spray Agent Orange. It had a rather large tank in the back where it was mixed. And it had, like an agricultural spray rig out to the side and I forget what the recommended airspeed was, but when we did that then the gunships would fly behind us in the covers in case we'd get shot at. That ship when it wasn't, when we didn't have a spray mission was used to carry troops and I believe it was aircraft 258 and they couldn't keep it painted. They'd paint it and the paint would peel off and stuff and when we flew it, and if the spray got on us there wasn't anything that said the take your uniform off right away and wash it or any protective clothing that we wore, if our gloves, which were in short

supply, if they got moisture on them didn't even wash those out, you know, we just wore them the next day. Yeah, we sprayed it.

LA: You mentioned the gunships covering you. Were they flying behind you or behind this, this helicopter that was spraying?

DD: Not directly behind, but they'd fly off. One would be off right wing, one would be off left wing far enough back to where if somebody shot at the bird it was spraying. If somebody shot or even if they were escorting a single ship, a Huey or a fighter, whenever they were, they were far enough back that they could engage and shoot their weapons immediately in the area that, that aircraft was in. If they were up any closer, you know, they wouldn't be able to engage it. Sometimes they would be equally spaced across to cover the aircraft or the flight. And, if say you took fire from the right side, the guy on the right would immediately engage and the other guy would come up and get ready to cover this guy when, when the initial gunship made his run and when it broke, usually to the right, when they broke then this gunship covered his break by engaging the area where they would get fire. And then this guy would turn around and climb up and try to be in a position to cover this guy when he broke until the, the flight or the aircraft that had been shot at was out of danger. Usually, 1 or 2 runs and of course folks were far enough away where they wouldn't be engaged again. Or they may, if they're still continuing to be engaged, this guy, the second guy may cover the initial break and then turn and cover the, the flight while this guy climbed up and covered his break and continued to cover the, the flight. The tactics that were used by our Huey gunships, the b-models, was quite different from what the tactics used by the Cobras were. Cobras usually started out at a lot higher altitude. The b-model gunships or the Charlie model gunships, the Huey gunships, because they were closer to the same level you felt, I felt a lot better covered because they were close enough to where they could also take the fire that was shooting at us. Whereas a cobra starting from a lot higher altitude, you know, if, if their armament engaged the enemy, they broke a lot higher. So, they really were no longer a threat. So, then they would change fire to flight. I felt more comfortable with the Huey gunships.

LA: So, to get back to Agent Orange, were you concerned at the time about Agent Orange being sprayed?

DD: Nope, nope. Wasn't aware of the dangers. Wasn't aware of the long-term stuff. I don't know if anybody was, of course, the Air Force had been spraying it in a lot, a lot larger airplanes could cover more ground. Ours was mostly smaller projects, if you will, maybe fire bases killing the vegetation back from the perimeter of the fire base. Not so much long straight line along a canal or a creek or anything like that. But no, but we didn't know, you know, it was just spray. You know, it's going to kill the vegetation, you know, so.

01:14:27

LA: What were some of the ways you coped with war?

DD: Coped with it? Drank. Drank heavily. First and second tour. It was a stress release. It was a time for guys to get together and relax and if you wanted to talk about the day, we did or there's a group of guys that played cards and pokers and they didn't drink [chuckles]. But we sang songs and told stories and talked about girlfriends and messed with the new guys, new guys that were just coming country and I relate to what happened to me. I came in country and went to the club a particular time and I go, "how'd you take your, check ride today?" And I said, "no I took the operators test." How'd you do? I passed. So, what you Passed the test, you got to buy the bar. Okay. You know beer might have been a nickel or a dime and shot of liquor the same thing. You put \$5 on the bar, and it was bought for most of the night so, you know, did that. Hey, guys, I took my check ride today. Did you pass? Yeah, buy the bar. Got first letter from home today, buy the bar. Got a letter from my girlfriend, buy the bar. Got shot at today, buy the bar. And you just, [chuckles] some guys were pretty easy and did that for a while before they caught on. And a lot of times it was, you know, and I think we had 60 pilots. And if you divide that up into a year, you basically had a pilot program to leave about once a week. And so, you look for new guys to come in. So, you realized you'd been taken with this buy the bar thing when a new guy come in and somebody say, "hey did you get a letter from home today did you take a check, ride?" Yeah. You got to buy the bar here. You, that's what they did to me. And usually, [chuckles] the guys that gave the new guys the hardest time were the guys at two weeks ago were new guys. There's a lot of things done to them. But that was a stress release. We sang songs

01:16:51

LA: what was the most memorable friendship you had during your time in Vietnam?

DD: There was quite a few of them. Most of the guys I flew with every day and in particular, the guys that I've seen since then, one fellow in particular, Bill Freeman, lives in Simpsonville. In I knew he was from South Carolina. He knew I was from the time Augusta, Georgia. So that and we, we arrived in Vietnam about four weeks apart. So, Vietnam age we were the same age. And generally, that's who you were closest with, were guys that came the same time. And that seen Bill a number of times and we ended up being in the National Guard together. And I went to his wedding, tried to go to his wedding in 1972 up in Ohio, Bill Freeman, we flew together. You know, we were same time frame, left a month apart. Ended up in the National Guard together. So many times after Vietnam. I didn't have any contact with the guys anymore, because you know, I'm not writing the guys back there, you know, at home with my girlfriend, my family, and moving on. So, 'til the internet came around it was sometimes difficult to find people. But Bill Freeman. And George Mason, which I mentioned earlier, was a good friend in basic and flight school and when he was killed his mom and dad requested me to be the body escort. We were good friends in high school, but we were separated quite a bit in Vietnam. And I developed a close relationship with his mom and dad after bringing him home, so.

01:18:50

LA: Who did you write to or receive letters from while in country?

DD: My mom and dad, of course I had a girlfriend and that was probably the most important one, the one I look forward to the most. But that only lasted from August until October. Mom and dad promised and did write me every Sunday. I got a letter once a week from my mom and dad, which was looked forward to and regular and it gave me a routine. The next one would be Mr. and Mrs. Willingham whose house stayed at in California before I came over and he told Mr. Willingham told us told everybody in the class, when you get to Vietnam get an address, write and tell me what it is and tell me where you're at. And when we did that Mr. Willingham, who worked Caterpillar Tractor, had his secretary put together a newsletter about once a month, and the first one came out and, you know, amongst other things and thank everybody that come by and Dennis is in Vinh Long and my son, you know, is in Vietnam in the third and fifth and Gary Tamietti is in third and fifth. And he let us know that on this big base there was about seven of us. So, you know, when we had time off, we could go look for each other. He also when somebody write and tell him that, classmate had been killed, he would include that. And both his son and Gary Tamietti didn't, were wounded and ended up going back. And they kept us updated on them. And anybody that would write Mr. Mrs. Willingham, they would put it in this newsletter and send it out to us. And with all the a lot of the bad things that are said about Vietnam and how people felt and a lot of times California stuck out there by itself, Mr. and Mrs. Willingham we're great. And they also invited everybody on your way back home. Stop by we'll do it again on your way home. And—but I came through McGuire, New Jersey, I didn't come through California so, I didn't get to see him on the way home. And, of course, family, brother and brother and his wife, who Were Vietnam vets. They, probably the best gift I got was, and I don't know how Bruce did it, but he shipped me a box of apples from Washington state and I'd go out in a day, and I take 1 or 2 the apples with me, and it was a big treat, so.

01:21:28

LA: What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at PX [Post Exchange]?

DD: Most expensive was a camera, 35-millimeter camera. A lot of times we'd be out during the day flying missions and stuff. We'd come back in and "hey, the PX got a shipment of watches in." And of course, it'd be late in the day or maybe the next day before we got over and all the good stuff was gone, but the most expensive was a camera, 35-millimeter camera. Now my brother picked up a Rolex watch for \$95 at the PX when he was there, and he tried his darndest to get me to buy one or order one through the military catalog stuff. But you know hell, I was 20 years old. I wouldn't spend \$95 on a damn watch. I should have, some of the guys bought cars while they were over there. They would order cars and pick them up when they got home. I didn't do that. I waited till I got home. Typically, a piece of jewelry, a watch, and a camera were kind of high on the list. And then, of course Christmas gifts could be ordered through the catalog and they'd ship it right straight to whoever you wanted it.

01:22:48

LA: What was the most beautiful thing that you saw in Vietnam?

DD: I'd have to say one or two things; nature wise it was when I was in I Corps flying with the 101st in the mountains. There were waterfalls that had to be 2 or 300ft tall jungled sides of hills and looked very peaceful. But then you go a little bit further, and you come across a valley that was bomb craters and everything else. But some of the countryside was absolutely gorgeous. And there was a, when we were in Vung Tau, there was some ladies there that were half French, half Asian that were beautiful, gorgeous.

01:23:47

LA: All right. Well, that's the end of my service questions because there another story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam you'd like to share?

DD: There's this, there's a few of them. One of them is my first experience of seeing somebody shot down was on September the 1st, 1969. We were in night mission and were guided into Cambodia by the captain that was in charge of the C-N-C [Command and Control] and lost the lead ship. It was shot down from when we we're about 150ft and it was actually Cambodia. We weren't supposed to be there, and there was a yellow green tracer that just filled that aircraft full, and they're flying off it. We were chock three and was off the left side at 45 degrees. And of course, I hadn't even been there a full month yet. I was a copilot, Peter Pilot, and I was guarding the controls, guarding ready to go on the controls when the aircraft commander was, if he was wounded. And my eyes were on the aircraft that was being shot and it hit it in the engine, and it was like a bottle rocket going off. There just pieces and hot parts and stuff at night. Look like bottle rocket just spewing out the back end of that and the engine quit, they hit the ground and just burst into flames. We landed and the troops jumped off. Maybe some of them were shot when getting off and our gunners were shooting and the Cobras were suppressing. And we left the glow of the burning aircraft that lit us up and felt a little bit safer as we flew out of that light into the darkness. Felt a little bit safer and then got altitude and went back. There was a advisor named Michael Burns that was wounded that night and died later. And it got to be really complicated being, 1st of September of '69 [1969] and having a Huey shot down in Cambodia. It influenced the way I thought about stuff the rest of my time in Vietnam and the four pilots that didn't get shot down and all the American crew survived that, believe or not. And the other pilots that weren't shot down were really bitter about the captain taking us to that place when we found out later that he knew that automatic weapon was there. And so, shortly after that, I was transferred to another unit. In that other unit the Cowboys flew quite differently. We had, did a medevac mission where the crew chief was awarded the Silver Star for jumping out of the aircraft, going getting the guy, putting him on board. Robert Luke, he lives in Arizona. February the 4th, we had aircraft go down, and I picked up the four survivors from, took them to the hospital. And when we got back to Bearcat that morning the, it was sunup. Got back, we've been gone for over 24 hours. We had 16 hours flight time which was an awful lot. The crew chief was post-fighting the aircraft and he came to me and he called me back and said, "Dennis, just look at this one. Tell me what you think it is." And it was a mark on the underside of our rotor blade. From the gunships tail rotor. We'd had a mid-air and survived. There's not very many people to have mid-airs in helicopter and survive. March, the end of March, that February end of March, we had an aircraft, you know, last pick up zone, take an RPG [Rocket-Propelled

Grenade] and exploded. And I picked up two of the survivors of that. One guy died, and we just didn't find the third guy. And I get a, a card from Phil Miller pretty much every year on the anniversary of that thanking me for the, cause he's had the rest of his life, and he's married and kids, grandkids, and a career. We see each other at reunions. very next day. That day when I picked up Phil, I was trail next. The day I was lead and my copilot took six rounds. Nobody else but some of the troops on the back were hit, but Goldsmith took three rounds on the way in and three rounds on the way out, and he survived. May, we participated in the Cambodia incursion which was quite an operation. You know it wasn't D-Day, but far as helicopters are concerned, 1970 there was a whole mass of helicopters that we went up the Phnom Penh River and secured the ferry crossing from Saigon. And during that time, I also had an engine fire with a guy named Frenchie Dumont from Maine. We survived that. During that month of May, George Mason was killed, his mom and dad requested me to bring his body home. And then, Mr. and Mrs. Mason, after we buried George, gave me an envelope and I'd been extended two weeks to take care of some personal business by the major from Fort Sill. And so, I asked Mr. Mason what he needed me to do. I wanted to get started, cause all I want to do is get back to the unit, to my guys. I was one of the senior pilots at that time and I just, I just wanted to get back to the guys. And Mr. Mason pulled out a envelope from the jacket that he was wearing at the funeral and handed me a envelope that had, him and his wife had bought a round-trip ticket from Oklahoma City to Augusta, Georgia. And they said, "you go see your mom and dad." And then when I got back, I found out that one of the guys new to the unit was from Oklahoma, the same county that George was from. And he wrote his mother, and his mother knew Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Mason knew her. And a month or so later [unclear] had enough time to become an aircraft commander. And by that time, I was a scheduling officer, I scheduled him to fly his first mission. And he was dead by 12:00 o'clock. Was 20 years, I was 20 years old. Second tour I flew with two guys that had gone to flight school with my brother. And I thought by volunteer to go to the 101st, that I'd be working entirely with Americans. But most of the American ground troops had been pulled out. And so, when we did our reconnaissance primarily from Khe Sanh to the A Shau Valley we were out there by ourselves. We always brought a Huey along, we had a scout, a loach, two guns, and a Huey that flew, I don't know, 3,500 to 4000 feet. So, he had line of sight radio communications with the unit back home. And if anything happened to any one of the other three aircraft, no questions asked. We wanted him to beat us to the ground, because we didn't even have artillery coverage out there. We were just eyes and ears of the division, so. And they also had a club, guys drank, and sang songs, and units stood down in January of '72 [1972]. And my mother and dad, because they were Army, they got the *Stars and Stripes*, and the *Stars and Stripes* had an article that said the Second of the 17th comes home to Fort Campbell. And they sent that newspaper to me in Vietnam, address to the Second of the 17th Air Cav [chuckles]. But once they got 51% of the authorized strength at Fort Campbell, they called the unit home. That's what they called. Then I got out, met my wife, and had kids and family, and live the rest of the time.

01:32:22

LA: Well, on that note, I'd like to talk about your post service life.

DD: Okay.

LA: What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

DD: Well, the girl I was engaged to, when I went the service, we didn't have anything to do with a couple of months in Vietnam. And what happened was what my dad predicted. I talked to my dad about marrying this girl, and he said, "son," he says, "don't do it before you go to Vietnam." He says, "if your relationship can last a year in your absence, it'll last forever." Well, it, I don't know, lasted six weeks, eight weeks. So, she was young, and vibrant, and needed to socialize. So that, that was a big effect. And, of course, and gosh, I had 2 or 3 other things there. Tell me ask me the question again.

LA: What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

DD: Relationship with my sister, who protested quite a bit. And during that time, she seemed to be pretty strongly against everything. Now in today's today now, me somebody saying anti-war has completely different connotation what it did back then. Am I a pro-war person? Hell, no. You know, I don't, it'd be great if we never, never had to place people in jeopardy. But sometimes it's necessary. As strong as she felt about all this stuff, when Gulf War and stuff came around she, she changed completely. Now she supported everybody. So, I tend to think that it was something chic and popular that her and her friends did because it was a popular attitude and then when it was okay to support the military. And then she changed again to what was chic and fashionable. And that and some other things, but yeah, my relationship with my sister was changed by that.

01:35:00

LA: Did you know any antiwar veterans?

DD: You know, you have to say chronologically. Through the years it has shifted back and forth and one guy, who was more of a hippie than anything else. And it was, it was a whole atmosphere of what he, what he was. He was pretty cool to hang around, and be with, and laughing, and that kind of stuff. But he wasn't, really overtly, strongly anti-war, anti-military. He'd been a Marine, he just had a little bitter tour. But, no, no.

01:35:55

LA: Who, since the war have you talked to about Vietnam?

DD: Up Until the 90s, it was, we were all pretty much invisible. Didn't really bring the subject up. And it wasn't till after 9/11 that the military service began by the general population, was noted and appreciated and applauded. And I think as part of my healing I was able to be in the National Guard with many other Vietnam veterans. We were able to talk about it and sometimes brag about it, or tell stories, or at least have some release and without any criticism. And I think that helped a whole lot. But being able to speak about it to veteran's organizations or to in the educational platform that my daughter helped with. My daughters a school teacher in Bamberg,

South Carolina. And when she started to cover World War II, she asked my dad to do a little first-person history of it. And dad wanted to know, well what do you want to talk, what should I talk about for an hour? Before the war, during the war, and after the war. And he took little pieces of mementos and stuff so that the children, the fifth graders in particular, could touch and feel, and have something tangible to relate to what dad was talking about. And then when Vietnam came along in the history book, which, you know, for fifth grader you can't dedicate a chapter to something like that, it's just kind of a page. And Amy had one uncle show up where the book said the, the war ended in 1973 when all the troops, combat troops came home and he had a, a friend that was killed in '74 [1974], '75 [1975]. And he was irate because Amy was teaching children the war ended in '73 [1973] when there's still many deaths go till '75 [1975]. And she kind of goes, "got to teach what's in the book." And so, we would talk to the kids and bring touchy, feely stuff and take questions. Amy has, I asked Amy one time. I said, "you know, I've seen you do dad and the, and your students had a lot of questions." I said, "find out what their questions are based on what they've read." This is fifth and sixth graders and have them write the questions down and I will try to, when I talk about it, I'll try to incorporate the answers and of course I couldn't do it with all of them. So, what I did, I took those questions and I wrote an answer to all their questions and so that Amy could give it back to them. And what she did, we she made copies of it at home. She's got from that and a couple other classes questions that they had that I wrote the answers to and tried to incorporate it. And so going from there and speaking to some veterans group to her on Veterans Day or Memorial Day or something like that trying to share. It helps me heal and I hope it can help educate other folks. I had something came up in my mind. It's Welcome home stuff. Were you going to ask about the welcome home?

LA: Go ahead.

DD: I have a lot of veterans, sometimes when I'm speaking, you know, remind me that they didn't get a parade when they came home. And I'm sure there's a lot of folks that didn't. Especially after 9/11 when troops would come back from Iraq and Afghanistan. It was kind of well, we didn't get a parade and it's too late and, you know, the hell with you. There were units that shipped to Vietnam, and there were units that came home, but not the same group of guys came. Now when a unit ships out, we'll say from Fort Gordon or Fort Eisenhower, if there's 2 or 300 people that go, those 2 or 300 people, hopefully the same people come back to the families, and everybody stationed at that fort. We didn't, I didn't go that way, my dad didn't, my brother didn't, Annie didn't go that way. We went as an individual replacement by ourselves all the way to Vietnam to replacement battalion. Was assigned a unit and I made it to a full tour. And when I came home in August of '70 [1970], I didn't know what day I'd be home. I didn't know what airplane I'd be home, because I was one person coming back. And I called my mom and dad from Atlanta, and I told them, I'll be in Augusta 2:30 on flight number so and so. And so, they met me at the airplane. You know, that's how much notice they had. And they took me to the house and they welcomed me home at the house, not a big overt circle, circus out in the front yard in the neighborhood with signs and everything like that. My family welcomed me home. We had families in the neighborhood whose sons were in Vietnam, we had family in the neighborhood who had lost a son, and there wasn't any reason to put this out on the street. So,

the welcome home celebration kind of became invisible the way we talked about ourselves until the after 9/11 when we started wearing our hats and saying it's okay to recognize me now. I feel some guys still don't want that, but I think for the most part everybody came home as an individual. And there wasn't this big unit there wasn't Norman Schwarzkopf parade in New York City, tickertape, and stuff like that. So that's a welcome home.

LA: Yeah.

DD: Thank my family.

01:42:13

LA: Have you been to The Wall in DC?

DD: Yes, yes, I have.

LA: What did you think of it?

DD: [chuckles] I was leaving that kind of open as a yes or no question. It's very moving, very moving. I was fortunate enough to, when I was working in Manassas a number of years ago, that we had to be at work at 6:00 o'clock, got off at 2:30 to avoid the congestion, traffic congestion in DC. And one of the guys I worked with was also a Vietnam vet. He wanted to go to Arlington and go see The Wall. So, on Saturday we did that and it got to be a little bit late and being an electrician, one of the things I had was I carried, I always carried a little pocket flashlight with me. When we went to the wall there were some people there that were looking for a particular panel and the panel numbers are way down on the bottom. They changed the lighting and you really couldn't see that. So, I pulled out my flashlight and was helping people find it, and I got a good feeling about helping people find something in it. I talked to one of the volunteers there and eventually became a volunteer and I'd go, didn't have a schedule. If I felt like going down the wall and answering questions and, you know, making comments about The Wall and helping people find stuff that I would do that helped, veterans find stuff, families find that. Even one Wednesday night I helped three ladies. They were walking down the west wall, which is the one that points to the Lincoln Memorial, and the one lady, it was really a woman and her two daughters. One daughter was dragging her hand on the wall, and she walked down there and when they, and I asked them if I could help them find a panel or a name, or if they had a question about the wall, I'd try to answer it. And said, "well we don't know anybody on the wall." And I thought that was strange, and I said, "you don't you don't know anybody on the wall?" She says, "no. After Wednesday night service, sometimes we'll come down here and one of us will walk along with a hand on the wall, and the other one will say, stop and we'll say a prayer for the family of who's ever name we have. But we don't know anybody on the wall." and I said, "so, would you like to meet somebody?" She said, "I thought they were all dead." I said, "Well, I can introduce you to some guys." And I told them the story. Told them about George, I told them about, [Unclear], I told them about Sheldon Kimball, and after the third one, they kind of went, "It's enough, we got to go." And they turned to walk away and walk about 2 or 3 panels back in the direction they'd come. And the mother stopped and she turned around and came

back to me. You know what, I wonder what I did. And she said she wanted to thank me. She said she'd been; they'd been to The Wall many times, but that was the first time the wall talked to them. I also met Hal Moore there at the wall late one night by ten, 10:00 o'clock. Little, short guy, trench coat. He came down, I asked him the same questions and he said no, he knew where he was going and he asked me if I was a veteran, what I did. I told him and he thanked me for my service, and he got to the panel. And one of the things all the volunteers know, they know where the Ia Drang Valley Battle guys are. And he stopped there and I says, "you know Ia Drang." He says, "yeah, I was there." And he thanked me for what I did in Vietnam. I Thanked him. I says, "and what's your name." He says, "Hal Moore." Also met some of the guys I flew with, Carlyle Roach, who lives in Scotland, and I flew with second tour who knew my brother. His son-in-law contacted me and said they were coming to the States. And one thing Carlyle wanted to do is visit The Wall. Could I meet him there? Sure. So that was 2 or 3 months away, and I got a motorcycle rode up to DC, had my Cav hat, standing at the apex of the wall, and I saw Carlyle come around the corner, and he saw the Cav hat and made a beeline for me. Didn't recognize me, just saw the hat. And when he got close, he recognized me. And it was a good reunion it was a surprise for him. So, yeah, I've been there. And one thing that was added after the wall was built and dedicated, I think in '82 [1982] was the, the Woman's Memorial, it's just up off the east wall in that same area, and it's a statue of three nurses holding a wounded guy, and it's extremely moving. It really is. If anybody hasn't been there and can't handle The Wall, for as a veteran, a lot of lot guys won't go. It just, it's too hard. Maybe they could stop by the Nurse's Monument, the women's monument, which is again, very moving. Yeah. But I've been to The Wall, taken my grandchildren to The Wall. Had them in the, in the fall. The east wall that points towards the Washington Monument gets heated up late in the evening by the sun. And after the sun goes down for a little bit of time, you go and put your hand on that east wall, and it almost feels like it's body temperature. It's, you get goosebumps. It's a, it's a great memorial. It's not a war memorial; it's a veteran's memorial. The government built and the government did for this was gave them the land to build it on. It was built entirely from private donations entirely. And like I said, the only thing the government did was give the land to build it up. From a distance it just looks like a big black stone and as you go to it you really walk down into it. And like the war for so many of us that was invisible and hidden and not in public view because it's sunken like that. From a couple angles you don't even know it's there. But it's like deep cut in the country. It's awesome. I highly recommend it.

01:48:59

LA: Have you been back to Vietnam?

DD: No, don't have any desire. No. Some guys do. I don't. I'm done, not the same place. And what would I go for? I'd much rather go see the guys I was there with, you know, in Las Vegas, or Reno, or Orlando, or someplace else. Just meet the guys.

01:49:29

LA: Okay. And this is my last question. Do you have a favorite book, poem, or movie about Vietnam?

DD: Yes. Movie would be, we were young, *We Were Soldiers*, when we were young. Pretty good movie. Sometimes Hollywood takes too much artistic, to make something. But they it's close. I'm sure there's some things that they had to massage a little bit, but overall, I think it's a true, good ballad. Number of books and a lot of them involve helicopters or, special operations group, *Hell in a Small Place* which deals with the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, where the French were defeated. But overall, I have to tell you that, *Dear Mark* is something that it's a little different. Susan Jimison compiled the letters that she wrote to her brother Mark during training and during Vietnam. And even after he died, she might need an older brother to talk to. I think when he died, when Mark died, I don't know, eighth grade, 13 years old, something young, think older brother. And even after Mark died, she might feel the need to write a letter and go "today was Mom and Dad's 25th wedding anniversary, we did yeah." And she kept all those original letters and the ones she added to. And somebody who knew that said you ought to write a book. And so, the book, one of the things in the book is they got a missing in action telegram before they got the—he's dead. The day the missing in action telegram came, was her older sister's wedding. Her dad got them, got the telegram, read it like Mr. Mason. He stuck it in his pocket. And he didn't bring it out 'til maybe the next day 'til after, you know, all the joyous occasion was over. But Susan's book, *Dear Mark*, is about, her trek to find out not how Mark died, they had a pretty good, detailed description of the events surrounding his death, but how he lived. She wanted to make contact with the guys that were in his unit. Did you have any pictures of my brother in Vietnam? And what was he like? You know, and so she goes about now with the internet finding guys that knew her brother. And in this one of the other things, she finds out that when he was in Fort Wallace, Texas, he met a girl that went to, I think, Denton Woman's College who he fell in love with. And the family didn't even know this. And so, when Mark died this pseudo fiancé wasn't notified at all. And she does, through the contacts of Mark's unit, finds out about this girl, ends up contacting her as, and the whole book is about finding this and that's only halfway through, there's so much more back of it. But it's a different perspective than, you know, yesterday I went flying, it's clear blue and 22, and we lifted so many troops and people shot at us and stuff like that. And here's her telling about growing up with Mark and being a brother and trying to find people that knew him from—it's from the family aspect, from the Goldstar family who we don't hear that much from, and it's different from what I normally read. *Dear Mark*. Susan Clotfelter Jimison.