RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS BRODKIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH
and
MOHAMMAD ATHAR

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dennis Brodkin on April 29, 2015 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for coming in today.

Dennis Brodkin: My pleasure.

SI: We appreciate it. We have wanted to interview you for a long time. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

DB: April 22, 1944 in Newark, New Jersey.

SI: Happy belated birthday.

DB: Thank you.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your family background starting with your parents' names.

DB: My father was Ed Brodkin, one of seven children, one of two born in the United States. His mother and father were of Ukrainian, Russian, Jewish, extraction. The family arrived in the United States in 1912. My father was born in 1918. The Brodkins, from what I know--and my grandfather was the only male Brodkin; he had sisters, so it's hard to find other Brodkins who are direct lineage to our family--were farmers and peddlers in the Kiev area. When they came to the States, that's pretty much the business they stayed in. My aunt and my father were the only two, as I said, who were born here in the United States. My mother's family, her maiden name was Albaum--Rose. They are of Polish extraction. My grandfather was from Tarnogrod, [Poland] and my grandmother was from Bilgoraj, [Poland]. Let me back track. On my father's side, I know very little about his mother. She died when he was seven years old. Never met her. Never met my grandfather. He died when my father was eighteen. So when my grandfather on my father's side died, my father moved in with his sister, my aunt. That side, the Brodkin side, I can only go one generation back in Europe. My mother's side, can't go back at all. Her mother and father, as I said, came from Poland. What was interesting, Bilgoraj and Tarnogrod were relatively close together in the Lublin area of Poland. They came over separately. I never got their story, but my sense is they were in Brooklyn, probably met. My grandmother was three years older than my grandfather. Later genealogy work confirmed this. They probably met and one said they were from Bilgoraj, the other said we're from Tarnogrod, sort of neighbors in Poland. My grandmother's maiden name was Hirsch. So the Hirsches and the Albaums got together. Interestingly enough, they were also in the fruit and vegetable business, peddlers. But they were street peddlers; my grandfather had a horse and wagon. When my father met my mother in or about 1938, and my mother told her parents who she met, it was almost like a real upgrade. The Brodkins had a store. The Albaums were street peddlers, so it was almost like they were marrying money, but trust me, none of the families had any assets to speak of. It was a poor to a lower middle class family. So that's my father and mother.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

[Tape Paused]

DB: I'll go back and tell you just a little something more about my grandparents.

SI: Sure. Absolutely.

DB: So the historian in me has always been interested in trying to do some kind of genealogy and family tree. I have not done as much genealogy as Howard McGinn, my roommate who you interviewed, who really was able to delve deep. Part of the problem is I couldn't find much on the family. Did a little Ancestry.com, Ellis Island research. I was able to find the ships and the manifest that both sets of grandparents came over on, but I can't find my paternal grandfather. I found my paternal grandmother whose name was Pauline, English translation. She went by the name Pessie, P-E-S-S-I-E on the ship manifest. I never heard that name before. Part of the problem with those manifests are whoever took the names down, they transliterated and she may have said something else. But on the manifest, it has Shmuel, my Uncle Sam; Dawid, my Uncle Dave; Maisey, my Uncle Murray; Sere, my Aunt Shirley; Ephraim, my Uncle Frank, and their ages. It lists as their residence a place called Kaudros, K-A-U-D-R-O-S, Russia; there is no such place. I mean none that I could find and I've looked at old maps of Russia, old maps of the Ukraine. I'll share with you a little later in the interview. We found some other Brodkins from the Ukraine. We're not related, but the father, who's my age, did a lot of genealogy. I asked him; I said, "In the course of your research"--and he went to the Jewish ancestry organizations, the Mormons, Ellis Island, everywhere--"We can't locate Kaudros and I'm trying to find phonetically what it might even be close to." It's still a mystery. So if, in the course of your interviews, you ever hear of Kaudros, please let me know. [laughter]

SI: Was the name changed at all, that you know of?

DB: We believe so. I have seen Russians named Brodkin spelled B-R-A-H-D-K-I-N. However, on my grandfather's naturalization papers it's B-R-O-T-K-I-N. I've always known just B-R-O-D-K-I-N. Albaum, an interesting story. They were A-L-B-O-U-M. On my grandmother and grandfather's headstone, which I visited yesterday, it's A-L-B-O-U-M. But my mother in high school decided that wasn't fashionable enough and she changed it to A-L-B-A-U-M. So all of my cousins go by Albaum. I happen to be now the patriarch of that Albaum lineage. All the male heirs died. My older brother has passed on. By default, I am now the senior Albaum.

SI: Did your grandparents pass away before you were born?

DB: Actually no. My mother's grandparents lived quite--my grandfather died in 1960. My grandmother died in 1972. It was the Brodkin side that I never met.

SI: I was going to ask if any stories came down through your family about what life was like.

DB: Interestingly, yes. My Uncle Dave and Uncle Sam, who were quite older than my father, were both branded by the Cossacks back in Europe. My Uncle Israel Hirsch, in fact, was drafted to fight in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. [Editor's Note: The Russo-Japanese War occurred from 1904 to 1905, ending in a Japanese victory.] So there was a little bit of history. They left because of the pogroms. [Editor's Note: *Pogroms* were violent assaults on Jewish communities in the Russian Empire by neighboring populations and/or government forces, carried out from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.] That much I am convinced of. The Albaum side, I think, there was also persecution in Poland, but there I think it was more an economic move. It's hard for us to realize--but not for you guys because you're doing these interviews--but my maternal grandmother was seventeen when she left Bilgoraj, travelled by herself to Hamburg, transit to Brooklyn. Her older brother was here. She left her parents in Europe. We lost track. They were probably dead before the Holocaust or killed in the

Holocaust. I know my grandfather on my mother's side died earlier and this is somewhat a funny story. Funny but it has a twist to it. My grandmother had a younger sister who came also later. The three children came without the parents. My grandfather on my mother's side's Hebrew name was Zelig. When my mother's brother was born, his name was Seymour but they gave him a Hebrew name of Zelig. My grandmother's younger sister was never told that her father had died. Somewhere along the line, either my grandmother or someone else referred to my uncle as Zelig. In the Jewish tradition you name people after someone who's recently departed. So she learned that her father died by accident and only by hearing someone call my uncle Zelig. So I have no idea what happened to the Brodkins in the Ukraine and the Albaums or the Hirsches in Europe, but can only suspect that they were lost in the Holocaust.

SI: You were saying before that the Brodkins had the store and your mother's family were the peddlers? Do you know how your parents met?

DB: Yes. My father did not go to high school. My father, he would have gone to Central High School in Newark, but economics being what they were and again, he being an orphan at a relatively young age, he sold carrots on Mulberry Street in Newark literally by the bunch. My mom had gone to South Side High School, graduated. She was working as a sales clerk at Woolworth's in downtown Newark. My father went into the store, saw my mother, struck up a conversation and they became an item. It was per chance. They weren't matched up, fixed up, arranged or anything, but he was shopping and there she was. They had a short courtship. I think they met in '38 and they were married in 1940.

SI: So your father went from selling produce on the street to having a store?

DB: Well he worked for his brothers. his older brothers who had a store. Are you familiar at all with the produce business in Newark?

SI: A little bit, yes.

DB: There's a market called the Miller Street Market. Through my uncle on my mother's side, in my summers growing up, I used to help him peddle in East Newark, Harrison, and Kearney. We used to pick up our goods at the Miller Street Market. Well, one of the small stores, even in the 1960s, if you looked under the white wash ,you would see the name Brodkin. So I knew we did exist. We had a history and that's where my uncles--my uncles were much, much older than me. My Uncle Sam I never met. My Uncle Dave I did meet. Sam and Dave--not the record group--they had this store. My father, shortly after marriage--he went into the service the day I was born. April 22, 1944, he got his induction papers, but he developed an ulcer very quickly, got a medical [discharge] in ninety days. So he was home. He went into the dry cleaning business. This is probably the only time I got top billing in my family. My older brother's name was Bart; I'm Den, and he named the cleaners, Denbart. So he did delivery to homes, dry cleaning, and in early 1950s he went to work for Pechter's [Bakery] as a deliveryman. His route was basically North Jersey; up at two in the morning, delivering pastry, rolls, breads, to all the major restaurants in Bergen County, Hudson County. Then in the late '50s, he went into his own business but doing the same thing as an independent contractor rather than a salesperson for Pechter's, but he specialized in pastries and pies, and cakes. It was Ed Brodkin Pastries. My father was an entrepreneur and owned his own business. He did that through 1969 when they

left New Jersey for Florida, but I'll get to that later in the chronology. Basically, he's a salesperson his whole life.

SI: Was the independent business still in Newark?

DB: No. We have moved by that time. There were two moves in my early life. We lived in Newark from 1944 to 1951. We lived in my grandmother's apartment; she had a six-family apartment house, three of which were her, and her children; the other three were tenants. She had trouble with a particular tenant and they did a swap. We left our apartment and moved to this tenant's sister's house in Hillside. So I lived in Hillside from 1951 to 1953. My father had the G.I. Bill benefits, veterans' loans and stuff like that, and they built a mini Levittown in Iselin, Westbury Park Homes. We moved to Iselin in 1953 where they lived until 1969. One of those cookie cutter, $11,500-dollar houses.

SI: You had an older brother?

DB: I had an older brother and a younger brother. My older brother was born in 1941, September 10, 1941. I'm April 22, 1944. So he was two and a half years my senior. My younger brother was December 16, 1948, four and a half years my junior. My mother wanted a girl. She had three boys, all cesarean, as if that matters.

SI: It just surprises me that your father wound up getting drafted because usually having one child and another one on the way--

DB: Since he was the youngest, no one else in his family had served in the US. On my mother's side, she had an older brother who was mentally challenged. Let's just leave it at that. He did not serve. But her younger brother, the one who peddled that I worked with, he served stateside only, was in a terrible automobile accident and lost his arm as an eighteen year old. It was my first exposure to a person with that kind of disability. They had given him a prosthesis. He hated it. He threw it in the garbage. He tells me the story about the garbage men coming to pick up the garbage that day and seeing this hand sticking up. He said it freaked them out. But here's a guy that more than compensated for the loss of his arm by his physical strength. He can lift things, crates of cantaloupes, hundred pound bags of potatoes, and I'm struggling to lift a bushel of peaches. He was incredibly strong. So my mother had an older brother, two younger sisters, and a younger brother.

SI: Did they ever share any stories about being on the home front during World War II was like for them?

DB: Not really. I know they all lived pretty much--the Jewish community of Newark was very tightknit, and our family was very tightknit. I know they all lived in and amongst themselves. I did have an uncle on my mother's side--one of her sisters married a fellow who served with the Second Armored Division, was at Normandy. I just came back from Normandy. I'll share that with you later. I sort of walked in his footsteps. He was the only one that I know of in our family who was overseas. He was very passionate about his service. He went to all reunions. He just died at age ninety six. He just died two weeks ago. So the war wasn't on the radar screen. I think getting by was more on the radar screen. I was too young to ask even about the wartime experience. My father was more laughing about the fact that he got out so fast. I think that's pretty much all I can say about World War II for me personally.

SI: You lived in Newark until 1951.

DB: Correct.

SI: Do you have any memories about that neighborhood?

DB: Absolutely. Loved it. Loved it. I'm staying with my cousin right now in Cranford. She was one of the three family members who lived there. She's a little bit younger than me and we reminisced. The problem [is] our house in Newark is now probably a landmark as a drug house. It's still there. It's boarded up. I've been back a couple of times. Once to show my kids and you know how your memories are--the hill. A telling history--there's Clinton Place on the top, Osborne Terrace on the bottom, Reeves Place in the middle. Well, my recollection is from Reeves Place to Clinton Place was a very substantial hill, because we used to build those milk crate scooters and come down the hill. I went back; my kids are laughing at me. "Dad, that's not much of a hill." My cousin and I talked about it last night. I said, "Janice, do you remember the hill?" "Oh, yes. The hill." I said, "Go back and take a look." I loved the neighborhood. What can I tell you? Hawthorne Avenue. I lived on Tillinghast Street, one block from Hawthorne Avenue, which was a major artery in the South Ward of Newark. We were free range children. We didn't have helicopter parents. I would go to Kiel's Bakery around the corner. Errands were not an issue. I walked to school, Hawthorne Avenue School. I know I was seven when I moved, so I know I couldn't have been older than seven when my parents let me go to the Roosevelt Movie Theatre on Clinton Avenue with a friend on Saturday for the triple headers. I have two grandchildren now who are nine. My daughters would never think of allowing them to go down to get the mail. As a grandparent, I might not even think too kindly of that, but we did. When I moved to Hillside, we lived on Conklin Avenue, which is I'd say about five blocks in from Chancellor Avenue. Friday night being Shabbos, my grandmother liked to have company. My grandfather was an alcoholic. My grandfather was a problem. She didn't like being alone too much. He wasn't abusive; he just couldn't handle his schnapps. I was one of her favorites, so she liked for me to come visit her on Friday night. I would take the bus. I'm either eight or nine because it's '51 to '53. My memory won't allow me to say I was twelve. So I would walk from Conklin Avenue to Chancellor Avenue. I would get my dime out. I'd wait for the fourteen bus. I knew exactly where to get off. I had a little satchel with me for a change of clothes and stuff like that and I would spend Friday night and Saturday with my grandmother.

SI: You mentioned the area that you grew up in Newark was predominantly Jewish?

DB: Yes, it's not quite the Weequahic section … it borders on it. But it was predominantly Jewish, although my neighbors--on one side was another six-family house, pretty much Jewish. The other side was a one family house, an Irish family who's a Newark cop.

SI: Did religion play a big part of your life growing up?

DB: Yes. There's a synagogue on Osborne Terrace and Hawthorne Avenue, which is now a mosque interestingly enough. It was an Orthodox. My grandfather tended to be Orthodox. We were not. Later on in life, we were conservative Jews, not reform. When we moved, on the high holidays and so on, it was an obligation. We went to grandma, grandpa's and we went to their synagogue. I'll never forget the first time I went to an Orthodox synagogue with my grandfather. It was the scariest thing I have ever seen in my life, if you know anything about the faith. I

mean, they cover themselves with the prayer shawls and they're mumbling. It's a language that was--this is before I went to Hebrew school. It was this archaic language and no women; the women are upstairs. There was no levity; it was very serious business. You're making you're arrangements with God and everything else. It was scary. My first connections with organized religion were scary. The family celebrations were just the opposite. We had a large family--Passover, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, were major events. Everybody came from wherever they were to my grandmother's or another aunt's house and we've maintained that tradition. Both of my daughters, even though they've married outside the faith, still look forward to the Jewish holidays as a major family event.

SI: One side of the family is from the Polish region.

DB: Right.

SI: One is from the Ukrainian region. Were there any particular aspects of how you celebrated the holidays that came from either traditions?

DB: No, they come from the same lineage, the same wing. Within the Yiddish speaking world, there's the Galitzianers of the southeastern region of Eastern Europe, and the Litvaks tending to be from the northeaster areas, like Lithuania … Both the Brodkins and the Albaums were Galitzianers, so we came from the same tribe if you will. So there wasn't much of an internal division or friction. The Brodkins were not religious at all. My grandmother and grandfather--again, not having grandparents, they're the ones who would have--my father never went to Hebrew school. My father was not bar mitzvahed. All of the Albaums were bar mitzvahed.

SI: Go ahead.

Mohammad Athar: When you celebrated these major holidays, did you also celebrate with neighbors or was it just family?

DB: Just family because it was a large family. Again, in the Jewish tradition you welcome, whoever. So yes, occasionally there were guests, friends of family, and stuff like that, but it was pretty much a--my grandmother was a wonderful cook, the old world recipes. At the sort of family reunion we had on Sunday, my cousin made my grandmother's apple strudel, literally. [laughter] I mean, it's the same recipe that came over with her. I was not an apple strudel fan myself. So for me, and some of the other kids--you know [what] a strudel dough is like, right? It can be pretty heavy. So she used to take the dough and make cookies out of them and just sprinkle a little sugar on them. Well, they're fine on day one, but on day two they're the hardest rocks you've ever [eaten]. They're delicious, but they're hard. When I was in Vietnam, they sent me a box of those cookies. By the time I got them, we used them for skeet. We were shooting them. You couldn't eat them. [laughter] It was my cousin, since I told him that story, his kids are now teenagers, [and] they call them the Vietnam cookies. They don't call them my grandmother's cookies.

SI: So growing up in this tightknit family, did the family speak a lot of languages? Did they speak Yiddish?

DB: Yes, yes. My grandparents spoke Yiddish. My parents both spoke Yiddish. We spoke no Yiddish, but just through assimilation, you're hearing. You learned all the curses. We learned

enough to be dangerous. Fast forward thirty five years, I'm practicing law. I'm doing a closing in New York. I'm representing the buyer; we're buying a garden apartment complex. In New Jersey and New York, that's an industry that the Hasidic Jews, for some reason, seem to have a major role in. So I go to the closing at a law firm in Manhattan and I get there early. Now Dennis is, by itself, not a particularly Jewish name. Brodkin maybe. I don't think I have--I don't think I scream Semite if you look at me. So I'm sitting by myself and in come three Hasids, high hats, payos, prayer shawls, sitting down on the opposite side of the table and they start talking in Yiddish. They're talking about the deal and they're saying some unflattering things about what they intend to do in this transaction, part of their strategy. Now not only am I ethnically bound to say something, it's pissing me off. Pardon me. So I said something to the effect, "I'm a *lantsman*. I'm a fellow traveller. I'm a Jew." Immediately they stopped; they felt embarrassed. The tone of the closing turned 180 degrees. My client said to me, "Dennis that was the easiest one of these deals we've ever done. What happened?" I said, "I'll explain it to you later." I explained it to him. He got a big chuckle out of it. He was Italian. [laughter] So that was the one time in my life that knowing some Yiddish helped. But of course understanding the Borscht Belt comedians, who would throw a Yiddish word out every now and then, it helped. But yes, if my parents wanted to talk about us or they want to go out and leave us home, they would talk in Yiddish. Mostly, we grew up in an English speaking house. After my grandfather died, my grandmother Albaum moved in with us and lived with us for quite a few years. My mother and her still spoke a lot of Yiddish. My grandmother was illiterate in all languages--English and Yiddish. She would read *The Daily Forward*, the Jewish newspaper, but look at the pictures. She got her news from TV. Ed Sullivan was Ed Solomon. President Roosevelt was Rosenfeld. You probably heard that before, but they made everybody Jewish. [laughter]

SI: So was it a shock to move to Iselin?

DB: Let me tell you. I went to Hawthorne Avenue School, which was--Philip Roth--99.9 percent Jewish. I went to Hillside Avenue School, we celebrated Hanukkah, not Christmas, I'd say eighty five percent Jewish. I moved to Iselin; I was the Jew. We moved to Woodbridge proper when they didn't have enough schools. I went to a different school, fifth grade, sixth grade, seventh grade. I went to a school in Iselin. I went to a school in Fords. I went to school in Keasbey. None of those had large Jewish populations. Woodbridge Township had a large Jewish population. When I finally got to the high school, I hooked up with a lot of Jews and there was a synagogue, Adath Israel; we were members. So at Woodbridge High School, I went to school with a lot of Jews, but in elementary school, there was one other Jewish family on our block. It was very unusual, but that's why my parents stayed as close to their family. On weekends, we'd go back into Newark or be with our aunts and [uncles]. I had a lot of cousins, a lot of cousins. So we didn't lose our contact, but we didn't live in and amongst a Jewish community.

MA: When you were growing up, did your family keep up with the news in Israel and events there?

DB: Well, Israel wasn't until '48. [Editor's Note: In 1948, Jewish leaders declared the independence of the State of Israel. Israel's victory in the subsequent Arab-Israeli War preserved that independence.] I can't say they were Zionists, certainly not. I had a first cousin. My father's closest first cousin, a first cousin on the Brodkin side--I never told you my grandmother, who I never met, who died at seven, her maiden name was Wiedre, W-I-E-D-R-E. My cousin

Sol Zessin fought in Israel. He was amongst the founders of the Israeli Air Force. There's this new movie that came out, a documentary about the birth of the Israeli Air Force called *Above and* Beyond. It is about the Machal, the people who came from the United States and elsewhere to fight for Israel. He had fought in World War II as a bombardier. He got the call in 1948, "Help." He went over to Italy, was recruited with a couple other guys from Newark, who said, "We're going." He played a large role. He was a hero to the Israelis. We never talked about it. That's your next question. It's really funny because as I grew up and developed a bigger interest in our history and the military and stuff like that, he never offered it and I really didn't know that much about it. My father, they knew about it. We always knew Uncle Sol, Cousin Sol, had fought in Israel. That's one regret I have. If there's someone who I can go back and have an hour with, he's the one I would really like to talk [to]. What I learned is that he was involved in a prisoner exchange. As typical of the prisoner exchanges, there would be three Israelis exchanged for a thousand Egyptians. It always seemed like that was the way it went. The prisoners were kept in Italy, so he was on a mission to return them from Italy to Egypt and had plane problems. They had to land in Gaza, not where they were intended. That was the closest he said that he ever felt in danger. I think he was more proud of his service to Israel than in the Second World War. The Second World War he pretty much got in near the end and didn't see much combat. So in terms of our connection to Israel, he's our closest connection. My parents, they would do whatever they could for Israel, mostly financial contributions and stuff like that. One of the proudest things we could do was we gave them, my brothers and I, for their fiftieth anniversary, a gift to Israel. My father got cancer, prostate cancer, which he survived and they couldn't go. There was a residual benefit out of that. We all went later. My younger brother couldn't go, but we put together a trip of ten of us and went to Israel and had the most spectacular week of our lives there. It was like visiting the homeland even though it wasn't our homeland. If you ask me, I'm an American first.

SI: Yes. I was just curious. You said your cousin didn't talk about the Israeli military experience. Did he talk about World War II at all?

DB: No.

SI: So he just never talked about.

DB: He never talked about any experience. Except for the uncle that I told you who was in Normandy, I'm the first who really served. I had cousins who were in the Cold War Army, '50s, stateside. There were no wars to fight, so they didn't. I had National Guard relatives. My older brother probably did a year of ROTC when he went off to college at Penn State, but my younger brother didn't. He's got an interesting story, which I'll tell you about, but I'm the only Brodkin that saw duty that I'm aware of.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your education. It sounds like you went to a number of different schools.

DB: Yes. I skipped a grade, which means when we had our fiftieth reunion this week and I was the baby. I remember being the baby all throughout. When we graduated high school, I had just turned seventeen and I never drove in high school. I had to pass the driving test in New Jersey and there was always a backlog to take the driving test. So I didn't get my driver's license until well after we graduated in June. So I double dated through high school. In college, I couldn't

drink; didn't turn twenty one until April of my senior year. I was 123 pounds. I just saw pictures of myself because we had a little fraternity reunion. From pictures of what I looked like at Rutgers--and I have to tell you--I looked like I was twelve. So, socially I was immature. Educationally however, I was ahead of myself. The reason for that is Newark had half years, Kindergarten 1A, 1B, that kind of thing. When we moved from Newark to Hillside, I was in the middle of second grade. They advanced me, and we moved in December. They moved me from second grade, they tested, and they said, "You're not going to second grade. You're going to third grade." So I skipped that kind of thing. I was ahead of myself. When we moved to Iselin again, they had a school. I was in an annex with a potbelly stove. Literally, that was the heat. [The] school is not there anymore. There's a fire station there. Cooper's Dairy, which is now Metropark--Mr. Cooper would come with a basket of milk pints. That was how we got our milk for snacks in school. Who knew that the Coopers would turn into this--were sitting on this goldmine. When I practiced law, I got to read the trust documents that Mary Cooper, she became the matriarch--all that was leased property. The Coopers did very well by it. But I remember Mr. Cooper when he was the milkman ,if you pardon me. So fifth grade was in a potbelly stove heated, wooden annex. Sixth grade, I had to take a bus to Fords, Fords School #15, which was probably a twenty minute ride from Iselin. Nothing descript or non-descript about that school, except it was different kids, serviced by Fords. Seventh grade I went to a Keasbey school, which is out by the Raritan River. Keasbey was the dumps. It was famous back in that day for having an odor and in the warm weather you knew about the Keasbey dumps. A lot of my teachers followed me. It was interesting because when I left Keasbey, eighth grade was in Woodbridge High School. Again, our class was so big and they hadn't built junior highs or anything. So the new high school, old Woodbridge High School is on Barron Avenue, old typical small town, federal structure. Woodbridge High School was this big--became the largest high school in the state--modern, glass, brick, super modern building. They took the eighth grade and put it in Woodbridge High School. So I technically went to high school for five years, but it was split session. Eighth, ninth, and tenth grade went from 12:10 in the afternoon to 5:10 at night. No eating, no study halls, it was just straight academics. Your junior and senior year, you went from 7:10 in the morning to 12:10 in the afternoon. If you were a good athlete, as a sophomore, you couldn't play varsity because practices would be in the afternoon and you're in class. There were mirror clubs--afternoon student council, morning student council. Afternoon Red Cross--my brother and I missed each other. He was always in the--he was in the morning when I was in the afternoon. That had an effect on our living arrangements at home because my grandmother had moved in with us. (Since I didn't have to go to school until 12:10 and could sleep in later, I no longer slept with my older brother.) When that happened, they moved my younger brother in with my older brother, so that my grandmother could have her own room. I went to Woodbridge High School for five years. I've made a number of friendships that have lasted to this day. In fact, quite a few Woodbridge guys went to Rutgers. I was very disappointed in our fiftieth reunion that none of them were there. That's a subject we'll come to later. There were so many people from out of state at our reunion, but not nearly as many from New Jersey. So my closest Woodbridge friend lives in Florida. I email him every day. We're going to the Rutgers-Michigan game in the fall. He visited me when we lived in San Diego. I have a Woodbridge friend who lives in Phoenix. I went to his children's' bat mitzvahs. We were living in southern California. I have a Woodbridge friend who is in Kalispell, Montana and when my wife and I did a cross country tour through Glacier National Park two years ago, we saw him. My high school fiftieth reunion, I did not attend; we were in Italy. I'm sort of glad I

didn't because we graduated with seven hundred and seventy people, so there were all kinds of groups. Well, my group didn't show up. [laughter] It was the other kids. It wouldn't have been worth travelling three thousand miles for it, let's put it that way. I still feel very strongly towards Woodbridge. I'm on one of their email lists and stuff like that. So there has been a Woodbridge diaspora across the United States and I've stayed in touch with my Woodbridge friends.

SI: So where were you living in this Levittown type community, you say Levittown, it kind of evokes a certain image, was it like that? Were all the houses the same?

DB: Four models. If you came home drunk at night, you might have gone into the wrong house. Now, I've been back, because it's over sixty years. People have added on, we added on. When my grandmother came, we had to add on to the house. So we added on a big den in the back. It doesn't look the same, but I will say this: the small saplings that we planted, now are large trees. My wife, who knew me just as my parents were moving out of that house, came from Queens, where the houses were really brownstones together. She thought the distance between the houses was enormous. When I go back now and look it's almost like they're one on top of the other. They were quarter of an acre houses. I could see into my neighbor's bedroom if I wanted to, but it's all perspective. In 1953, coming out of Hillside, this was the country. Parkway was two lanes, when they finally built it. Now, I came down here this morning on the Parkway, it's six lanes in each direction.

SI: Outside of this prefabricated community, was it more rural?

DB: Yes, very much so. Very much so. How could I best describe that? No fences originally, so everything was open until--in fact, our yard got fenced in because all the neighbors put their own fences up. We did a lot of street ball. In Newark, I might have played stoop ball, but we played stick ball in the streets, football in the streets, rode our bikes, no sidewalks; never knew a community without sidewalks. Hillside and Newark were urban. Iselin had no stores nearby. My mother had to shop in Woodbridge. Even at that time, there was only like one A&P. Then the Mutual opened up. I don't even think it exists anymore, but that became this big wonderful supermarket. Where Woodbridge Center is now was the clay pits. We used to go swimming literally in these--it would be an artificial lake and you dive off the clay pits. Metropark wasn't there. Menlo Park, excuse me. Forget Metropark. Menlo Park center wasn't there. When I was a junior in high school, the movie theater came in. It was like, "Oh my god. We're finally going to have a movie that we could go to." Now that movie is gone. What was an exciting historical event is now history. Metropark, the train station in Iselin was on the corner of Green Street and Route 27. It was a little brick nothing. So if we wanted to go to New York on the train you didn't have Metropark. I want to say it was Robert Kennedy--yes, Robert Kennedy's train--in 1968 when he got assassinated, I was in Fort Meade, Maryland, but I had come home and they did the train with Ethel Kennedy standing on the back and they slowed down. It was thousands of people who had gone down to the train to pay tribute as the train came by, but there was, again, no Metropark, to congregate; it was this little hole in the wall train station. If I wanted to take the bus, as I would take to help my uncle peddle, I would catch a bus on Route 27, which went to Penn Station in Newark, changed buses and stuff like that. So getting around was a little slower, a little bit more difficult than it is now, but Woodbridge Township was very rural. Woodbridge Center, downtown--we were members of the Adath Israel Synagogue, which is no longer there either and was the center of Jewish life, was bustling and urban. People walked to it who lived in Woodbridge. We rode everywhere. I had to ride to Hebrew school. In fact, when I

was very young, my mom arranged a taxi service to take me to Hebrew school. She worked one or two years. She was mostly a housewife for our growing up, but there was a couple years she worked for Revlon in Edison. For me to get to Hebrew school, I did a lot of hitchhiking as a teenager. Again, I was young. I didn't drive. If I wanted to get someplace, the Woodbridge Circle--are you familiar with the Route 1 Circle?

SI: Yes.

DB: Well, it didn't look like that. Now it's got lights. No lights. We were daredevils. We used to play football and baseball. The Cloverleaf was all grass, huge. It was as big as a football field. All the kids would--but again, talking about what would your parents allow you to do? Route 1 is the major north-south highway in the country, truck traffic. You wait, you watch, no traffic, across you went. If you wanted to have fun, I can get to Woodbridge High School by going through the cemetery. We used to go in the sewers under the highway. Where there is a shopping center now was the Woodbridge drive-in. They don't have drive-ins anymore, but we used to go to the drive-in. Woodbridge looked a lot different than it is now, but it was very rural. That is, no supermarkets. Oak Tree Road, the upper part of Iselin, which is a major Indian population now, I think (…?) all like that, small town USA.

MA: Before you graduated high school, were you involved in any organized activities?

DB: You name it. Student council, I was a sports editor of the newspaper, honors society, sports, played a little baseball. My brother was a very good athlete. My brother got scholarships. Part of my own psychosis, being two years behind him, I went through high school and probably was called, "Are you Bart's brother?" more than, "Is your name Dennis?" [laughter] He blazed a trail. I was probably the better student than he. Not to say I didn't cut my own path, but it was tough following in his footsteps because he was that gifted an athlete. People say, "How come you're not as good as your brother?" Again, that's my own psychosis. [laughter] Yes, I was active in school.

SI: You mentioned going to help your uncle peddle. Did you have other jobs that you worked?

DB: Well, let me just tell you a little bit about that because that was a real education for me. Peddling is old world and his route was East Newark, Harrison, and Kearny. East Newark was a very Eastern European type community. It had a fairly large Italian population. Our clientele were not the young married. It was the older folk who were used to, in the old country, buying from street vendors. I got to learn other languages and cultures because people would come out and say, "Ketufla" or "Tsihulia," or they named the vegetable or the fruit in their language. They understood pounds and the money, but they weren't necessarily specific with the language. Since I was young, not only did I pick the fruit and vegetables for them, I would carry it to their homes. So I got to see the inside of these homes. Obviously, I only knew what my house looked like and what my grandmother's house looked like, but seeing these old Italian homes with walls with all the crucifixes and the family pictures and the doilies and the linens and the lace; it was very interesting seeing the cultural mix. You go to Kearney, it's Scots-Irish. There was a bar on every corner. Part of the reason my grandfather was an alcoholic--he's the one who started the peddling business--he would stop at every street corner, everybody knew him, "Hey George," give him a shot. He couldn't finish the day working. My uncle used to have to send him home by bus. My uncle that I peddled with never completed high school either, the one who lost the

arm. Of course, he was a novelty. The kids would come out and see this guy with one arm and say, "What happened?" He'd say, "I ran in the street and got hit. Don't run in the street," or he'd say, "The horse bit my arm." The kids looked at him. "A horse bit your arm off?" He never told them, "I was in an automobile accident during the military." So I learned personal interaction. My math skills improved tremendously because it was a cash business and you had to add up stuff as you put it in the bag. We didn't work with pencil and paper. So I learned to appreciate money and buying at three dollars a case and you sell retail with the hope of making five dollars a case, stuff like that. I'd stay with him in the summertime. He just died. He was like a second father to me because I stayed in his house. You started the day at four o'clock in the morning to go to the market, get the goods, and we'd peddle until nine, ten o'clock at night. There were no ordinances banning us at the time and he didn't have a music bell to let you know he was here. He would call out, "Strawberries, peaches." People knew his yell and he had a regular route. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday was one place. Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday was another.

SI: Were there any other jobs that you had?

DB: I worked for my father when he worked for Pechter's. That would be strictly weekends. His route was Teaneck, Hackensack, Palisades Park. There were lookouts that sold hot dogs and hamburgers and stuff like that. On weekends he would need me because he had ginormous deliveries. I worked with him mostly, eleven, twelve, thirteen. I remember that because my bar mitzvah was catered by a very, very spectacular delicatessen that was in Teaneck, New Jersey, the Royal Deli. If I play Jewish geography with people and they're from Teaneck, if I say Royal Deli, they know what I'm talking about. I worked more with my uncle than I did with my dad. I take that back. Your memory plays tricks on you. When my Dad had his own business with the pies and the pastries, I would give him the time off in the summertime. I would run the route for him. Then, his route was the Jersey shore--Asbury Park, Bradley Beach, Belmar, and stuff like that. I was dating my wife at the time and I convinced her to help me run the route on a particular Friday night watching the sunrise over the shore at three o'clock in the morning. I did work with my father quite a bit, but more so with my uncle. Then it was college. In fact, Rutgers was terribly inexpensive, fortunately. It was two hundred dollars tuition. So what I earned from my uncle, I applied towards college. Rutgers was not my first choice. I know you're probably going to ask me about that. My brother had gone to Penn State ahead of me. I wanted to go out of state, as did he. Nobody in my family had been to college. I told you, my mother graduated South Side. My father never went to high school. None of my aunts or uncles. No one talked college. But my brother again, because of his athletic prowess, they were interested in him, so he played baseball and basketball at Penn State. I wanted to go to either Bucknell because it was close to Penn State and I knew some people at Bucknell. I dabbled as an intellect and thought out maybe Williams College would be appropriate for me. My mom and dad said, "Dennis, we just don't have the means to support you." Now I know how I felt, and it was repeated again when my children were high school age--we lived in Cranbury at the time--said, "Dad, Rutgers is just too close. I want a different experience. I want to go out of state." They didn't go very far. I had a piece of me at that time too. As it turns out, I can look back in retrospect that I absolutely have no regrets. Rutgers was the best place for me. It was as if I went to UCLA. I never went home. New Brunswick was a hundred miles away from Woodbridge, even though it was only ten minutes. Like I said, I didn't have much choice. The fact that some of my friends were coming here helped and the fact that we could live on campus

helped tremendously. I was not a commuter. Like I said, whatever misgivings I may have had before Rutgers were dispelled my first week in Hegeman [Hall].

SI: Before we get to Rutgers, you said particularly when you were in the Woodbridge area, you would often be the only Jewish student in the class.

DB: In elementary school.

SI: In elementary school. I was wondering if you were exposed to any anti-Semitism.

DB: Yes, absolutely. From both students and teachers. Of course Bible reading was obligatory back then. This was before the Supreme Court said, "No, you don't have to." I had teachers who even if it wasn't voluntarily you would be reading. I mean, I was a "kike." There were other, maybe more subtle, forms of anti-Semitism. When we get to the military, I have a strong anti-Semitic incident to share with you. When we were asked to read from the Bible I would always pick the 23rd Psalm or something from the Old Testament and I was often told, "No. Read from the book of so and so." Jesus Christ was not part of my parlance. It's interesting, Woodbridge was very Catholic. We had a large Italian and a large Eastern European [population]. So Protestants were rare too. The Lord's Prayer, there's a Catholic version, a Protestant version. You're exposed to this for the first time as a kid. Why are they continuing to say the prayer and other people are stopping? Or a lot of kids were going after school to catechism class. What is that? That's something I'd never heard of. You can tell that some of these kids came from homes where Jews were not welcome. It's wasn't virulent. I didn't get beat up because of it, but it was uncomfortable. As I say, once I got to high school and I was in and amongst more of my Hebrew school classmates--and that's not who I associated [with]. None of my best friends from Woodbridge High School are Jewish. I take that back. A couple of them are, but fortunately it was a good melting pot, Woodbridge. They even had Jewish teachers. I didn't have any in elementary school.

SI: What were your favorite subjects in school?

DB: History. I had an uncle who wanted me to be an engineer. Science was not my strength. I was good in math. Physics, chemistry, [so-so]. I loved history. I liked English. I had some bad experiences with English teachers, but I liked history. At a very early age and I don't know why, but I really felt that military history, vet--as a kid, I watched *Victory at Sea* religiously. There was a show on West Point; I watched it religiously. My favorite movies were Audie Murphy, John Wayne--more so than my brothers. It was just something that I fell into, which is probably why I went ROTC.

SI: You mentioned why you got into Rutgers. Tell us about your first few days at Rutgers.

DB: Okay. It's easier now because having just shared a lot--having lost my voice sharing those wonderful moments with the people. In fact, getting ready for the parade on Saturday, someone ran up to me--"Dennis, I haven't seen you. Remember Hegeman?" Sure. The quad looked a lot different then. It wasn't paved and stuff like that, but I was in Hegeman Hall. My first day there, there was no food plan and stuff. The Ledge was our student center. I think I was coming back from the Ledge across George Street and up the steps. I see somebody who was my best friend in Hillside, but I was only there, remember, third and fourth grade. So I had long forgotten about him, but I didn't forget him. So we reconnected, became roommates and we've

had a lifetime relationship since then. So you get to meet new people. Hegeman [was] all male. One of the first things I remember was listening to WCTC; never had heard that before. During the first week of school they put--I don't know if they still do it, if anybody even listens to them--but they played a lot of "Rah, Rah" college music. So you would hear on the windows--we didn't have CDs and those kinds of radios; we had the old kinds of radios. College fight songs from Michigan and Rutgers and whatever. So it was a real convivial, collegiate kind of environment. Of course we had to wear our dinks and ties. [Editor's Note: A dink is a small, beanie-like hat that Rutgers freshmen were required to wear as part of a class-wide hazing ritual.] So we stood out and got harassed. I remember Alex Kroll, the great football player, right here in front of the Barn giving me all kinds of junk. It's hard to describe, but the people were extraordinarily friendly. One of my Woodbridge colleagues was in Leupp Hall, right across from Hegeman, so I would visit him. His roommates were from here. You networked. My roommate is from Redondo Beach, California, which was an oddity. Rutgers did not have that many out of state students and certainly from California. His family was originally from Cherry Hill, but they had just moved to Southern California, so he made sure everybody thought he was from Southern California, surfing dude, but he was really a Jersey guy who just moved to southern California. Fast-forward about thirty years. We move out to southern California, I look him up. He wanted no part of Rutgers. He had a very sour [experience]. He had the Rutgers screw. He had a very sour experience his senior year. He didn't graduate with us. Because I had brought my yearbook with me, I wanted to share Rutgers stories. He said, "Dennis, that's a piece of my life I'd rather not talk about." So that's unfortunate. I remember back and forth to the Ledge because that was pretty much our social center. Since we didn't have the food plan, we'd go downtown. Of course Albany Street looked a lot different then; so did George Street. The NBL Lunch. I can't remember the names of all the places--Patty's behind us, Corner Tavern, Old Queens. The Ledge was probably where we ate a lot of our lunches. Bad weather, we would go into the Commons. We could eat in the Commons, but we weren't obligated to eat in the Commons. Of course, the post office was there.

SI: The Commons, they had a cafeteria but they did not have meal plans?

DB: It wasn't a required meal plan. I think you could've signed up for a meal plan if you wanted. Weekends, there was nothing on campus. So you'd get in a car, you'd go to the diners on Route 18, Edison Diner, Route 27, you'd go to Highland Park. We got to learn where there were places. There were quite a few--one of my friends was Hungarian and through his family we found these hole in the wall, fabulous Hungarian food places.

SI: Back then on weekends, would the campus pretty much empty out?

DB: Yes. It was a big commuter school. Second semester I should add, I rushed fraternity. Of course that's when you did your meals at the fraternity. So it was just that first semester where we were on our own.

SI: Was that part of your decision to rush a fraternity?

DB: Yes. Well, you know what? The Greek system back then was very strong and if peer pressure is anything, that's where your peers were going. They were independents, a lot of the commuters. The guys in Hegeman, I'd say, ninety percent of them rushed a fraternity.

SI: How did you decide on Phi Epsilon Pi?

DB: Comfort level. I wasn't looking for a Jewish house by any stretch of the imagination, and of all the so-called Jewish houses, the Phi Ep house was the least Jewish, maybe which is what attracted me more than anything else because it was diverse. I had a cousin who was in AE [Alpha Epsilon] Pi at another university. In fact, he worked for AE Pi. He was a Greek. So I looked at the AE Pi house. I looked at the "Sammy" [Sigma Alpha Mu] house. My brother was a Phi Sigma Delta at Penn State, but you know what? I think I went Phi Ep more because of my pledge class than I did because of what I saw at the fraternity. I said, "These are the guys I'd like to spend four years with," because they were graduating, the people who were doing the hardest job of pledging you. So I think it was more because of--and that fellow that I mentioned was my oldest friend in Hillside. He went Phi Ep.

SI: I know Phi Ep historically is a Jewish fraternity. Was it still all Jewish? Was there segregation still? Religious segregation?

DB: Not to make this sound wrong, but we had an African American fraternity brother. Rutgers was as white as you can imagine. You were there Friday night to see the Old Guard dinner. You saw who you inducted. I mean, not the Old Guard. Excuse me. The oral history [annual meeting], there weren't too many African Americans sitting in front of you. At our class dinner on Saturday night I was reminded of how white our class was. So Rutgers itself did not have a very diverse [student body]. There were quite a few and we befriended them, but Phi Ep did have the Italians, the Grazianos, Tom Ashley, Baldecchi, Turner; my roommate was McGinn. So no, it was not--it was a predominantly Jewish house, but again, pardon my vernacular, it wasn't a Jew house. We were the number one academic house on campus. If you follow *Animal House*, yes, let's go to the Jew house. I think that attracted me, as well. There were serious students. It wasn't a party house, but they did party.

SI: Tell us about what the process of getting into a fraternity was like then.

DB: A lot of socials. You were invited for dinner. I guess they wanted to see if you drooled or dropped your food on the floor, if you had some social grace, and stuff like that. You did a lot of selling yourself I guess, and they did a lot of selling themselves. There were, of course, parties. I guess the cattiness too, the competition between the houses trying to outdo themselves. So there's some of that play. Once I felt comfortable at Phi Ep, I was happy that I was invited back and I really didn't look at the other houses too seriously after that. So I think my best answer is, I fell into it.

SI: You mentioned the dinners. We learned about the formality of the time.

DB: Yes. Phi Ep had an interesting--and of course, I learned this more once I became a brother, but every night they had two dinners, an informal dinner and a late dinner. Late dinner was jacket and tie. You can wear underwear; as long as you had jacket and tie you're okay. Friday nights, late dinner, you can bring a date from Douglass or from wherever. We had a housemother. So, of course, she ate late dinner. We had a pre-late dinner ritual of having a glass of sherry with our housemother. As pledges, you generally were compelled to go to late dinner because we were the late dinner entertainment. As part of the hazing, if you will, they had a little stool that you'd be asked to stand on. They would say, "Okay. Do the Greek alphabet

backwards with a lit match," or "Give me the twelve countries in Africa that border the Mediterranean," or "How much is such and such times [such and such]," or "Sing your favorite song," or "Hum your favorite song," or "Tell us about all the girlfriends"--whatever. We were entertainment. Of course, we had to wait tables. There was a seal on the floor at Phi Ep and pledges were not allowed to walk across the seal. So when you were carrying dishes, you had to make sure, [laughter] because if you did, you did twenty push-ups right there. The fraternity brothers divided up into good cops, bad cops. There were some you knew to stay away from. Our pledge master was very difficult, but then there were a lot of guys who pulled you over, "Are you doing okay?" Of course, there was always the fear that you'd get blackballed, rejected at the end of the pledging. It wasn't automatic. We had a thing called feces--yes, feces--which was a duty, usually around ten o'clock at night, our freshman year, again at Hegeman. We'd come to the house, knock on doors, and see what they wanted to eat, and then we'd run up to Greasy Tony's or Old Queens and bring food back for them. So sort of like a chore, if you will. How it got the name I don't know, but people have never forgotten it. Yes. We ate food out of dog bowls occasionally. We were next door to the DKE [Delta Kappa Epsilon] house and they were notorious for hazing, being rough, the paddling and stuff like that. We had no physical, to speak of. I'm not giving away any fraternity secrets now because our house doesn't exist anymore, but the last night you were up twenty-four hours. It was the closest thing to psychological and physical hazing. They made a pancake out of you. They rolled you in milk, dropped some eggs on you, floured you, and they made you dance with somebody for twenty-four hours non-stop. It was fun.

SI: Tell us about getting into classes at Rutgers. What were your memorable experiences in the classroom or professors that stand out?

DB: Well, what I remember most about Rutgers was how hard it was and also the core curriculum. You had your two years of foreign language, your two years of science and history and stuff like that. Freshman year, a lot of that was done over the summer, your first semester, so there wasn't too much of a chore. Western [civilization], you're getting western civ and it was only two sections. You had Charanis and Winkler or you had Weinstein and Lenaghan, and I had Professors Weinstein and Lenaghan, which from what I was told was the B team. You needed to have Henry Winkler. English was incredibly hard, because it was a lot of writing and my high school English was not a lot of writing. It was probably my first exposure to an outwardly gay professor, also. I know I had gay teachers in high school now that I think back at it, but this fellow was clearly openly gay. Again, getting used to that--you're at an all-male university--we never even thought twice about that. When I think back about it now, don't even think twice about it. We had naked swimming--you've probably heard all these stories, but our phys. ed. class was you'd swim without a bathing suit. My wife to this day asks me, "Why'd you not have a bathing suit?" I said, "I don't know." I was never approached. I'd been in the military where I had that happen, but not here or anything like that. If that was inappropriate I apologize, but I'm just saying it wasn't part of our rigors. We didn't worry about it. Didn't know about it. I do remember--let me see--freshman year, of course ROTC was one of my classes. English, Western Civ., Calculus--oh my goodness, Calculus [was] very difficult. TA, Korean, had an English problem, speaking. Calculus is hard enough. The guy in front of you who's teaching it can't communicate, it's very difficult. I had it in the basement of Frelinghuysen. What I remember more than anything else is he would take attendance, which took him forever because he couldn't pronounce our names. He would turn around, face the

blackboard, start his formulas, never looked back. By the time class ended, half the class just had vacated. That was a very hard subject. My most memorable experience, my freshman year was Spanish, Spanish 215. I had placed out of the 101 class and had literature. My professor was a guy by the name of Fernando Toro-Garland. I've since googled him; it turns out he's this major guy from Chile, world-renowned poet, playwright and stuff like that. He was Mr. Magoo in terms of his vision; he couldn't see a thing. He drove a Ford Anglia, this little car, and he would make a U-turn--the class was in the Barn, second floor, and he used to drive down College Avenue, make a U-turn, always drive on the sidewalk because he couldn't see where he was going. When he took attendance it was one of these. Anyway, as you probably know, you got your grades on a postcard. We used to put a postcard in. So you wrote, "Midterm" with a blank, "Final Exam" with a blank, and then "Final Grade." Then you waited until the postcard came and you got your grade. Very hard class, but again because he spoke very limited English. I got the postcard and I got a one on the midterm, a two on the final, a three final grade. Caught me a little off guard. There was no indication that I was doing three work. I was one of the few who participated in class. He knew me. I didn't hide kind of thing. So I go to see him and he goes, "Senor, Brodkin." I showed him the postcard. "Muy Bueno." "Muy Bueno?" I said, "Senor, uno, dos." One other guy from my fraternity was in the class also. He also got a three, but his was three, three, three. So I couldn't get through. I couldn't understand what he was telling me and I couldn't understand. I couldn't explain to him my misgivings. I went to the Romance Language Department, Professor Panet, who was head of the Italian Department. I explained and showed him the postcard and he agreed that something seemed amiss, but he said, "Maybe you didn't speak in class." I said, "That's not the case. Whatever." So I got a three and that was my only three. To show you what kind of idiot I am, I stayed in the class for the second semester. Most of the guys said, "Enough of this." They got threes and fours. I don't know if it was European or different concept of what a good grade is; he thought three was a good grade. So that was my most unsettling academic experience (…?) first year.

SI: You went right into ROTC?

DB: Yes.

SI: Was it mandatory still at the time?

DB: You know what? I don't remember. My recollection is that it was, but some of my friends say it wasn't. But I took ROTC.

SI: You said you took physical education as well?

DB: Yes.

SI: I thought you had one or the other.

DB: No, phys. ed. was required.

SI: Tell us a little bit about ROTC and what that training was like.

DB: The first two years it was nondescript. It was military history and marching. Every Wednesday, Buccleuch Park, we took over the city and you went to class in your uniform. There were a couple of guys in my fraternity who were ROTC--one Air Force; everybody else was

Army. I really didn't have too much adverse--I didn't mind it. Other guys hated it. I do remember the commander of--I'm pretty sure of this. I'll check it and we can verify it later. But I believe that my sophomore year, the cadet commander was a guy by the name of Colin MacManus who was one of the names on the Vietnam Memorial that our class dedicated and he passed away in Vietnam. The more apt question is why did I go advanced? I can't answer that with a really good answer either, other than saying it was 1963. Vietnam was not on the map. I was not as directed academically as a lot of my peers who said, "I'm going to med school. I'm going to law school. I'm doing this." The thought of being in the military and travelling the world intrigued me. I think I told you, as a kid I was fascinated by guys who served, thought it was a noble service. I figured if I was enlisted I rather be an officer, thank you. If I could pick my place, I don't mind going to Germany. I was Army ROTC. Some of my peers were going advanced. Most of the Phi Eps wanted no part of it, so there were only like three of us out of our pledge class of twenty-five who went advanced. I enjoyed it. I really didn't find anything grotesque or immoral or anything of that sort. I went for my training in the summer of 1964 at Fort Devens, which was an incredibly interesting experience because campus ROTC and being on an Army facility was very different. I bunked with a guy who I later met in Vietnam, quite by accident. He was at Saint Peter's College. That summer was my first flying experience. I have never been in a plane before. To get to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, I took the Eastern shuttle. A little anecdote about that, my colleague and I--the Eastern shuttle, you didn't need a ticket. It was like a bus. It flew every hour on the half hour. We got there at like 3:20, there were two seats left. They were the bad seats. The wing was not a good place to be. So we had a choice of that or waiting for the next flight. My friend says, "Let's go on this one." I get the window seat. We take off and I nudge my colleague and I say, "George, the engine, the propeller is not moving." He didn't look. He says to me, "Dennis, it's an optical illusion. It's going around so fast it looks like it's not moving." I go, "George, the propeller is not moving. It's really not moving." Just then, the pilot came on, said, "Ladies and gentleman, we've had a fire in the right inboard engine. I've shut it down. We can go to Boston, but since we're right over Newark we're going to land in--whatever." My father had taken us to the airport. He stayed there. We get off the plane. He said, "Do you want to take the bus?" I said, "Dad, if I don't get on a plane now I don't think I'll ever fly." So they bring out of the hanger--I mean this plane was the filthiest, dirtiest--it was the backup, but I got on it, uneventful. My first flying experience was as a result of ROTC.

MA: You talked before about how your family kind of had a service tradition almost where your uncles served, your dad served.

DB: I wouldn't call it much of a tradition because that was it. It was just these two people.

MA: Did that influence you to join ROTC?

DB: Nope. Never even thought twice about it.

SI: Vietnam was not yet on the radar.

DB: Yes, correct.

SI: But there were events like the Cuban Missile Crisis and so forth. Did they affect your thinking? [Editor's Note: In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union

remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.]

DB: Absolutely. Affect my thinking, no. But [I] couldn't have experienced my Rutgers years without that. We were nervous and scared over the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was over at Douglass helping a young lady with some work and she was helping me with some studies and we were quite nervous about how that was going to come down. The assassination of Kennedy was an incredibly memorable event. I had gone home. Again, I said I didn't commute, but my barber was still in Woodbridge and we were having a fraternity party that Saturday night. There was a football game scheduled. I went home to get my haircut around noontime. I'm sitting in the chair and Walter Cronkite comes on--"We interrupt this program to tell you that President Kennedy has been shot." He wasn't dead yet. It was awful. I drive home. My mother and father were doing the books for the business. The radio and television wasn't on. They hadn't heard. I came in. I said, "Mom, did you hear President Kennedy got shot?" "Oh my god." I had to leave and I was on Route 1, right about where Menlo Park is now, when the radio came on and said he died. I kid you not, cars pulled over. Grown men are weeping. It was incredible. Got back to New Brunswick. I was living in the fraternity house at the time. Everybody was just in shock. Of course we cancelled the party. They eventually cancelled the football game. We didn't know what to do. That Friday night, a group of us,--on Albany Street there was a movie theater. *Under the Yum Yum Tree* was playing. We needed some good lighthearted entertainment, so we went to the movies. As I say, we cancelled the fraternity party. Sunday morning--we had a television in the basement at the fraternity--a couple of us came down and watched Jack Ruby kill Lee Harvey Oswald. These were incredible days, incredible. I guess, the last two years, '64, '65, ROTC was uneventful. No one talked about going to Vietnam. Mostly everybody thought they were going to go to Korea, Germany. I got deferred because I knew I was going to graduate school. I was going to be a historian. Got commissioned at graduation and then was deferred. I brought a lot of paperwork. My story starts here when I got my commission, but I won't start.

SI: We just have a few more questions about Rutgers.

DB: Take me where you want to go.

SI: I wanted to talk more about the fraternity. Once you were in and you were a brother, did you become active?

DB: Yes, I was an officer. At one time, ran for President; lost by one vote, but I was recording secretary one year. I lived in the frat house for two years. Howard McGinn was my roommate for the two years. My first year living in the house, we had suites inside and outside rooms, two bedrooms in. My inside roommates, one became a dentist and one became the art critic for the *New York Times*, a guy by the name of Michael Brenson. He's very prominent. They were terrific inside roommates. Across the hall, upper classmen. Again, they were inspiring people. They were the smartest people I ever met in my life. We partied hard, but we studied hard. Our bull sessions weren't just about Hank Aaron and Willie Mays. We talked the world. We talked philosophy. It was great. I loved my fraternity years. Being in the house was good. The food

was good. Parties were good. I wish I could do it again. The second year, my senior year, they redid the house. They made all the rooms, not single rooms but a double room; no more fours.

SI: At the parties, was there a lot of drinking?

DB: Okay. Yes, but the DKE house would have six kegs in front. We'd have two six packs. It's the best analogy I can give you. No, we drank, but not nearly as much as some of the other houses on campus. A lot of guys, who were serious with girls at the time, were pinned. A lot of my fraternity brothers who were here for their fiftieth reunion, were with the women they dated at Rutgers and married. My wife I met post-Rutgers, but she knew all of them, because we've gotten together over the years. In preparation for the reunion, one of our fraternity brothers dug up some of the old party pictures. At the end of every party, you'd lay out in front of the house or in one room and they'd take a picture. I'd always be with a different woman. As I told my wife, "I don't remember their names." I said, "Either that says more about them or more about me. I don't remember." But I didn't have anybody serious that I dated. Parties were great. We had live entertainment, bands. We had a bar downstairs. Yes, there still was drinking, probably underage drinking. I know I drank and I wasn't twenty-one, but no hard stuff, no drugs. My brother was a Phi Ep five years after me. The house was thrown off campus for drugs. So that's '65 to '70. I know you hear in your interviews, tremendous difference. If you had my brother sitting here rather than me, he hated Rutgers, he didn't do well at Rutgers. He stayed close to his fraternity brothers, but not the same. I shouldn't say he hated Rutgers. Whether he'll come back for his fiftieth I don't know, but I've stayed a loyal son for all fifty years.

SI: When you would have these parties, you said there was live entertainment. Do you remember any acts? Were they local bands?

DB: Both. We kid and some of it might be apocryphal and we don't even remember the names, but we think there were the (Thornton Sisters?), Ivory Jim [Hunter] and the Headhunters. The Playboys was one of the groups. Not all of them were local. We had a house steward, who did all the meals, for want of a better term, an entertainment chairman and we had one who was really good. He was connected with the music scene in New York. They'd bring in some very professional sounding groups and others were probably local high school bands.

SI: Was there a competition then between the different houses?

DB: Yes. Definitely. We attracted a lot of Sammies and AEPIs would come to our house for parties. We were a pretty good party house.

SI: I think there was a cup.

DB: The Keller Trophy. Absolutely. I was the manager of our athletic teams. Like I said, I wasn't that good in sports, but I had tremendous sports interest. Phi Eps were very good. We won the basketball championship three years in a row. We came in second to Phi Gam one year. That's the best that we did in the Keller Trophy. We had very good bowlers. We had very good swimmers. We had very good tennis players. We ran the gamut, but our best sports were basketball and volleyball. We had a guy who played varsity basketball on the freshman team at Rutgers, but didn't make varsity, so he was on our team. We had a fellow who's still playing competitive basketball in his seventies. Saw him at the reunion and he's still playing. We were very much interested in the Keller Trophy and we played football. We'd get our butts kicked a

little bit by the DKEs and the FIJIs [Phi Gamma Delta] and stuff, but we held our own. We were never embarrassed athletically. Not all the houses participated, but we were very much in the mix, if you will.

SI: There were other aspects, not just athletic right?

DB: The Keller Trophy is strictly athletics.

SI: I think some people told me about a glee competition and something else.

DB: There may have been, but nothing organized. Not like the Keller Trophy.

MA: I was a little curious about how Rutgers football games were?

DB: Jacket and tie. You got dressed. Of course, very rarely did we fill the place. As you know, the Princeton game was always on the road. That was well attended. That was a big event, playing Princeton. It had the historical significance as well as that inherent rivalry that we always had with Princeton. So that was a good game. I think I probably went to every home football game with one very, very major exception. The undefeated year, 1961, the game against Columbia was my younger brother's bar mitzvah. [laughter] So I did not get to see probably the second most memorable game in Rutgers football history. Listened to it on the radio. I went to away games, but of course Rutgers wasn't big time. We were playing the Lafayettes and the Lehighs of the world, not UCLA, and Southern Cal, and Army. I went to graduate school in Madison in Wisconsin. Of course being exposed to the Big Ten, which Rutgers is now, was like an eye opener. You go to a stadium and its ninety thousand instead of twenty thousand. We built floats for the Mili [Military] Ball weekend--or one of the weekends that corresponded to the football season, we'd would always build a float with the fraternity. Guys would bring flasks in their jackets to drink and I guess that was probably the most evil thing we did. We had dates. Guys brought women to the games, but it was pretty formal. You didn't wear jeans and a t-shirt. One of the things I remember about Rutgers as compared to the way it is now, and it's a function of pride and everything else, there was a lot of other university garb being worn. Kids walked around with Georgetown shirts, UCLA shirts, Michigan shirts. There weren't many kids wearing Rutgers shirts--or a huge high school. Kids were walking around--Clifton, Nutley, Woodbridge and stuff like that. Now, I walk around and it's nice to see. Now I'm actually seeing Rutgers "Rs" on the cars and stuff like that. So I get the sense that there's a much better feeling about the university--not in Trenton, but amongst the general population.

SI: It has become much more widespread.

DB: Right. Even in Oregon. I live in Portland now, and you say Rutgers--I went to the Washington State game in Seattle. They know who Rutgers is.

SI: You wrote that you also participated in Hillel.

DB: Yes. Very minor. I can't even speak to it. I did it for social reasons. I didn't eat the food. I don't even know if they had food back then, but I didn't keep Kosher. That, by the way, was something very interesting. My house was not a kosher house, but we respected certain dietary--and I didn't eat meat and milk. It had nothing to do with being Kosher. I do remember one of the first times I did eat a meal here and they gave me a meat dish, and the only beverage that you

could have was milk and I drank water. That was just something you had to get used to. Now our fraternity, again, our steward, I think most of the years I was there, was Jewish, so we didn't have too much ham and stuff like that on the menu, but it wasn't a kosher menu.

SI: Did you have any interactions with the administration, like the Dean of Men or anything like that?

DB: Fortunately, not. I mean, we knew about Dean Curtin, the infamous "Curtin Call." Dean Boocock. I did have interaction with Dean Crosby. He was the dean. I had President Gross for a class, which was wonderful, and Schlatter, who was the provost of the university. I had them for a class. Dean Dobbins. We did occasionally--because of the fraternity life, they would come and speak to the house. We had a funny incident with President Gross. As I was mentioning to you, Friday night dinners were formal with your dates and stuff like that. We tried to invite a guest to speak after the dinner. So we invited President Gross to dinner and the President of the fraternity was called "The Superior," and The Superior stood--and we're all standing because you usually had a prayer over dinner--and he said, "Dr. Grace, would you please still say Gross." A memorable event in Phi Ep lore. He took it very well.

SI: [laughter] He seems like a very smooth guy and personable.

DB: He was wonderful and a great mind. I had him for "Traditions of Western Religious Thought." I had great professors at Rutgers, but he stood out.

SI: You were here during a time they had some great history professors, such as Charanis, Winkler, McCormick, Sr. Do any of those stand out?

DB: Absolutely. I could give you a tidbit about each of them. Warren Susman is the reason why I went to Wisconsin. He was a Wisconsin grad.

SI: I forgot he was there.

DB: My holy trinity was Susman, Genovese, McCormick. I had all three multiple times. Susman I had for US I. Some of the older Phi Eps had him for American Intellectual History or other classes. When I look back now, he was in his early thirties when he was here. The man was brilliant. He was funny. He was an inspiration. I took his class or classes as often as I could. Professor McCormick was much more serious, very dignified, very Oxfordian. Again, [when] I started here, it was McCormick, Susman for US I. So one I had one semester. But then when I became a junior and I could take the electives and I took Professor McCormick for American Political History. When I ultimately decided that history was the route I wanted to go, I spoke to Warren, I said, "Okay. What do you think would be right for me?" He says, "You're going to Wisconsin," which of course was the number one school in the country for history. I wasn't sure what I wanted to write on. That's where Professor McCormick comes in. I'll get to that in a second. But Genovese was really the fulcrum of my experience here. He was an incredibly gifted teacher. Forget his politics and what happened at the teach-in and afterwards, you would never have known that from his instruction. [Editor's Note: On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Rutgers University's Scott Hall, professor of history Eugene D. Genovese declared, "…I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." A firestorm of controversy ensued and became a focal point in the 1965 New Jersey gubernatorial race, but Rutgers University President Mason W. Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted

public pressure to dismiss Genovese, on the principle of academic freedom.] He was a Brooklyn guy. He was a little rough around the edges. He wasn't as smooth as someone like McCormick, but he had an innate gift of teaching. I had small classes with him. Again, the beauty of Rutgers; I had twelve people in the class. You couldn't hide. He'd come in without notes and just go. I had him for Negro History. Listen to that parlance--Negro History--not even black Americans or African Americans, Negro History. Of course, after the teach-in, which was at the end of my senior year, he became world famous. When I decided to go to graduate school, McCormick had just written a book called *The History of the Second Party System,* which intrigued me. It was about Jackson and pre-Civil War was the area that I liked the most. I was playing with some ideas and ultimately, my thesis was on a subject that was right out of his book, the election of 1836. So what happened to me at Rutgers is the reason I went to Wisconsin and what I wrote about at Wisconsin. While I was writing it, I came home and went to the public library in New York and Genovese happened to be there when I was doing some of my research and I ran some of it by him. I did not have Professor Gardiner, although he had come. I had Professor Charanis. I had, in political science, Dr. Curtis, Michael Curtis, who was pretty well known at the time. I had Professor Paul for Constitutional history, first-rate faculty, first-rate. I can't say anything bad about any of them. I got a high quality education.

MA: Were the history courses mostly focused on Western history or was it just a mix?

DB: Rutgers didn't have many electives. I wasn't a European historian. There were very few. Charanis taught Byzantine and Greece. Winkler taught modern European history and stuff like that. I look at the syllabus now, the course offerings--we didn't have any courses in Asian history, African history, anything like that. It was mostly American or European, western civilization. My junior year I took nothing but history and I got a 1.0. That was it for me. I found my niche. I did very well in all the classes. I think at the end of my freshman year 1.8 was my [cumulative], which is pretty good. But as I went up and took classes that I wanted to take, I did very well. My second semester senior year, I goofed off admittedly. I even got a call from a dean and I don't know what dean it was. I was late in giving in a paper, but Rutgers was that good that they weren't going to let me get away with it. He basically said, "Get your paper in or you're not graduating."

SI: That's a huge change from now.

DB: Yes, exactly. My daughter and son-in-law are both professors now and college life is quite different.

SI: Yes, you get late papers all the time.

DB: Yeah right.

SI: The Dean is not going to call.

DB: Incomplete is almost like a major grade.

SI: You mentioned the sit-ins, which have come up.

DB: It was my birthday. The major teach-in in Scott Hall was the night of my twenty-first birthday. If you asked me did I go out drinking, the answer is no. I was in Scott Hall at the teach-in.

SI: Well tell us all about that.

DB: You've heard it I'm sure. Again, I went expecting fireworks. The evening started off a little calmly enough, I remember. There was a conservative core amongst the faculty, who stood up and defended western civilization and then Warren Susman got to the podium and lit a bomb. I remember the banging of the hand, the fist on the podium. He broke his watch. If you knew Warren, he was this round ball of jelly and he was just quivering. He raised his voice. He had a squeaky voice when he raised his voice and he shouted down at this one professor and said, "How dare you insult us with that." Then Genovese, in a much more calm tone said, "Look, I welcome the Vietcong victory." I think the words were something different. "Not only do I expect the Vietcong, I welcome it." Then of course, he became a political figure in the gubernatorial election that followed. I think I still had class with him that semester. It was as if it never happened. Don't forget, it was at the end of the year. The *Targum* had a big follow up on it and we talked about it for quite some time, the fraternity brothers did, but you know what, just another night out at Rutgers except with a little bit of a (…?). Then I went to Wisconsin and the war was the centerpiece of things then. They dealt with it more in the streets than I think happened here at Rutgers. But I wouldn't forget--there were three teach-ins if I remember correctly, but I only went to the one. As a member of ROTC, I just want to share; I don't remember any backlash amongst the cadets about all that. You know, "That communist son-of-a-gun." It may have, but not my experience.

SI: Why did you go to the teach-in?

DB: Well, I was a history major. We were talking about the war and I knew Susman and Genovese were going to be there. I think there may have even been an inkling to expect a confrontation. I think as much for entertainment as serious political debate.

SI: Outside of the teach-in, was the war still not really in people's consciousness?

DB: I would think that's true. If it was, it was a hardcore elite. I wasn't amongst those. In fact, I know there was, but I wasn't political.

SI: Before we go to Wisconsin, is there anything else you want to share about your time at Rutgers? We can always come back to it.

DB: Again, no regrets. In fact, just the opposite. I loved it here. I thought I got a great education. I know I got a great education. I was reminded of it at the reunion. I'm looking at these people, we all shared a common experience and we've all succeeded very well. It's a self-selected audience I agree, but most of the conversation was on the positive side. It was a small enough school--we all heard the "Look to your left, look to your right," and it was true. We came in with about twelve hundred. We graduated about 950, so we lost quite a few students. I know a lot of guys who dropped out. It was hard. It was hard. The hard part was the required classes. The Humanities exam, now that I think about it, I remember how that scared the bejeebees out of us, that you had to pass this test on music, and art, and literature, and philosophy. The bio science [students] and engineers were going crazy, but it wasn't the most

difficult test. I know that scared it. Most of my class went to--most of my fraternity, I should say, went to law school. We have a few doctors, but majority went to law school. I was the only academic. I was the only one going to graduate school.

SI: Now when you went off to Wisconsin in '65, were you thinking you were going to have a career on a college faculty?

DB: Yes. I thought I'd be an academic. Again, I think McCormick and Susman were role models for me.

SI: Tell us about going to Wisconsin.

DB: Again, interesting. Flying was not in the range of possibilities. That summer, there were a couple plane crashes in Lake Michigan. My mother said, "You're not flying to Chicago." I took a train and it was filled with college people, college kids going to school in the Midwest, so it was fun. I remember getting off the train in Madison feeling terribly lost, but again, maybe fifty of us got off the train--big. Unlike Rutgers, the first impression was, big. I lived in a graduate dormitory. My roommate was an English major from New Trier High School, Evanston, Illinois. I didn't see much of him because he had a woman. He'd spend most of his time out of the room. I was very lonely. I made friends and stuff like that, especially through my classes, but I can't say Wisconsin to me was a great social time. Again, I was on the younger side. The big adjustment was getting used to graduate school. I originally went to study with Professor Leon Litwack, very renowned historian. That summer he decided to go to Berkeley. Immediately, I'm thrown a curveball. The guy I'm going to study with isn't there anymore. They brought a relatively young professor named Richard Sewell, Harvard educated, turns out to be a brilliant man, lovely guy, just retired. He was great. He was a terrific seminar. People in my seminar have gone on and they did become the academics that I thought I'd be. One of them was Ira Berlin, who won the Pulitzer Prize and is world-renowned Civil War historian. They were very professional, very hardcore, very difficult. I studied with William Appleman Williams, who was again, one of the names that most people [recognize.] Wonderful professor. Aced his class. That made me feel really good. I had David Lovejoy for colonial history. Merle Curti had retired and he was Warren Susman's teacher, and he learned that I was from Rutgers. By the way, that's when you know what Rutgers' reputation is. You go to a seminar and they go around the room, "What school did you go to?" You say, "Rutgers." It was almost like they moved you over here, academically. "You don't have to worry about doing this, this, and this. We're going to assume that you've been trained and you're up here." That always helped. You meet a guy like Merle Curti and he knows Warren Susman, your ego is getting stroked even though you don't know it. I started this thesis that Professor McCormick and I had talked about and it was novel. It was novel in the sense that, at that time, history was pretty much a more literary--the sciences had not quite gotten there yet. The behavioral aspects--I mean, now it's normal, but I did a lot of statistical analysis of a particular election. This was pre-computer, so I had to do all the calculations manually. Basically what I was--if you don't mind--I chose the election of 1836 and I was trying to show that over twenty-five years before the Civil War there was already political evidence of a great divide in the country. Martin Van Buren was the first northern candidate who ran on the old Jeffersonian-Jacksonian parties. You had Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson. Well, Van Buren is from New York. How would he be received in the south? What I was trying to show--he wasn't an abolitionist yet. He was not a threat to the South at all. Jackson had chosen him and whatever. What I was able to show by using the states of Virginia

and Tennessee in the upper South, and Mississippi and Georgia in the lower south, was in the counties that had the highest slave population, Van Buren did the worst. Why? Was it his politics? Well, the thesis that I was generating was it was an early sign of paranoia on the part of the southern slavocracy against anything northern. If you know the election, the Whigs did not have a single unified candidate. They chose different candidates to run against him depending on the strength. Even more ironically, the election of 1836 is the only election in our history where something happened that's different than any other. You have any idea what that might be? Has to do with the Vice President. I'm turning the tables on you. What happens if the President doesn't get a majority of the electoral vote? Who elects the President?

SI: The Senate.

DB: The House of Representatives. But you're right. It goes to the Senate if the vice presidential candidate doesn't get a majority. What happened with Van Buren is he had different vice presidential candidates in different states and the reason is the one who is his primary candidate was a guy named Richard Mentor Johnson from Kentucky, who had a Negro mistress. It was seen that he might not be too popular in the South. So in a couple of the southern states, Van Buren had a different vice presidential candidate. So when the electoral votes got counted, Johnson didn't have a majority. It went into the Senate. It was a Van Buren-Johnson ticket. That was my thesis. Now, I never got my doctorate at Wisconsin. I never finished my paper. I satisfied myself that I proved it. My professor loved it. But Vietnam got in the way. I was at Madison for two years. My second year, I was an RA. I needed money and it was a good experience. That's when the [shit] hit the fan in Madison--the Dow Chemical recruitment and the riots. They didn't blow up the math building yet; that came after I left. Wisconsin was very much a large radical campus. I had gotten commissioned the day I graduated. So here I am, a second lieutenant, Reserves, deferred. I wasn't going to participate, and forget my political feelings, which were against the war, but not rabidly against the war. I wasn't going to jeopardize anything by getting arrested in an anti-war protest. So I stood on the sidelines and observed. This student body was much more engaged, much more so than Rutgers, but again it's a year later. Rutgers might have been equally as engaged by that time. But Wisconsin, more students, more activity. The professors, there was a Genovese type at Wisconsin. There's a great book called *They Marched into Sunlight* by David Maraniss, written about five years ago. He writes about three things. He was a student at Wisconsin at that time. He writes about his experience as a student in the late '60s at Wisconsin. He writes about a particular battle in Vietnam, which I was near. And he writes about the politics of Lyndon Johnson, and I spent some time in Washington. So the book really hit me. He did a bibliography in the back of all the people from Wisconsin that he interviewed. I knew these people. I was surprised I wasn't interviewed. I mean, I wasn't that important, but I'm just saying I knew all these people. So I wrote him a real nice note that I thought he really nailed it on all three components. He wrote me back. It was very nice. If you want to read, in particular, a book that covers college in the late '60s, a Vietnam situation, and the politics in Washington, I would highly recommend that. So anyway, I got deferred. Maybe now is the time--unless you have other questions--to start telling the [story] because I brought some memory devices to help me.

SI: Absolutely. You had a deferment for graduate school. Did you just decide to leave school at that time or did something change in the system?

DB: Both. Here is my DA-61, where you apply for your demployment. You're going to be appointed. I don't know if this one is dated--yes, October 21, 1964. I'm a senior at Rutgers. You have to identify what branch of service you want to be in. That was an ROTC requirement, one of which has to be a combat arm. So I asked to be transportation corps first, signal corps second, artillery third, and just your background, high school and whatever. I'm not going to leave you this, because this is my only copy, but if you tell me you want me to, I will make you copies of all these things.

SI: Yes.

DB: This is the original. The reason I got all the originals is I filed a Freedom of Information Act [request]. I take that back, before I filed the Freedom of Information Act claim, and I'll tell you why I did that--after so many years they declassify everything. So I wrote to the Reserves and they sent me my file. This was in my file. Here is my appointment, June 9, 1965, which is the date I graduated, through the Professor of Military Science, ROTC, appointing Dennis Brodkin a second lieutenant. So as part of graduation, I got my bars. I have a copy of that. Then here's my application for delay. I'm going to go to the University of Wisconsin. I'm going for PhD. They would only give you twelve months at a time. Here's multiple copies of that. I'll put together a package for you. It's easier than doing it now. I get a letter--well, I had already started, so I knew it was approved. Your delay is extended until June 30, 1966, so I got a year. It tells me all the reasons why the deferment would end. If you deviate in your field of study, you discontinue your study, you change your full-time assignment, you got your degree, unsatisfactory grades, or transfer--if I left Wisconsin. So that would end my deferment. Then in November--and a lot of these are Rutgers guys, from the Department of the Army, Fort Wadsworth--here's a list of everybody who got their deferment. If you go to me on the back here, my address--Witte Hall, Madison, Wisconsin. I think it mentioned I was in a graduate dorm, so Witte Hall. Two years ago, it was my first return to Wisconsin. I haven't been there since 1967. It's as if I was never there. Unlike Rutgers where I feel like I never left, my two years at Wisconsin seem like a blur. It's as if I was never there. So then, in February of 1966, your application from post-graduate days, delay is extended to June 30, 1967. So I got two years. Dick Cheney, by the way, is at Wisconsin the same time I am. As you know, he got five deferments, never served in the military. We know where his political leanings on the war were. This is a document that found its way into the file and it's marked up by the Army; it's the things that they wrote on. My home address, that was my college address--I don't even remember signing this thing. They wrote that I was at the University of Wisconsin, American History. I was a DMS by the way, Distinguished Military Student and a DMG, which is an interesting part of the story because when you got your assignment, if you were DMS, DMG, they usually gave you your first choice. I ended up with artillery. I think the deferment did that.

SI: At that time, did that also mean you could opt for a regular commission as you were in the reserves?

DB: You mean rather than US Reserve?

SI: Yes.

DB: No. I was always in. Here's a letter that I wrote in May of '67. Now, my recollection is a little foggy, so you'll have to forgive me on this one and even this doesn't jog it. I write that on

June 30th my student deferment terminates and as a second lieutenant, on that date I become eligible for the call of active duty. I say, "Well, with all the uncertainty that that means, maybe you can help me out. Here's what I would prefer, if I'm going to get called." Now Vietnam is happening. I think I was told that my deferment was ending, that I was not going to be eligible for another year, but coincidentally to that, I was suffering academic burnout. This is part of the reason why I didn't complete my Ph.D. Ultimately, that may be more significant than the phone call that I think I got or the rumor that I think I followed that my termination was ending. As far as the military is concerned, from all the documents that I have, it was a voluntary end of termination, but I don't think I was that dumb, but I might have been. I wish I could give you a better answer, but that's what I recall. The bottom line is: the middle of '67, I'm done with Wisconsin and I'm going to go into the service. I had met a woman in December of 1965 at a party at Rutgers Law School that all my fraternity brothers, living in Newark at the time. I was in Madison, but I was home for Christmas. My wife to be had come to the party as a guest of another female friend. The Jewish community in the northeast, as I think I have suggested to you, was pretty tight knit. I looked at her, I said, "You remind me of somebody." The person that she reminded me of, she happened to know from Jackson Heights, Long Island. Turns out--this is eerie--her family knew my family. If they ever tried to fix us up it would never have happened. Long story short, we started dating. We corresponded while I was in Madison. It got more serious when I got home. It got very serious when I got home because in June of '67 we were engaged. Here in July of '67 I get a letter from the Army saying, "Records of this headquarters indicate you have terminated your delay," by that letter that I just described. It says, "You've been scheduled for two years active duty and will be ordered as a Field Artillery Officer, Basic Course, Fort Sill, Oklahoma." It said to me, "Complete this form and get it back to us by a certain date." The date that they tell me to return it by is after the date--it's almost after--yes, it says July 25th and I got it on July 27th. I remember making that note. That is important for what I'm about to show you. I sent this form, because they said, "Where do you want to be assigned?" Just like they asked me what branch did I want to be. I said, "Let's try the First Army Headquarters in New Jersey, Wisconsin, or California. If you had to go overseas, North America, South America, Europe." You notice I didn't say anything about Southeast Asia, right? I got many copies of this and this is the one actually from their file. I indicated I'm going to be married. I got to find the one that has the note on it. "Request assignment instructions. Officer failed to return preference forms." I did, but just according to them, I was late. Now I'm concerned because now I'm going to field artillery training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. If you remember, it wasn't my first choice, but that's where I'm going. When I was commissioned I was commissioned in the air defense. I had crossed cannons with a missile. Fort Sill is field artillery. My Army career is not getting off to a good start. I go to the Pentagon. Since I lived in New Jersey, why not? I meet a guy named Lynch, Major Lynch. We're talking and chatting and we shook up a nice relationship. He said, "You know what Dennis." Sort of like, "I'll take care of you. Don't worry. All right?" Now I'm going to get into the good stuff. I get my orders in January of 1968. I'll share this with you. Forget all the military lingo because the Army has a language unto itself, but TDY [Temporary duty assignment] en route to tells you where you're going, but if you look carefully down, it says, "Reassigned to." That's the important part, on the bottom. "USA Special Research Detachment, OACSI," stands for Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence. Fort Meade, Maryland--what's at Fort Meade besides First Army Headquarters? Do you know?

SI: The National Security Agency.

DB: NSA. This was an NSA assignment. I'm going for two years, civilian attire. They're putting me to study European events, even though I'm an American historian they figured, "You know history. You're an academic. You're a bright guy." So my dream came true. I said to my wife, "This is good. You'll be an Army bride, stateside. The war's on, Vietnam." Not being selfish, but I got what I wanted. I'm getting in the NSA, who knew all the bad stuff at the time. That was a good assignment. Note that on my orders my MOS is listed as 9301, which is an intelligence MOS, not an artillery officer MOS. That's how it looks like it's going to end up. Let me have that back. Go ahead. Stop me.

SI: Was it called the NSA at the time?

DB: You know what. That's a good question. I don't remember. I don't remember. I still just think of it as the NSA. Now, I go off to Oklahoma and here's my class. Tattered a little bit, but this is--I report to duty on January 30, 1968. You know what date that is?

SI: Yes.

DB: Tet Offensive. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive, a series of offensives conducted from January 30, 1968, to September 30, 1968, by the Viet Cong against every major city in South Vietnam, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.] I'll never forget it. I'm sitting in Snow Hall at Fort Sill, General is talking, Lieutenant Colonel comes on stage, hands him a piece of paper, and he goes, "Gentleman, the communists are on the streets of Saigon." Now, here's name, rank, what position you're going to hold, where you're going to go next. Now, we had a lot of Marines because the Marines didn't have their own artillery school. They were all going to Okinawa, most likely going to Vietnam. If you go through this list, here's a Vietnam, Dugway Proving Grounds, all different kinds of places. You don't see too many Vietnams. By the time this class ended in mid-April, fifty percent of the guys were reassigned to Vietnam. You come to yours truly.

SI: We are looking at an order sheet with a few dozen names on it.

DB: You are, and what you're looking at--we had one guy from Jordan. By the way, we also trained foreign soldiers. Let me find me. I'm in section--bear with me for one second. Brodkin. They made me an assistant section leader, which wasn't something I was particularly happy about because it gave me responsibilities, and they already had me going to Fort George Meade. I'm going to point out one other name on here only because it has a very sad component to it. This guy William Britton, he was going to stay at Fort Sill. He was married, I was married and there's another guy on here, who's a Marine, is married. As married officers, we were allowed to live off base. I lived in Duncan, Oklahoma which is about twenty five miles east of Fort Sill. What's interesting about that is we're there in the winter time. This Bill Britton is from Mississippi. The Marine is from South Carolina. Whenever it snowed or the weather was bad, Dennis drove because they weren't familiar with driving in snowy conditions. Again, I was the first Jew. Religion seems to have a common theme here today. I was the first Jew that either of them had spent any time with. They were looking for the horns. They were nice people. They were wonderful people, but Bill and I used to sit up at night talking about religion. He's a southern Baptist, a good old boy, and he was a lot of fun. His survival skills were phenomenal. So when we did field work, I stayed close to him. Book work, he stayed close to me. We were a good team. He and his wife, and my wife and I, whatever leave time we had, weekends and

stuff, we'd go to Oklahoma City together. We'd got to Anadarko visiting the Indian tribes together. We became like this. When we graduated, we separated and went our separate ways. Let me continue with that story because if I forget anything--it's about ten years later, I'm home. My daughter just finished at Penn. She's working for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. Whenever I went to D.C., I always went to the Wall [Vietnam Veterans Memorial]. Always paid respects and homage to friends and colleagues that I lost. The Wall is done chronologically and I knew where my guys were. We're walking out and I'm in a chronological period where it's not my time and I don't think I'm going to know anybody there. I walk by and I see the name William Britton, this fellow's name, but I know it's not my William Britton; it can't be. It was either before we went to Fort Sill or so many years later.

[Tape Paused]

DB: At the end of the V-shaped pathways, there's a book that has the names of all the people on the wall, and what line they're on and what panel, so you could find them if you didn't know. Feeling relieved that it's not my Bill Britton, we walk to the end and I look in the book under Britton. Lo and behold, below the Britton on the wall is William D. Britton. It has his date of birth and where he's from, and I knew both. I said, "Oh my god. Bill got killed. I can't believe this." If you would have predicted which of the two of us would have made it home, Jewish kid from Newark who's never fired a gun in his life or rural kid from Alabama who's been firing a gun since he's two, whose father was a career officer, whose grandfather fought in the civil war, who's had a military life, aspired to be a career officer. Who would have made it home? But there for the grace of God. I was distraught forever. I couldn't believe it. I go to the Internet. There's the virtual wall, where it has all the information. I left a message on the wall. "Anybody has any information about the death of William Britton, I'd be most interested in learning. We were colleagues at Fort Sill." About six weeks later, I get a response from someone who was in his unit, and knew exactly what had happened, had operations report information about what had happened. Turns out he went to helicopter school, got shot down, but the irony is--not the irony, but the interesting thing is he was in Vietnam at exactly the same time I was. He was thirty kilometers from where I was. He died in his first month of service. He didn't last very long. Fast forward ten more years. I'm now living in California. My message is still out there on the wall. My email changed, but somehow this person found me. I get an email from his granddaughter. His granddaughter tells me--and I tried to find his wife. His wife remarried. She wanted no part of living that experience all over. She was pregnant with her son when Bill went overseas. He never obviously saw the baby. This girl that I'm talking to is the daughter of the son, who was born while he got killed in Vietnam. She was a college student, University of Auburn, Alabama, somewhere like that. She didn't know her grandfather. She knew he served in Vietnam and died, knew nothing about him. Her mother didn't want to talk about him. Father didn't want to talk; father didn't know him. What can you tell me about my [grand]father? I think he's in here. Maybe not. I got pictures of him. I remember it well. So I wrote her a nice note and pictures and stuff like that. She was very, very thankful that I helped her. She was writing an article for the university newspaper, "My Grandfather," that kind of thing. It's terribly sad because when I think that we all worried about--here, I left a wife at home. Fortunately, she wasn't pregnant. Those stories, you read about them, you hear about them. Well, I know someone who experienced it. I'm sure Bill knew he was going to Vietnam. I guess he figured we were immortal. He's coming home. The fact that he's leaving a pregnant wife--there are quite a few in this class who didn't make it, but I remember we were all forward

thinking, optimistic, even the ones going to Vietnam in artillery. I didn't really pay that much attention to my artillery training because I'm going to the NSA.

SI: What was the Fort Sill course just a standard orientation?

DB: Yes. It's the officer's basic course, but in artillery orientation. The first day there--I'm already married. My wife and I check into the Holiday Inn before we report to duty. The building is shaking, the windows are--my wife says, "What are we getting into?" I sort of felt the same way. It was solid training. Oklahoma was interesting. I'll share one story with you--again, has a religious connection. We're there for Passover. We're looking for matzah. We weren't going to get a care package from our respective parents. We figured the local Safeway would have a box of matzah. My wife goes to shop, no matzah. She asked the manager of the store, "Can you help me out with the matzah?" He goes, "Oh, yes. That's on the cheese aisle on twelve." He thought she meant mozzarella cheese. Again, the military back then, not that many Jews, and certainly not at Fort Sill, not in the combat arms. In Judge Advocate General, maybe, Signal Corps maybe, the support services, but not in the combat arms--certainly not volunteers. The draft was on, but my class was mostly ROTC, National Guard, active duty kind of thing. In March of 1968, I get this letter welcoming me to the NSA.

SI: (…?)

DB: (…?) Obviously, everything is super-secret. You can't even get on the base, he's giving you instructions. "Here's where you report. We're looking forward to you." In fact, here's the envelope it came in. It says, "National Security Agency, Department of Defense." While this is going on, Army is doing a security check on me. They went to my high school. They went to my neighbors. I found this out through them. "Is he gay? Did he cause trouble? Does he have an arrest record?" Routine security clearance. We finish Fort Sill. We say our goodbyes. The guys going to Vietnam, "Goodbye. Good luck." The guys going elsewhere, "See you down the road." I report to--and we were happy about that assignment for other reasons. My wife had a brother in Baltimore, right around the corner. We said, "This is good in many ways." We get an apartment. Back then, in military cities, you get furnished apartments very easily. My wife and I found a furnished apartment. She was going to work for the Rouse Company in Columbia, Maryland, the new planned community that was being built at the time. Now it's very established, but back then it was a new community. We were going to have a wonderful life together. We were going to get pregnant, have a baby in the Army. They pay for it. Sunday night, before I'm to report for duty, I call Captain Hartnett. He says, "Lieutenant, I don't know what's going on, but your paperwork is delayed." He says, "Take a week off on us. Call me next Sunday night and we'll do this again." My wife and I went back to New Jersey and New York, had a week off. Sunday night again, I call him. He says, "Lieutenant, I'm speechless, but you've been reassigned." He says, "Come meet me at Starbucks." It wasn't Starbucks. This is all it said. He gives me a piece of paper.

SI: Can I read it?

DB: Yes.

SI: It says, "Attached to detention detachment. Post will publish reassignment orders." What does that mean?

DB: What does that mean? I don't know. By the way, this was when I made the phone call and they gave me the leave. That's the piece of paper that I had to put through the service requesting the leave and so on. I got some leave. Fort Meade at that time was headquarters for First Army, mostly an administrative post. I think there may have been one quasi-combat--I'll call it--unit at the base, but nothing for an artillery officer. I'm nervous. Excess, May 1968, the repercussions of Tet are all over the place, I'm seeing Vietnam in my future. I know the Army is not that quick to reassign you. They give you a little time. The scuttlebutt was, if you don't get--I had two years of active duty. Counting backwards, they typically would give you a month's notice. Working backwards, I knew if I made it through November of '68 without hearing more, I'm pretty safe. I may get assigned someplace else, but I'm not going to 'Nam. I get my orders on May 23rd. I'm assigned to a thing called special research detachment. The orders were by way of a phone conversation with my good buddy Major Lynch, the one who got me the assignment in the first place. What's the date on that, the 23rd of May?

MA: Yes.

DB: A couple days later--basically I was just hanging around not doing anything. A couple days later, on the 28th of May, I now get assigned to the ultimate assignment, which is Special Processing Battalion I think it says.

SI: Yes.

DB: Right?

SI: Special Processing Battalion.

DB: Do you have any idea what the Special Processing Battalion may be?

SI: No.

DB: I had no clue. You have no clue. It turns out it's a holding station for me. Turns out, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, at that time, an officer could serve as legal counsel without legal training and if there was a prosecutor in a unit, special processing unit, who was a lay, you could have a defense attorney, who is non-JAG officer. Special processing handles all special court martials. The army was inundated with AWOLs. When guys came home from Vietnam, the typical draftee, two year tour of duty. He goes to basic training. He goes to advanced individual training. He spends a year in Vietnam. He's got three months left. If he doesn't re-up, extend, or get extended, he comes home. He's got three months. He becomes a juvenile delinquent, literally, because the Army doesn't know what to do with him anymore. He's already served his time in Vietnam and these guys are either burnt out, drugged out, freaked out; they're just not going to be good soldiers. So they run. They go home. The Army is not going to let them off that fast. They bring them back and they court martial them. If it's really bad, they'll get a DD, Dishonorable Discharge, or they'll put them in the stockade, withhold pay, and then ultimately give them an Honorable Discharge. But they're entitled to a legal defense. I'm their defense attorney. I had no legal training, because there's another guy in the unit who was also not an attorney. If they didn't have him, I didn't know what they would have done with me. That's what I ended up doing at Fort Meade. While I'm there, I get this letter. This comes the same day as my reassignment orders. It says, "Dennis Brodkin, Special." It has me at the NSA. It's from Fort Devens, Mass. That's where Army intelligence did their special training. As part

of my introduction, if you will, to the NSA, they're going to give me a special training week at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Now you're looking at me like, "What's going on?" I'm saying to myself, "What happened?" How did I go from a cushy stateside assignment at the NSA to a special processing battalion at Fort Meade, Maryland. Being the enterprising person that I am, and being so close to the Pentagon, I go back down to Washington and see Major Lynch. You're intrigued by what's--?

SI: Yes. This is interesting.

DB: Yes, it's interesting, right? Again, you'll get copies of all this.

SI: Oh, good. [laughter]

DB: I never even responded. They told me, "Throw it away." They already had notified him that Brodkin is not going to be there. I go see Major Lynch. He looks at me, says, "Look, I can't tell you, but I'll give you a hypothetical." Oh, no. I offered up possibilities. I said, "Wisconsin? Are you associating me in any way shape or form with what went on in Madison?" I said, "I was an RA. I didn't protest." I said, "That's not my background. I didn't do any of that. My family was born here. My parents, my father, as I told you, was born in the United States. My mother was born in the United States. My father served in World War II, albeit very briefly." He says, "No, that has nothing to do with any of that or hypothetically has nothing to do with it." He says, "But suppose, just suppose, someone on your mother's side did the following," and he rattles off some stuff. Well, it turns out my wife's parents from New York were very active in what we'll call the liberal persuasions during the 1930s. During the New Deal, when there were a lot of Americans out of work, they were part of the Workmen's Circle, strong labor people, strong liberal democrats, as were my family but even more so. I think my father-in-law may have gotten the union, the radical newspaper, so they were on mailing lists and stuff like that. The kicker was my mother-in-law had two cousins who were born in the Soviet Union, came to the United States in the great flood of Jewish immigration, were engineers. Stalin in the 1930s was looking for these five-year plans that he had and he advertised in the United States to the unemployed. We don't have that problem in the Soviet Union. Why don't you come back and work here? These two cousins returned to the Soviet Union. When my mother-in-law died, we went through her papers and we found letters that she had from her cousins, written in English. They were English speaking, but they went back not because of anything Bolshevik, communist, or anything. They went back because they needed to survive. He didn't tell me that that was the reason, but we suspect that that loose tie did it. Now, I never challenged it. I never inquired about it until many, many years later--in fact, as recently as the end of 2013. Yes, December 2013. I'm in touch with one of my fraternity brothers who happens to do security law, national security law. I told him my story. He said, "Dennis, it's vestiges of Rosenbergs, of the McCarthy period. It has every bit to do because you were Jewish. It has every bit to do with this anti-communist hysteria. You smell, you whiff of communism, you're not going to get a clearance for anything." He says, "I'm surprised you even got commissioned." He said, "If they had done their work, you wouldn't have even got a secret clearance because as an officer you're automatically secret." I said, "(Shelly), let me ask you. Should I file a Freedom of Information Act?" Again, I was willing to let history--it bothered me all those years, but I had never gotten closure. He gave me some information as to where to write to because he could cut through some of the bureaucratic nonsense. I wrote two letters to the Defense Security Service and to US

Office of Personnel Management, and they both responded the same way. "We have no records of you." It's as if I never existed, which I don't accept. We also wrote to the NSA and they never responded. Somewhere buried in Washington is the real story and I don't know what it is. All I'm telling you is I went from a loyal American assigned to the NSA to an outcast assigned to Fort Meade, Maryland and who knows what's going to happen. Let me now really fast forward. This still has some interesting twists to it. I get promoted on June 8, 1968 to first lieutenant. Remember I'm doing this countdown, November, November, November, November. Finally, I'm in court doing a routine court martial, November 18th--won't forget the day. I get a tap on my shoulder. "Lieutenant, you got a phone call from the Pentagon." I pick up the phone, it's a woman's voice. She says, "Lieutenant, this is so and so. Just giving you a head's up, you're getting orders for Vietnam. Your orders will be cut shortly." I was hoping for Germany. I was hoping for Korea. I'm going to Vietnam. Now remember, since I've left Fort Sill I haven't lifted a gun. I'm playing golf with guys from--all JAG officers and stuff. All of them, they were going overseas but to Germany and Thailand. No one is going to Vietnam. Vietnam is in the news. Of course everything else in '68 is in the news--Kennedy, Robert got assassinated, Martin Luther King got [assassinated]. I can talk about all those things if you want me too. Now I got orders. I go see Major Lynch. I'm a regular at the Pentagon. He says, something to that effect. I get my orders. November 25th, these are my written orders, but what's interesting behind all the gobbly gook, if you go down into the middle, there's special instructions. I don't know if you can see that. No, no. It's in the next paragraph. You're okay. Here, let me show you. Special instructions. I'm sorry. "OFF, officer, WNB, will not be ASG, assigned, to FA duties."

SI: Field Artillery.

DB: Signed?

SI: William Westmoreland. [Editor's Note: General William Westmoreland was the commander of MACV, or Military Assistance Command, Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.]

DB: Pretty good. Major Lynch, my buddy, is taking care of me. "Look, you can be an artillery officer but you don't have to be a field artillery. You can do service in many other ways." In fact, my MOS is listed as 8105, which is a Civil Affairs Officer. I'm feeling a little bit better about it, but I still have to be trained. For three days I think it was--oh, sixteen hours. This is you're orientation to Vietnam. I walked through. I got qualified on a M14. It wasn't even the M16. They had a mockup of a Vietnam village and they said, "Okay. Now you're ready to go to Vietnam." Crazy right? Still nervous about it. Now I get my orders on January 7th, saying, "Report to Travis Air Force Base by no later than January 17th."

SI: 17th. Yes.

DB: "You're going to Vietnam." I said, "Okay." My parents lived in New Jersey. My wife lived in New York. I was flying out of Kennedy. The last night I spent in New Jersey--you can't make this up--it was the Bob Hope Christmas show from Vietnam. Here I am knowing I'm going to Vietnam the next day and I'm looking at the Bob Hope show. Now, if that's your understanding of Vietnam, it's not much of an orientation, but nonetheless, it was a little freaky. It was a very teary farewell. My older brother was so distraught, my parents. No one talked. It was the elephant in the room. The expectation was you're coming home. Just make the best of

it. You're not going to be assigned to artillery duties. Just God bless you. My grandmother gave me a good luck, Mezuzah, a religious medal to wear. I was feeling comfortable. I didn't sense impending doom, but I knew it was a nasty place. Off I go on American Airlines--I show you this only because it runs complete circle--January 16, 1969 for seventy five dollars and sixty cents; I fly to San Francisco. I see the city of San Francisco. I catch a bus to Travis. You could get there a lot of ways. You can go on a military transport, but for most guys who went to Vietnam went on civilian. The Army, Navy, chartered with all these airlines--Alaska, Braniff, Capital, Delta. I was with TWA. I went to Vietnam on a stretch DC-8 with stewardesses, but everybody on the plane was military. We flew to Hawaii, six hours, refueled. We then had a twelve hour flight to Okinawa through the night. I was the only guy awake on the plane. I don't sleep on planes. The guy next to me was going back for a second tour. He had just come out of Brooke Army Hospital, which was the burn center. He was wounded. He's filling my ear with stories. I don't even want to hear this. But most of the guys--it was a very quiet flight, a very quiet flight. We land at Bien Hoa, January 20, 1969. You know what that date is?

SI: The Second Tet?

DB: No, January 20th. Every four years.

SI: Nixon's inauguration.

DB: Nixon's inauguration. We land at Bien Hoa. I'm watching the coffins being reloaded on the planes going home. We're on a bus going from Bien Hoa Air Base to Long Binh Post to be oriented. We're listening to Nixon's speech promising an end to the war in Vietnam. It was very--

SI: (…?)

DB: It was odd. Let's just put it that way. I go to 90th Replacement. The guys going home survived Tet One. I'm there for four days. Now, you get your teeth taken care of. They're giving you a permanent protection because the expectations are in the field you're not going to be able to practice good field sanitation. You, again, get oriented on a weapon, map reading, local customs, money--you got to exchange your money for this stuff, military payment certificates. Greenbacks you couldn't use. You had to use military money and all that stuff. Last day there, they tell you, "Report to the transportation center so you know how you're getting to your next assignment." Per my paperwork, my MOS is 8105, which is Civil Pacification Officer. I thought I was being reassigned to Na Trang, which is on the coast of Vietnam, very safe city. I was going to be a civil pacification officer; winning the hearts and minds, building schools, roads, helping positive communication. Seems like it fits me. Major Lynch did me good. Nha Trang is a three-hour flight from Saigon. I probably figure I'm going to report to Bien Hoa Airbase again. Get up the next morning, I go down to the transportation center, "Brodkin," go to the helipad, 54th Field Artillery Group. "What's this all about?" I go. There's another guy getting on the same helicopter as me. He's a captain. He's going back for a second tour. We fly off to a place called Xuan Loc. Xuan Loc, if you know your Vietnam history, was the last city to fall--tomorrow, April 30th. Before Saigon fell, it's probably the South Vietnamese Army's finest moment. They really stood their ground and did very, very well there, but ultimately they lost. April 30, 1975, Xuan Loc fell. That's where the 54th Field Artillery Group was. I report, Colonel Adams--I think it was Adams. Anyway it was a guy, he

had a cigar in his mouth, chewed it rather than smoked it, real tough guy. He pulls down a map. "Here's our area of operations. Captain so and so you're going with the 5th to 40th. Brodkin, you're going A Battery, 2nd and 35th Artillery. Dismissed." I stand frozen in place. I'm not ashamed to say this. Now I'm really scared. He says, "Lieutenant, you have a problem?" I said, "Sir, did you read my orders, sir?" He looked at my paperwork. "What do I care?" He says, "We need bodies." He said, "We just lost Lieutenant Anderson yesterday. [He] stepped on a five hundred pound booby trap." I said, "Sir, did you read my orders?" I want him to see this "Will not be assigned [to] field artillery." He says, "Let me tell you something. There's two choices." He says, "One, you can file an Inspector General inquiry, but you'll either be dead or home before it's heard, or you can do an about-face and be the good officer that we've trained you to be." Trained? I'm remembering Fort Sill months ago. I'm remembering Fort Meade. I'm remembering my sixteen hour Vietnam orientation course and you're putting me into a field artillery unit in Warzone D. I was petrified. My first night--now I report to battalion headquarters; I'm not yet at the battery. I go to battalion headquarters. I swear to you, the first night I didn't know the difference between outgoing and incoming. We were firing out; nothing was coming in. I'm ducking under the bed. There's a B-52 strike thirty miles away; they called them arc lights. The ground is shaking. I said, "What is that?" They say, "It's a B-52 strike. You don't want to be anywhere near that." "Dennis, what happened?" Now I report to A Battery. At that time, A Battery was defending the ammunition dump at Long Binh that the Vietcong had blown up in Tet One. There was a Tet Two. It was pretty bad, too, but not quite like Tet One. We're not far away from Bien Hoa. We're out there, but remember it's an ammunition dump. My first night there, we take incoming and I didn't even get a hooch yet. I'm just finding my way around. I swear to you--I saw too many John Wayne movies--I'm running for cover. I was not running a straight line. I'm doing the serpentine zigzag, zigzag kind of thing. I didn't even have--I had my shirt off. I put a flak jacket on, a helmet. My steel pot was twice the size of my head and I'm bouncing along my steel helmet. I can just picture how funny it must have looked. We had very good officers. My battery commander and especially my executive officers calmed me down, got me acclimated. I'm now assigned to a battery as a fire direction officer, 155 howitzer, self-propelled. My MOS is 1193, Field Artillery Unit Commander. Interesting weapon and I'd seen it at Fort Sill. Most of our training was on split trails, the kind that are towed. These are like tanks, they self-propel. There's one document I didn't bring and I forgot. I had my 201 file, which was all your military training and background. It mentions my forward observer experience. You get pulled out into the field. Then I went back. I spent most of my time as a fire direction officer. I know I talked a lot. I'm sorry. Of course, you knew your tour of duty was 365 days. The very first thing that you start is the countdown. If there was ever a stupid war and a stupid way to fight the war, Vietnam was it. The Marines are up in the highlands and the Army is in the delta. It was counterintuitive to anything any military strategist would tell you. Marines have short lines of supply. You don't put them up in Khe Sanh, where their closest depot is two hundred miles away. That's not the way. Marines hit, run. Army is stationary. You already could tell morale was low. Guys just wanted to get home, so you get a short timer's calendar. So the first one is 365 days and you color it in, countdown to spot number one. [laughter] Then when you get under a hundred days, you're short, you're officially short. You got a short timer's calendar. Now you'll notice some of the colors--well, most of the colors were the same, but you didn't do one day at a time because you might be out in the field for seven days, which was a great experience because you come back and knock off seven days. These are both my short timer's calendars. They smell still

musty of Vietnam. So yes, I was counting down the time from the day I got there. I'll stop now. Let you ask me.

SI: It seems like everybody was doing that.

DB: Everybody was. We were mission-oriented. We were doing our duty. Forget your feelings about the war. You had your buddies. It was a camaraderie unlike any--forget my fraternity; these were my buddies. I maintained contact with two Vietnam guys, one in New Zealand. There was ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps], the Australians and New Zealand. Our unit, we were a general support unit. Our unit supported just about every major--the 1st Infantry Division, the 25th, the 9th, the 199th, the First Australian Task Force, the 11th Armored Cavalry, 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne. I was with everybody--not as a member of their units, but A Battery or C Battery of 2nd 35th was there. I made a friendship with a guy from New Zealand and another officer and there's one who I've never found that I'm still looking for. I was with A Battery from January until April. Then I got reassigned to C Battery, which was in a different section. I was basically in what was called Warzone D. If you look at a map of Vietnam, it was north and east of Saigon. Again, to protect Saigon from the same invasion route that was used during the Tet Offensive. Then, I went southeast of Saigon, which was the First Australian Task Force area of operations.

SI: Then the southeast deployment was after April?

DB: Yes. Yes. We moved constantly. We were called the moving battery. Nui Dat was the headquarters of the Australian Task Force. We were there over Christmas and New Years at the end of my tour, maybe a month. That's probably the longest I was ever in one place. We'd be three days here, two days here, five days here, some days we split. We split the battery. There are six howitzers in a battery. We'd send three here, three here. "Brodkin you're in charge while--" and that kind of thing.

SI: Describe your job as a fire direction officer. What does that actually entail?

DB: Good question. There were six officers in a battery. There was a battery commander, an executive officer, assistant executive officer, and then there were two or three FDOs [fire direction officer]. The FDO specifically was the mathematic transition between a request that comes from the field--when I was a forward observer we'd say, "We need help. We need support fire," or, "I'm lost. Fire a white phosphorous, Willy Peter, two hundred up and I'll use that as a marking round. This is where I think I am on the map, but I may not be there, so I'm going to give you some grid coordinates. Please fire the round here." Well, how do you calculate where he is? Go back to fire direction center. We have a big table with a big map of our area divided into grid squares. They would have XY axis on the bottom and a grid square would have two numbers. Let's say two-four going this way, one-eight going this way. They were a thousand meter squares. If all they gave you was two, four, one, eight, you're going to be off as much as a thousand meters. You would plot using a very fine ruler, exactly where that physical feature is on the ground that he's describing and you hope to get it to eight numbers. Two, four, one, six brings you this far. One, eight, three, five brings you this far and you'd put a pin on the map. Now you have to calculate that into a direction, and an elevation--an azimuth and an elevation. Without getting too technical, you're working off a 360-degree or 6400 mil. circle. The battery had to be laid--that's a survey term--against a known point, so you could

identify where the center of the battery is. What are those things now? GPS [Global Positioning System]. If you had a GPS, you would know the coordinates. Well, we would get the coordinates through a survey. I did that also as part of my duty, but not part of the FDO. You'd get the coordinates. Then, again, you use a slide rule and you would come up with--the guns are laid this way. This is north. You know you want to go so many degrees to the right and to get twelve-thousand meters, because that's how far away from you, you have different level charges. The shell is ninety-five pounds, but you had charge one, charge two, up to charge seven. Charge seven is the maximum, which can thrust the shell as far as eighteen thousand meters. That was our furthest range. We were medium artillery. There was an eight-inch, which went further. 175, which is like the guns on the USS *New Jersey*, would go further. The real workhorse of the artillery was the 105. That was the shorter range. The FDO was the person who had to guarantee that the fire was accurate. I don't have to tell you how many--the friendly fire accidents in Vietnam were usually FDO mistakes or there was a short round or a bad charge, or something like that. We had to do the computations and we would give the commands to the gun. The shell we want is HE, high explosive, or in the case of the marking round, WP, white phosphorous, illumination. Maybe it was night time and we needed light on the subject, so we had a high powered illuminate. The first thing you do is a fire mission. HE, charge five, VT--that's what kind of fuse do you want to put on the shell. VT was variable time, that we could do a calculation. The most potent weapon against troops in the open is a shell that explodes here and the flechettes come out. You want to do a variable time fuse, but the problem with variable time is human error. You could make a mistake by this much and it would explode short and if any friendlies were on that line, you could kill your own. Or it'll explode in the ground and not be as effective. You had different kinds of fuses. Delayed is where you're going against bunkers. You wanted the shell to go through the ground, get into the ground, and then explode. So you had contact, VT, variable time, delayed, probably missing another. I gave you a long answer, but we're the people who had to translate, "Here's where I am, get me accurate fire."

MA: When you would go out and do these surveys, would you be with infantry?

DB: No, no. There was actually a survey unit. There's actually a unit called survey that was part of the battalion. I'll tell you an interesting story about [that]. We were chosen the honor--President Eisenhower died when I was in Vietnam. Obviously, he wasn't President anymore, but being the great military leader that he was and President of the United States, he was entitled to a fifty-gun salute. They chose our battery to be the honor battery to fire that salute, which was simply going to be fifty rounds fired. In Vietnam, there were what we called free fire zones where we knew there were no friendlies, probably no civilians, maybe a few monkeys, swamp land, something. We knew we weren't going to be accidentally doing something bad. We had all this high brass coming to observe this honor for President Eisenhower. One of the things you always had to worry about was helicopter or other aircraft flying across the line of fire. Before you fired one round, unless it was direct contact and you could see the enemy, you always had to get approval from air traffic control because they knew who's flying where. We got clearance. Everybody was warned, "Don't fly through this. We got something special going on." We were firing and as FDO, I'm standing outside the fire direction center. I see all six guns facing the same way, the right way, and all of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I see six Hueys [the Bell UH-1 Iroquois] flying left to right. Unless they turn, they're flying across our line of fire. Now there's nothing more embarrassing then shooting down a helicopter when you got four-star generals standing behind you. Now, I'm not the commanding officer of the battery, so I'm not

the ultimate decision maker, but I see this and I am very nervous. We're not breaking the ceremony by ceasefire while these helicopters go across. They would hang me from the highest tree because I'm basically in charge of the fire mission. I go to a senior officer and they do some--fortunately, the helicopters made a left turn. They got the word. We were spared the embarrassment and went up. But that's the kind of thing--I'll give you one other incident. What a fire direction officer worries about, again, killing your own. I had just come back from R&R. I was very excited about it, sharing the stories with the guys with the FDO. We were good by that time. I was seasoned and sometimes you take things for granted. We're firing H and Is, Harassment and Interdiction. There's no target. These were just preventative fires to keep Charlie on his toes just in case he was coming there. We drop a round every thirty seconds. Maybe we wait another hour, drop five more shells. It was called H and I for a reason. It H and I'd us more than them because we had to stay up at night and fire these things through the night. We're doing H and Is. We get up. We hear something over the squawk box. "Who is firing into Grid Square 2354?" We look on the map. We're firing up here. We're not firing into 2354. We're firing, firing, firing. I say again, "Who is firing into Grid Square 2354." It's not us. Ignore it. Finally, the guy goes, "Check fire. Cease-fire. Check fire." We check fire. It then dawns on me. If I look at where we're firing, 180 degrees, the back azimuth as you would call it, was--if you figured out how far you're firing here, you go this way, that was us or it could've been us if you just reversed it. Now, no one's given a command to fire in that grid square so why are the rounds going in that grid square? We're firing at night. We send up one of the NCOs. We're firing three guns. He comes back to tell me, "Two of the guns are faced this way. One of the guns is faced this way." It was us. Now, you're saying to me, "How could that happen?" Well, remember I told you the survey component? They blew it. When they laid the battery, which is the term of art, they made a 180-degree mistake. Now, you want to know how guys get killed without intent. Fortunately, it was nearby, and he wasn't calling in the fire. It wasn't VC rocket fire, so they knew it was friendly fire. That was probably one of the scarier friendly fire incidents. We've had others where the monsoons were so strong that the rounds would explode early because it was like hitting a wall of concrete. The rain was that--or you get an electrical storm and again, lightening and artillery don't mix.

SI: This detail is great.

DB: Dog tags. You're issued two sets of dog tags, one that goes home with the body. It has my name, my rank. Now, I was 05023618, a number that you just don't forget. The modern Army--and it started when I was in--Social Security number. They no longer gave you two numbers. They figured the average GI can only remember one number at a time. Blood type, God forbid you're unconscious and you got to get a transfusion. Last but not least, religion. If you have to be buried, they want to at least respect your religion. I wear those dog tags for my tour. What religion? This is my last religion story, [laughter] maybe.

SI: Any stories you want to tell.

DB: Okay. This, I don't think needs explanation, but the Star of David, Ten Commandments.

SI: We're looking at a flag.

DB: If you read this, it says, "Flag. Individual chaplain. Jewish." Again, I'm the only Jewish guy in the unit. Guys knew it. Two guys were in Saigon. There must've been a Jewish

chaplain's jeep nearby. They ripped it off, presented it to me, and this flew on our armored personnel carrier. I took it as a compliment, but there's a chaplain in Vietnam who's missing his flag. I brought this home as a souvenir.

SI: Did you ever go to services in Vietnam?

DB: That's another good question. Thank you for asking. Again, not being that observant--I tried to get Passover goods. That didn't matter. But on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, there was a priest. The Catholic and Protestant chaplains came every Sunday, as best they could, if we weren't really out in the bush. I spoke with the--I think it was a Catholic chaplain. I said, "Do you mind?" Excuse me.

SI: Do you want to take a break?

DB: I'm okay. I said, "Do you mind. I feel I need." He did a private service for me. That was about it.

SI: Do you remember some of your early missions or the first few weeks in combat?

DB: I didn't know how I was going to respond. We had a very, very serious engagement as part of the second Tet Offensive. They weren't in the wire, but they were pretty close. It was mostly rocket Sappers. There was a particular weapon that was the friend of every GI that you're going to interview. It's Snoopy, the DC-3. That was outfitted with a machine gun that could fire two thousand rounds a minute. It may have been the slowest plane in the inventory, but it was viciously deadly. Of course, you'd see the tracer fire coming out of it and it would just circle over the area and lay down the heaviest rounds of machine gun fire, if we couldn't get artillery or mortars in and stuff like that. I remember my first reaction seeing that. I actually was cheering. I didn't think of myself as a killer or someone who would get vicarious pleasure out of what we were doing. But when it's you verses them, there's that whole different kind of attitude and that's probably the very first emotional feeling that I can tell you. I was so happy to know that we had this protection of this--it was called Spooky, Snoopy, different terms. It was boring. Like most of the guys will tell you, war is boredom interrupted by terror, and that's true. Being artillery, we weren't marching through the paddies. We'd be close. I've GPS'd all my firebases. You can do that now with the technology to see where the heck were we and we were in the bush, but not like the infantry. *Platoon*, which by far, is the best representation of the Vietnam experience. Oliver Stone may be criticized for a lot of things, but he won't be criticized for that movie. That nails it. The only thing missing--when I walked out of the theater--was the smell. He had the sight, the sound, the imagery, everything. I wasn't a grunt, but it was close enough.

SI: Now, your positions, I understand the bases would be rocketed and that sort of thing. When you were deployed out in the bush, would you be subject to attack?

DB: Yes.

SI: How often would that happen?

DB: Fortunately, being a 155 we could take care of ourselves. Not my unit, but our sister unit, B Battery, May 18, 1969, a base camp was overrun. Eighteen Americans were killed. The berm was breached. It could've been me. Let me share that with you because I did this court martial

experience in the United States. The battalion was having a court martial and the guy needed to be defended. They looked at my file, they said, "Oh, Brodkin did that." I wasn't where B Battery was. They flew me up to B Battery--let me just look at the clock. My wife is going to be waiting for me and I have much more to tell, but that's okay. We did the court martial and the word was around, military intelligence was generally pretty bad in Vietnam. You had a lot of chicken little stories--"They're coming tonight, they're coming tonight," and they didn't come. Well, this was another one of those, "They're coming tonight, they're coming tonight, get out of here," and I'm excess. I don't belong to this unit. I would have been out on the berm, but I got the last helicopter out of there. I'll leave it at that. That night, when I'm back at my unit doing our own thing, we're listening on our radio, battalion radio, of the attack at this base camp and it was a horrible event. The only other Jewish guy that I knew was our battalion surgeon. He got killed that night doing something he never should have done. Usually the doctor stays in an aid station and they bring the wounded to him and he operates. He was called to leave his station to go out to the berm. Someone he knew real well needed help and he went out, left his station, and ultimately was killed. Our unit suffered casualties. I was blessed that I came out unscathed except for an injury that I suffered from being drunk. I was put in a jeep, which rode over a really bad road. I spun around; hit my head on a radio mount. I woke up the next day with a patch over my eye and a butterfly. They wanted to give me a Purple Heart. Speaking of Purple Hearts, I did win a bronze star.

SI: Was the bronze star for a specific action?

DB: Yes, that's why I want to. Actually, I won two, but this is the citation. Basically, as fire direction officer, we were engaged in a very heavy campaign in-- we killed, I don't even know what the number is, a hundred and something confirmed dead. The battery was split. We were up twenty-four hour nights for like five nights in a row. It was a significant campaign.

SI: This is from May 12, 1969 to June 10, 1969.

DB: Correct. It's on the Dong Nai River. If you read, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, he describes being at that particular place.

SI: Yes, it says 107 confirmed kills.

DB: 107, that's what it was. Then I got a second Bronze star, which is right below the first one, which was for the meritorious service for the whole year. This was actually awarded to me in Vietnam. In fact, here it is. November 19th is--those were the other guys, who were awarded bronze star while they were in country. On November 3, 1969, I got the most valuable piece of paper, the orders home. Your DEROS, your Date of Estimated Return Overseas Station. Mine was, believe it or not, January 16, 1970. If you remember when I went, January 16, 1969. Remember Nixon, early end to the war, troops were being brought home, guys were getting early releases, what we called early drops. I thought maybe I'd be home before Christmas. Maybe the Army would be kind enough, find a way. No. I'll go right to the end. This is my port call. This is the last piece of paper you get that says when you're going home, January 16th. Here's the last piece of paper I signed in Vietnam. My base clearance records. Signed out. Make sure you left behind all the things you're supposed to leave behind. Every month, we produced a battery roster and usually my name would be amongst the first six because that's where the officers were. I saved this one because--I'll just read it to you, "The following personnel are expected

losses for the month of January." Don't take that literally. It means the other kind of loss; you're going home. It has my date that I got to duty, when I was going home. Here's my boarding pass for my flight home. Now I'm on K, which is Trans-Caribbean Airlines. I even kept a log. This was the milk plane. We went from Vietnam to the Philippines, Philippines to Guam, Guam to Wake Island, on the ground. No. It's hard to read upside down. Vietnam to the Philippines, two hours. On the ground an hour and a half. Philippines to Guam, three hours and six minutes. On the ground one hour. Guam to Wake Island, two hours and forty minutes. On the ground thirty minutes. If you've never seen an island being a dot in the Pacific, it was Guam. Wake Island to Hawaii, four hours. Let me end the story--this part anyway--we're flying from Hawaii to Travis Air Force base. An hour outside of Travis, the pilot comes on, goes, "Gentlemen, all returning vets, Travis is closed due to heavy fog. We're going to go to McChord Air Force Base, which is outside of Seattle." Half-hour later he comes on. He goes, "We don't have the fuel to go to Fort McChord. We're going to go to San Francisco." Okay. He comes back on, "San Francisco is closed." If you know your geography, Travis is here, San Francisco is here, the bay is here. Where we going? Can't go to McChord. "We'll find another airport." He comes on. He goes, "We're going to Oakland." Oakland is the other side of the bay of San Francisco. San Francisco is closed, how clear is Oakland going to be? We're going to Oakland. Plane is so quiet. We're coming down. We could tell we're coming down, but you can't see a thing. In World War II terminology, "pea soup." We can't see a thing. We come down, we come down, we come down. All I could see is the flashing red light at the wingtips. Now, he goes into this very, very sharp left turn. I figure we're getting close because they don't turn like that. I swear I thought the tip of the wing touched San Francisco Bay. That's how low we were. Next thing you know it straightens out. We come over the seawall, we hit the runway, [and] we land. Thank God. But we're in someplace we're not supposed to be. So he comes on, once he pulls over to the side. He says, "Okay. We're going to wait out the fog and then we're going to fly to Travis." I can walk to Travis from Oakland. No one wanted to experience another takeoff or landing. There was a three star general sitting in the front of the plane. We see him go into the cockpit. About an hour later--now, look, we just flew twenty-four hours, we're all home from Vietnam, just take us home. The pilot comes on the loud speaker, and he says, "They're going to bring Travis Air Force Base to Oakland." All the personnel that needs to out-process you are coming here. The infamous DD-214. Your official record was done in Oakland Army Terminal. It was done at--yes, at Oakland. Then I got other papers assigning me--look at this one. They gave you a certificate. I can get a steak dinner.

SI: "Free steak dinner."

DB: Well, you can see that I didn't use it. I said, "Get me on the plane." Now, if you remember the last American Airlines ticket I gave you, was January 16, 1969. On the plane home, they give you a magazine, *Tour 365*, and in my case it was Tour 365, 365 days. This was basically a summary of what a GI's experience was like. I checked off in here all the different units that I was with. They had a map of Vietnam. I'm going to have to unfortunately cut this short.

SI: We can wrap it up in a minute.

DB: I brought a lot of pictures with me. I'll just share with you a couple. This is the first week I was in country. This guy came in country with me. He went home before I did. We were in an FDC that was underground. There weren't many of those, but that was one of them. That's what the FDC looked like. Lots of coverage. This was a 155 shell. The white line means it was

an illumination round. That's a 155 howitzer. This is the village of Bien Hoa. This is an interesting story. This snake, pit viper, very poisonous, it bit a dog and killed it; bit the guy who owned the dog, but the venom went into the dog. He survived, but this was our MASH unit. This was the 93rd Medivac Hospital at Long Binh Post. That's what an FDC typically looked like above ground. This was that fire support base Concord. This was the Waldorf Astoria. I mean, it actually could put signs on. Those were the two antennas that we communicated to the outside world. This was built up. This was probably two years' worth of fortifications. I can't see what that--is that the showers? That's my hooch. Nope, I take that back. That's the FDC entrance. That's me, wearing my dog tag and my Jewish mezuzah. We actually had a mess truck. We hired locals to be our--that's my hooch.

SI: Were they by the guns?

DB: No, they weren't by the guns.

SI: What were those? Just old guns?

DB: Those were the enlisted personnel. We're in hootches by the guns.

SI: I meant in this picture.

DB: No. That's far back. That's the latrine. That was our outhouse. The famous burning S-H-I-T. I don't know if you saw *Platoon* when they did it?

SI: The honey buckets.

DB: Yes, that was it. I can't even tell. That's one of the guns. These fences were put around the howitzers to protect you against RPGs. That's our shower. Again this was a good base, if you can get one of these. That's me in a jeep. I never drove myself, but I wanted to pose for a picture. That's the howitzer firing. You could see the little dust. That's me again. I'm losing weight. I left for Vietnam weighing about 175 pounds. I came home 130 pounds. Food was awful. This girl, her father was killed by the Americans, her mother was killed by the VC. She was an orphan. She was a hanger-on. She was a wonderful girl, nine years old. I have a grandchild, [who is] nine. That's just a picture [of] what the battery area looked like. This is what you looked like when you come back from a field march. You can see the dust. Now this is with the Australians--I don't know if you could tell, that vehicle doesn't look like an American vehicle. It's a different color. That's an old British lorry kind of thing. This guy was an officer. He left Vietnam and went to Germany from Vietnam. This is the day I was reassigned from A Battery to C Battery, so these guys are waving goodbye. This driver is taking me to the helipad. There's the helipad. Now, immediately you could see the terrain looks a little different than this. This is dryer. I was in a new location now. I stayed with C Battery the rest of the time I was there. This is a duster. Anybody talk about dusters?

SI: No.

DB: Twin forty-millimeter cannons, very effective weapon. It was part of our defense to have with it, but that's called a duster. This is extremely interesting. I'll show you the outside first. That's an old World War II pillbox that the Japanese built at a place called Gia Ray. Gia Ray was a mountain, Hill 837--I want to say--meters, which on the top was a relay station. Signal

Detachment was up there relaying communication. Couldn't go through the mountain, so you had to relay the messages. We were there to defend the people on the top. This is the inside of--and this was our FDC. So here's our slide rules. I told you all the calculations, an M16. These two guys were from Texas. They were Spec-4s that I would command as part of the FDC. That's ammunition being dumped. I'm a little thinner. (Husky Charlie?). I don't even know why I was in my good uniform. I was going someplace. We had USO entertainment. We called them donut dollies because they used to bring us donuts and stuff. That was some young lady who posed for a picture. So now I'm in a bush hat rather than the--that's a 155. One of my duties was also a pay officer. When our unit was split, once you got your pay--one thing the military did was make sure you got you MPC [Military Payment Certificate]. I'm in flak jacket, M16, and this was nasty because you had to go into wherever the unit was to pay everybody. This is the little town that we were going through. It was a school day, kids getting out. Life went on--school bus. More school bus. This was a mess hall that we were building at a particular firebase. Believe me, I was not a handy guy. This was a different battery configuration. Notice it has wood siding, protections. This tower was used as part of our defense. Here we're laying wire. The guns had to talk to the FDC. We would lay wire. That's what these guys are doing, digging ditches so the wire would be connected. That's me sitting on top of a 155. We're on a road march. Just a picture of the howitzers in front of us and the other vehicles. Different FDC. It's now the rainy season. Let me tell you, you've never seen mud until you've seen the rainy season mud. It's the kind where you put your boot in and you might come out with your foot and your boot is still stuck. That's another FDC. That's another FDC. This was our mascot, our dog. Not the one that got killed by the snake. Now, we're with the Australians. This is at Nui Dat. This was another good base and they actually had an officer's barracks. All the officers slept in that barracks. There's a basketball net here. That's the roaming APC [armored personnel carrier] for the FDC. Again, that's what I looked like at Nui Dat. I don't even know if I'm wearing my dog tags there. You probably heard this before, officers tried not to identify themselves. We didn't wear our caps. We didn't wear our lieutenant insignias. We tried to blend in. Basketball court, we never used it. That's what it looked like. This appeared in The D*aily News*. My wife had a cow. My brother-in-law and my father-in-law had a cow because they saw--my parents moved while I was in Vietnam. "What did he do? What is this guy, crazy?" I wouldn't write about that stuff. I didn't want to get them nervous or upset. This is when I went to get the award. This is, I'm getting ready to go home now. I'm on my way to 90th Replacement so I took a picture of the locals. Here's a Chinook bringing in resupply. I think I also took it as a Buddha in the field. It doesn't show up there. These are my New Zealand compatriots. All the guys in this picture, except these two--this guy right here, if you can see, the Royal New Zealand Artillery. We exchanged caps.

SI: I was curious what this was.

DB: Yes. He's got my service cap. I've got his. We've maintained contact. I found him. He went back to Vietnam and wrote an article that I found on the Internet. He lives in Wellington. Stayed in the service another ten years, retired a lieutenant colonel, wonderful guy.

MA: What was it like serving with the Australians and New Zealanders?

DB: Wonderful. Language was a problem. They had different idioms than we do and it took a while. They used, "Sort out," you're going to straighten something out. They "sort it out."

When they called in fire, the way they would say a number or something was a little different. That's the Australian officers' club in Vung Tau. That's him wearing that cap.

SI: This is when you were on leave at Vung Tau?

DB: No, no. This was their supply base. Nui Dat and Vung Tau weren't that far apart. We could go down for a day thing--very safe. He'd say, "Let's go down to the officer's club." [laughter] Like really odd. Now this is when I'm coming home. That's my battery commander, Captain Pence, the first sergeant of the unit, Hofstad. That's a temple. That was a Buddha in the field. They were all over the place. This is 90th Replacement where you come in and go out of Vietnam. That's the Mekong River. I had a leave in Singapore in November. You don't have to see it--well, if you want to see me. That's what I looked like in civilian clothes at the time. That's downtown Singapore. I was there for three days. It was wonderful. There are a couple of pictures of me. There's me. [laughter] I look back and say that never happened. This guy's from my unit. He became a captain. Did you ever hear of Curtis Mathes Appliance?

SI: No.

DB: It's an old TV brand. Anyway, that was his father. I can't find him. This guy flew C-130s that sprayed Agent Orange. There was a Russian civilian plane at Singapore Airport and that's me getting out of my Pan Am jet back to Vietnam. We just had a seventieth birthday party for me. My daughters tried to find my friend from Vietnam and see if they had any pictures. These are the four pictures. He's not one of these guys. I didn't fill out my uniform very well, but that's me and that's the guy I was in Singapore with. This is when I was going home. They actually gave me a plaque. These are my Australian buddies and they even look like they're Australian--I mean, New Zealand. Don't they even look like they're--? He died, Agent Orange. This is my buddy whose hat I'm wearing.

MA: So you had encounters with people who were afflicted with Agent Orange?

DB: Say again.

MA: You had encounters with other GIs who were afflicted with Agent Orange?

DB: Yes. We'll talk about that briefly, then I think we have to wrap this up. When I came home, I didn't join a veterans' group. I wanted no part of anything. I just shrunk back into the universe, had my family, and became a civilian. There's an article in the newspaper that said, "There's going to be someone at the local American Legion tonight. If you think you were exposed to Agent Orange or may have been exposed to Agent Orange, come to the meeting and we'll tell you what you need to know." I go to the meeting with another guy, who was a non-commissioned officer, police officer in town. He had a very bad skin disorder. We go to the meeting, they pull down a map of Vietnam, then they pull down an overlay. They say, "If you were anywhere near any of the overlaid area, you were exposed to Agent Orange." Well, needless to say, a hundred percent of my tour was in the overlay period. They said, "We don't know anything about it, but we're beginning to collect medical information. We recommend that you go to your local VA hospital, have some blood tests taken. We're developing a registry of information." He said, "There is one disorder that the Army is recognizing as Agent Orange caused, and that's chloracne," which was a skin disease. Turns out this guy had chloracne. I knew someone early who was affected by Agent Orange. I go to the field hospital. I meet with a

doctor and he literally tells me, "We don't know what we're looking for. We don't know how to find it, but we need this information." I said, "Fine, take my blood." That's the end of the story. Years later, 2003, my brother comes down with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The first question they asked him was, "Were you in Vietnam?" No. He wasn't, but apparently by that time, they had made a linkage between that cancer and Agent Orange. I had gotten onto an Agent Orange mailing list. Over time, you would see the Army beginning to recognize this kidney disease, this cancer, this whatever, as being Agent Orange caused and you were entitled to a disability if you meet the criteria. I knew I had hearing loss, but again I just wanted to just part company with Vietnam, with the service. I won't go into detail about my further reserve component because there really wasn't much, as I didn't do anything. In 2009, I was diagnosed Type II diabetic. Lo and behold, in 2010, I get my annual Agent Orange magazine and it said, "Type II Diabetes is now on the list of diseases." Personally, I don't see it. I don't understand. My father had diabetes; the genetic connection I can see. The Agent Orange connection I don't see, but who am I to argue. If Uncle Sam says it's now a compensable disorder--and I said, I have hearing loss. Let me see what am I entitled to. You know the VA bureaucracy; it's impossible, and they all tell you, "Go to the American Legion or VFW and get an ombudsman, who can walk you through the process." I did. The guy said, "Dennis, you're a slam dunk. You take metformin. You got diabetes. You can't hear. You're going to get something." Eighteen months later--it took eighteen months--they heard my claim. They determined that I'm thirty percent disabled. I'm entitled to be a disabled veteran, I'm a member of the club, and I get a check every month, compliments of Uncle Sam. I feel I earned it. [laughter] If you ask me, "Do I see a connection between Agent Orange?" I remember Agent Orange. I definitely remember not rain, but something happening and you could just tell the ground around you looked different, the smell was different; where there was a jungle over here, all of a sudden there's no jungle. Where did this come from? We didn't know it at the time. We had no clue. What else could I share with you in the brief time? Why don't you ask me a few more questions?

[Tape Paused]

SI: More questions, on the record?

DB: Sure.

SI: Thank you for showing us your photos. In a lot of the photos, there were local Vietnamese. Can you talk about the relationship between your force and the locals?

DB: Sure. Locals by day, VC [Viet Cong] by night. That's probably the worst thing that I can say. We probably provided more intelligence inadvertently to the enemy. There was a difference between VC and NVA. We did come across a lot of NVA, but most of our contacts were with local indigenous forces. Also, at one time, argued it was with the Eighteenth ARVN Rangers. They were probably the only unit of Vietnamese troops that I can speak favorably about. It was a terrible army, high desertion rates, uninspired, poorly equipped, poorly trained, poorly fought. They would leave their radios on loud at night so that the VC knew where they were just to avoid them, kind of thing. But the Eighteenth ARVN Rangers was a very well trained outfit. I have to share just one incident with you. Very early in the war I knew this was a losing proposition. There was this ten-year-old kid who used to hang around our battery. I walked up to him one day and I said to him, "Ho Chi Minh." He said, "Ho Chi Minh, number one." I said, "Nguyen Van Thieu," the President of South Vietnam. He goes, "Nguyen Van

Thieu, number ten." Now, I didn't speak any Vietnamese. They spoke very little English, but one-ten was a way of--you want to go down the road, you say number one or number ten, so you know whether it was a good road.

Judith Brodkin: I wasn't sure if he was still here.

DB: I was just going to call you.

JB: I'll meet you over in front of Au Bon Pain.

DB: I've got more time now. [laughter] Winning the hearts and minds, I mean this kid's ten years old and he already knows that Ho Chi Minh's a good guy and Nguyen Van Thieu is a bad guy. We didn't have that much interaction other than these people who helped out and stuff, but I'm sure she was VC. They put the black pajamas on at night and caused trouble. We did do a lot of trading. Military issue was limited. You want barstools for an officer's club that you're building? We would trade anything for something they wanted. Steaks would disappear and barstools would appear. Beer--I probably drank every kind of beer that was produced in the United States because it'd come compliments of our mess sergeant. They'd go down to the port. What did we have? Bud, Hams, Olympia, Rolling Rock. When we were with the Australians--you'll get a kick out of this--they drink differently than we do and they drink Victoria Bitters and Foster and Tiger Beer, a little stronger than our stuff. There was a longshoreman strike in Sydney and they couldn't get their beer and they had to drink American beer. Well, we never heard the end of it, how bad our beer was as compared to how good their beer was. We used to have a slush fund. You'd pay ten cents a can and it was an emergency fund, God forbid, someone needed some money for something. Ice was non-potable water. If you wanted a cold soda or something like that, you'd take the can and rub it over the ice because you couldn't put a glass of ice in the cup because you'd get sick. Malaria pills--you probably heard about the side effects of malaria pills was diarrhea. The Marines had a daily malaria pill; the Army had a weekly malaria pill. Mondays was malaria pill day. Tuesday was not the day you wanted to be on latrine duty. As an officer, I was the field sanitation officer, so I was responsible for making sure we had appropriate field sanitation where we could have the drums and a seat. We did. Otherwise we dug a hole in the ground. We put two bricks on either side of the hole. You try to do it near a tree so you could put a roll of toilet paper on the branch, and that's where you pooped. Peeing, you peed all over the country. Food, I won't ever eat chili again in my life. Whenever we had a hot meal helicoptered in, invariably it was chili. I'll never eat it again. My wife would send cans of tuna fish or canned fruit. When you got your C-rations, there was usually a little tin of peanut butter or a can of fresh fruit. The trading was notorious. "Did you get the fruit? Did you get the fruit?" I always got ham and lima beans or pork and beans, not because I'm kosher or anything, but I didn't care for that, so I would trade off with other guys with other meals. We would heat them using C4, a little explosive heat. Like I said, my wife would send me tuna fish, so I'd eat tuna fish. Do you know Katz's Deli in New York?

SI: Yes.

DB: They have the hanging salamis from World War II? "Send a salami to your boy in the Army." Well, I got one of those, but it was rotten to the core. It didn't survive the heat. Candy--Hershey's produced tropical chocolate, it was chalk. It wouldn't melt. It didn't taste particularly good but it was the closest thing to chocolate. Cigarettes came in a sundry pack,

free. The Vietnamese loved mentholated cigarettes. If you wanted to trade with the VC or something like that, Salems and Kools were the number one. For whatever reason they liked menthol. I never learned. I didn't smoke. I very easily could've smoked because it was for free. You usually got a writing tablet in the mail. I wrote a letter home to my wife almost every day, some days more than one. She wrote to me, but of course we didn't get the mail all the time and the mail didn't always go out. She always got nervous. She knew I'd write almost every day, but she'd go three, four, five days without getting a letter. "What's happening? Where's Dennis?" That personal story is almost more interesting than the military story. Just getting by on the little things.

SI: I know they had like MARS [Military Affiliate Radio Service] stations where you could call home?

DB: Yes. I did that once. I did that once. It's funny. It's good that you have all this information. You're sitting like this, waiting for a phone and with the MARS, you'd make a call, you don't know where it's going to land, and then it becomes a landline. Mine went to Phoenix, Arizona, "Hold on please." My wife is in Manhattan. With the twelve-hour time difference, I'm calling at eleven o'clock at night for an eleven o'clock in the morning phone call. You have to use "over." You have to use military terminology because it was a radio signal, so it would cut out if you spoke over the other person. I have a tendency to speak over other people and she had a tendency to over speak. I'd say, "Judy, wait until you're done, then say over. Then, I'll know to start talking again." I had three minutes to say everything I wanted to say, but I had one phone call. There's eight guys behind you listening to every word that you said. You didn't have much privacy. We had an R&R in Hawaii, which was wonderful. The trouble was you had to come back. By this time you knew what you were experiencing and the flight back to Vietnam was worse than when you first went over. Plus, there are guys coming home through Hawaii and they'd go, "Short, short. Six hours left."

SI: One last question for this session. Either going out of the Bay area or coming back to the Bay area, did you ever run into any protestors or any opposition?

DB: Certainly not on my departure. I do remember--because remember, we weren't supposed to be at Oakland. We might have at Travis, because more flights were going into Travis than Oakland. Even though Oakland was a major Army terminal, there weren't that many guys being out processed. We might have caught a break there, but I do remember flying home in uniform and it was chilly. I was not welcome. I wasn't called "baby killer." I'm not going to give you any of that nonsense, but it wasn't like, "Welcome home, GI," like you get now--"Thank you for your service." None of that. I never walked in any parade when they had them. I did go to Washington when they broke ground for the Vietnam Memorial. I was there for the tenth anniversary. I have all that information. Like I said, my daughter worked at the Smithsonian so I did go to Washington. In my legal career I did a lot of work in D.C. and I don't miss going to the Wall. Lost friends--no real close friends except for Bill Britton. That still is devastating when I think about it. I know exactly where on the wall to find the names. I hope I never find another name by accident that I [wasn't] expecting. Like I say, I'm not in any--other than the Disabled Vets, I didn't join or seek out Jewish War Veterans or any group like that.

SI: Were you active in your class's effort to get a Vietnam Veterans' Memorial on campus?

DB: Yes. I served on the committee that did the location. We did it because of the teach-in. We thought next to Scott Hall was an appropriate place for it. Carl Woodward, who was our class president as you know, he was in Vietnam. There were a few of us who had--now, my roommate, Howard McGinn, who didn't serve, was also very active in the committee. So you didn't have to be a Vietnam vet to work on the committee. I stopped a few students and asked them if they knew where the memorial was; they didn't. So I'm not sure it's--

SI: It's there. We point it out. [laughter]

DB: I know. I'm not blaming you. I'm just saying it's not a--

MA: I see what you mean. A lot of students just walk by it.

DB: I know they skateboard by it because it suffered some damage from skateboarding, but we're happy that the list of names is that small. There were only two people from our class, Bruce Lawrence and Ed Brague. I think I told you this Colin MacManus, who I'm pretty sure was brigade commander. I lost high school classmates. I taught in South Brunswick High School when I came home and there were some kids from South Brunswick who didn't make it. It's not a war that touched as many people as World War II, that's for sure.

SI: Do you mean people who were your students that went over or just people that you knew?

DB: No, people whose families I knew from the late '60s. There were some from '72, '73. Yes.

SI: Well, thank you so much for all your time today. We appreciate it and hopefully we will be able to continue with another session.

DB: Sounds good to me.

SI: Thank you.

DB: Like I said, I have more to tell, but I think I hit the highlights. I just have to show you this. This was the tenth anniversary.

SI: The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial?

DB: Yes, right. Then they did an exhibit called, "The Things that were Left Behind." Did you see that?

SI: Yes.

DB: That was incredibly moving. Incredibly moving. I later found out--I don't know if it was Jan Scruggs or not--I think it was--that he was in the 199th Light Infantry Brigade when I was there. [Editor's Note: Jan Scruggs is the Founder and President Emeritus of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, which advocated for the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial to be built. He retired as President of VVMF in June 2015.] We were in support of the 199th. Did you see that in his--? Does he mention at all that he was in the 199th?

SI: I do not see.

DB: I don't see it either. He might have been in another thing, but we served together in some respects. As far as the Vietnam literature is concerned, *Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo, *Dispatches* by Michael Herr. The best is *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien. Then there was a book I had just read. I've had it for a while but I didn't read it. It's by a guy from New Jersey, Norman, called *These Few Good Men* or *These Good Men.* [Editor's Note: *These Good Men: Friendships Forged from War*, published in 1990 was written by Michael Norman who served as a Marine during the Vietnam War.] It was interesting because he writes about his Vietnam experience at a reunion they had just up in Montclair. Very good book.

SI: Michael Norman?

DB: Michael Norman, yes.

SI: Yes, I'll tell you more about him.

DB: Is he going to be honored as the oral history--?

SI: He was.

DB: He was?

SI: Yes, he and his wife.

DB: There you go. Yes. Well, that's his book. I recommend it. Then, of course, the David Maraniss book, which is as I said, encompasses more than Vietnam.

SI: Well, thank you very much.

DB: Okay.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

Reviewed by Molly Graham 2/10/2016
Reviewed by Dennis Brodkin 3/2/2016
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