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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS BRODKIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Molly Graham: This begins an interview with Dennis Brodkin. The interview is taking place at 1330 Southwest 3rd Avenue in Portland, Oregon. The date is June 11, 2015. The interviewer is Molly Graham. Dennis, let's first go over anything we wanted to cover from the last session that we missed.

Dennis Brodkin: Sure, I thought it might be helpful--once I came home, I went through some more things that I had that I didn't bring to New Jersey with me for the interview. Also, the interview brought back some memories of things that I had forgotten to mention the first time through, so I thought maybe I'll just close up some loose ends before we go on. Off the air, I presented to you a chronology that I put together, so hopefully that will help when we finish this product to put things in the chronological perspective because I know in these interviews I tend to digress or go out of order. Now you have that in front of you. One of the things I meant to mention, because my ending up in the artillery was the furthest thing in my mind when I decided to go advanced ROTC. In fact, I thought one of the benefits of going ROTC was that I would--to the extent that you could control your destiny in the military and avoid the draft, I thought by going ROTC and becoming a commissioned officer, I would at least control some aspects of where I would end up and what I might be doing. Part of what we were told in ROTC was that if you achieved the status of a Distinguished Military Student or Distinguished Military Graduate, that the Army would acknowledge that achievement by granting you your first choice in terms of branch and/or geographical assignment. What I'm showing you now are the two certificates that I received. One, indicating that in fact I was a Distinguished Military Student and, in fact, on graduation, I was a Distinguished Military Graduate. At the start of my senior year, in the fall of '64, I was asked to complete a form--I think I mentioned this early in the interview--where I had to designate my three branches of choice. First choice I put down was transportation corps because again, I had heard through the scuttlebutt that that wasn't bad duty. Second, I put down signal corps. You had to choose one combat arm. That is infantry, artillery, or armor. I certainly wasn't going to opt for infantry. I really didn't like tanks. I figured the least of all the evils was artillery. I selected artillery as my third choice. Come graduation day in June of '65, when I got my written commission, my assignment was artillery. I was very surprised that I ended up in artillery. But to make things a little bit better, the artillery had two components. One was field artillery and one was air defense. Air defense artillery was basically missiles that would ring cities to protect us in the event of an air attack or in Europe to protect those cities against missile or air attack, or generally just what it sounds like, air defense. I'm showing you the insignias that you wore on your uniform. Field artillery was crossed cannons. Air defense artillery was crossed cannons with a missile through the middle. So I was air defense. Well, as you have already heard from my interview, when I was called to active duty, instead of going to Fort Bliss, Texas, which was where you got trained for air defense, I was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for field artillery. My career took a few unexpected turns. This was just another one. The promise of being a Distinguished Military Graduate and getting your first choice didn't mean much. Obviously, I think as I mentioned, I had orders to Vietnam, which said, I would be a non-field artillery unit and my MOS was that of a civil affairs officer. As soon as I got to Vietnam that all changed and my MOS became 1193, which is a field artillery unit commander. What I originally was assigned after Fort Sill--as I mentioned to you, I was going to Fort Meade to work in the NSA. My original MOS--I'm just looking through the paperwork because I don't remember the number--was 9301, which meant tactical intelligence staff officer. On paper, I started my career as a tactical intelligence staff officer. Then, I was a civil affairs officer, but in

real life hardcore, I ended up a field artillery unit commander. When I finished with Shaun, I think I had shared with him that on the plane home they gave us a magazine, *Tour 365,* which was an attempt to encapsulate in annual form what you did over there, who you served with, what our mission in Vietnam was all about. It was like a *Life Magazine* summary of your tour in Vietnam. What I didn't bring with me, and this will probably surprise you, is that we actually had a yearbook. You would think I went to high school in Vietnam. I'm showing Molly this yearbook, the cover which says 2nd Battalion 35th Artillery. It has the battalion crest. It has the battalion motto, "Forward Always," and it says, "Vietnam 1969." If you leaf through it, just as you would in high school, it's got pictures of your favorite teacher and all your classmates. [laughter] In this case, it opens up with a picture of my commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hollingsworth, and then it goes unit by unit. I will just take you to this page, where it starts with all the officers in rank order. You have a lieutenant colonel, two majors, a whole bunch of captains. I was a first lieutenant by that time, so I'm a ranking lieutenant. I believe this yearbook was done at the end of the summer, 1969. I know that for a number of reasons because there were a number of guys who I knew who died and they're obviously not in here; there were guys who came in country a little later and they're in here; and guys who I knew from earlier in country were not here. I'm pointing to a picture of myself. These are the people that were all officers throughout the battalion. Then you have pictures of all the non-commissioned officers. Then it goes by battery. There are four batteries in a battalion. Three firing batteries, Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. By this time, I started out as alpha battery. By the time of this yearbook, I am in Charlie battery. I'm now showing Captain Pence, who was my battery commander in Charlie Battery. I had mentioned earlier in the interview that there's one gentleman in Vietnam that I served with that I've been looking for and I can't find. It's this guy (Charles Robert Mathes?). He's a lieutenant here, but he gets promoted to captain in other pictures that I have of him. He was captain. This is the senior ranking non-commissioned officer, First Sergeant Hofstad, wonderful gentleman, wonderful guy. Then the pictures of the officers by unit and I'm the senior FDO in the FDC. Now Molly, you weren't at the first interview, but I shared with Shaun, this flag, this ensign that was presented to me of the Star of David and Ten Commandments, which was ripped off by some of the guys with me. I was the only Jewish officer--actually, the only Jewish personnel in our unit. Here's a picture in the yearbook of the flag, which we--there's a flagpole that I'm showing you, but we didn't actually raise it. We did have it on our armored personnel carrier. This officer, Gary Gardenhire, I've maintained contact with. He became a state senator in Oklahoma. I have a record of the tribute that was paid to him when he retired. As it turned out, he's a very prominent state senator. I remember him as a young lieutenant who could play guitar. We spent many nights together. He had a sister who lived in New Jersey. When he came home from Vietnam, he visited my wife and I in New Jersey. I've stayed in contact with Gary, but I can't find Bob Mathes. Now, this is pictures of the guys in the FDC, the Fire Direction Center. My job was to train these gentleman and make them an effective force. Then if you go through the rest of the yearbook--and of course there were opportunities to make jokes, captions under the pictures, bring some levity. I was so surprised when--I remembered them sitting us for these pictures. I'm glad I have it because it's got some good memorabilia, pictures and things. The other thing I did after the interview was I looked at the Internet to see what I could find, if anything--and I've tried this before, but maybe I just wasn't lucky before--but I was able to find--because a lot of information has been declassified. I actually have, in my possession, which I'm going to give you a copy of--this is a

copy of the quarterly operation report of our battalion. It's dated July 31, 1969, which is when I was there. I could not find any other period that was covered. Coincidentally, I was very lucky. It actually covers a period of time when I was there. What an operations report does is describe what happened in the unit during that period of time. So if you go through it, it says, "Personnel. How many personnel did you have?" It gives you a chart, a table of equipment and manpower that said you're supposed to have one hundred and one men in your battery, six officers and one hundred and one enlisted personnel. Well, if you look here, C Battery at that time, had seven officers and ninety-eight enlisted men. We had one officer more than we were supposed to have. I remembered that being the case. That didn't last very long because B Battery was one short and our extra fellow was transferred over to C Battery. What I found interesting here--and by the way, it tells you how many awards were issued during this period. Casualties, seven killed, thirty-two wounded, six non-battle casualties. What's a non-battle casualty? One of the things I mentioned to Shaun, and I had a picture of, was a snakebite. One of our men was bitten by a snake, killed the dog, and the guy was taken to the hospital. Well, lo and behold--I'm rifling through the pages. I found reference. I thought I circled it to make it easy. [laughter] As part of this operations report, I was intrigued to find the following: under the paragraph called, "Safety," it said, "There were three accidents in the battalion during the reporting period." The one personnel accident reported in paragraph twelve above: "A snake bite occurred late in April and was not reported in the last quarterly report." Actually, that happened when I was in A Battery, which was in the prior reporting period. I was relocated, or reassigned I should say, from A Battery to C Battery in May of 1969. The reason I was reassigned, not to blow my own horn, but the FDC in C Battery was not performing up to par. They thought I was experienced enough now and knew enough to take charge of and train the C Battery FDC. I left A Battery very reluctantly, because I liked the guys, grew fond of [them], and ended up in C Battery. It was interesting that the A Battery snakebite ended up in the July operations report. Then what it does, is it explains, in detail, what the highlights of the operations were during this reporting period. Sadly, for B Battery, it goes into great detail--and I had mentioned this again in part one of my interview--of the incident on May 18, 1969, when B Battery got overrun and seven of our colleagues got killed. It goes into detail here and later in the operations report it has a summary of lessons learned--what we should take out of our preparedness and why the guys got killed and what we could do better the next time. Then it goes to C Battery, and this was fantastic reading, because it really did remind me--and it goes through almost on a daily basis as to where I was. The fog of war and the passage of years, you just forget. This reminded me that my memory wasn't so far off. Although, there are a couple of things in here I wasn't quite sure. For example, it says at the beginning of the reporting period, Battery C was located at Black Horse. I think I pointed out to you on the map that I showed you earlier where Black Horse was. It was the headquarters of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which by the way, was led by George Patton's son, George Patton III, with the mission of general support, reinforcing the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Then it says, "On May 9th, Battery C moved four howitzers to fire support base Mac. On May 12th, Battery C received four howitzers to fire support base Keener." I remembered going there and in that particular mission we were supporting the 18th ARVN, ARVN being the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Army. "On May 15th, the two remaining howitzers moved from Black Horse to Keener. Then the whole battery moved to Xuan Loc. Then three guns went to Black Horse. Three other guns go to Concord." They're showing how, almost through this entire period, the entire battery was never intact for a

very long period of time. The six-howitzer unit, two howitzers would go in one place. Oftentimes when that happened and the period when I won the Bronze Star, is we were in a split configuration and I was the senior--even though I was only a first lieutenant, we only had one captain in the battery and I was the senior first lieutenant. I was in charge of the two guns or three guns, or sometimes four guns. Usually, we split three and three. I didn't realize or remember until I read this--yes, there were times we went four guns and two guns. What I also learned, but was not surprised to find out, that during this three-month period of May, June, and July, of the three firing batteries, we fired almost by double the number of rounds than the other batteries. In the month of May, we fired 10,566 rounds of artillery. B Battery fired, by comparison, 5,400, and A Battery 5,700. The total for the battalion was 21,000. We fired half of the total that the battalion fired in May. That's the month that I won the Bronze Star. In May of 1969 was a major Vietcong-NVA offensive. That's why the round fired that month were that high. The next month June, we dropped down to 5,800 rounds. B Battery only fired 4,800 and in July we fired, again, 5,800 rounds. A Battery fired 6,000, B Battery 4,600. Also by comparison, moves. A Battery, they didn't move at all in May, two times in June, two times in July; four times total. B Battery moved once in May, seven times in June, seven times in July; fifteen times. C Battery moved four times in May, four times in June, and seven times in July; fifteen times. We moved more than the other three. I did not know that at the time. I knew we were called the moving battalion because as I mentioned to Shaun, our mission was to support whoever, whatever operations, whatever infantry units needed us--1st Infantry, 9th, 25th, 199th, ARVN. Not so much this operations period, but the next period, August, September, October, we spent most of our time with the Australians and New Zealand.

MG: Is there a record in there of the hits and kills and things like that?

DB: There may be. Yes. Let me see if there is. There are after certain operations. That's a good question. No, they don't show that--fire, train, intelligence. They do break it down by the type of ammunition. Most of the ammunition that we fired was HE, high explosive, but we also had WP, white phosphorous, and ILL, illumination rounds. Miles travelled by service battery ammunition trains. We had to be resupplied. They keep track of how many miles. The month of May, service battery ammunition trains travelled 16,431 miles. Aerial resupplies, seventy-one in May, seventy-six in June, eighteen in July. Tonnage, 106 tons of ammunition. We're going to get there. I think they may have casualties. Patients treated at the battalion aid station, thirty-four in May, seventy-five in June, eighty-three in July. Those could be anywhere from combat related injuries to the kind I had.

MG: I was going to ask you about that. Did your injury show up on any of these reports?

DB: No. When I was drunk?

MG: Yes.

DB: No. Not that I've seen. That would've been this operation period. So let me just read, for example, from the lessons learned category. You'll get a kick out of this, I think. "Four lessons were learned from the attack on Husky Compound, May 18th. Number One, a bunker is not the best place to be during a sapper attack. Although a well-constructed bunker can sustain a direct hit by a mortar, a sapper--" Do you know what a sapper is? That's the enemy carrying a satchel

with high explosives and they throw the satchel. You could see why a bunker is not a good place to be.

MG: Did you have satchel charges a lot in the combat that you experienced?

DB: I was only exposed to that once. More RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], long distance. We were the eight hundred pound gorilla--a 155 self-propelled howitzer is a pretty intimidating weapon. It wasn't the kind of thing that could be taken out very easily, more so by indirect fire than by--very brave, courageous, satchel guy could do the trick, but we usually had pretty well defended fire support bases. We only got breached that I remember on maybe two occasions now that I think about it. Rocket fire and mortar, more so. This particular case, "B Battery, the sappers got into the perimeter. The sapper is trained to fire at the aperture of the bunker, the opening, thus preventing the defender from participating in the final protective fires. Therefore, well prepared foxholes in the vicinity of the bunkers are more effective fighting positions than being in your bunker." That's almost counterintuitive because the first place you went to when you took incoming was to your bunker. Second lesson learned, "It is vital for personnel manning bunkers and/or foxholes during a mortar attack to stay alert for a ground attack and to return fire immediately." I think that goes without saying. The third lesson learned is, "One of the keys to an effective defense against sapper attack is illumination." We loved full moons. We liked nights that were bright and lit because we always felt that we could see better. They didn't have the cover of darkness. When the calendar came around to the time of month when there wasn't bright lights at night, we found that we were firing more illumination rounds in support of troops than not. These were very high-powered rounds and they would light up the area very, very well. Clearly what it says here, "The sappers trained to operate in the dark and once he penetrates the perimeter, he relies on confusion amongst the defenders and their inability to differentiate between the defender and the attacker. Thus, periodic illumination will assist in the detection of sappers." Lastly, and this was true whether you were under attack or not, "It is very necessary to establish and practice alternate means of communication throughout," because you found you'd lose your landline. They would cut the wire. You couldn't communicate by radio or phone so you'd have to [use] hand signals, or messengers, or whatever else. Now, here's what else you would find in an operations report--logistics, supplies, what could we do better. "The current rubber floor mat used in the M109 is unsatisfactory in the rainy season." No kidding. "These mats clog up easily, are readily damaged due to reported cleanings, and are difficult to replace. Cyclone fencing provides much better footing." Well, I got news for you. I don't remember seeing rubber floor matting. Our guys knew not to use it. "Evaluations. Cyclone fence is proven a better floor mat. Recommendation. Use cyclone fences." I do not see--let me go back to the beginning--whether or not--since body count was such an integral part of what we were all about.

MG: It would seem useful to evaluate the ammunition used and the amount of personnel.

DB: They have our casualties, but not the enemy.

MG: Whose job was it to put these reports together?

DB: Well, there's an S-1, personnel, and the clerks. At battalion level, there are much more administrative offices. This is signed by the acting adjutant general. The AG unit would do that.

As you could see, the distribution was US Army War College, US Commanding General Staff College, Army Air Defense School, Army Armor School. This would get transmitted throughout the chain of command, not only in Vietnam, but stateside. Like I say, I don't even remember what site I found this in. It was almost a miracle that I found it. It was originally sent to the commanding officer of 54th Field Artillery Group. Then his senior officer, II Field Force Vietnam Artillery; his commanding officer, II Field Force Vietnam; his commanding officer, Commanding General United States Army Vietnam; his commanding officer, Commander-in-Chief United States Army Policies; and finally, Department of the Army. I want to add that I also found and will send you copies of the Operations Reports for the 23rd Field Artillery Group and II Field Force Artillery, which were our superior command groups.

MG: That was my next question. Was this material taught to officers at the War College?

DB: I imagine that this is the kind of stuff at the War College and so on. This is primary source material. I mean, I was thrilled that I found it. Now, you could see that the cover page, it's unclassified. At one time, it was highly classified. When did this get unclassified? 1980. This is 1969. It took quite a few years. Of course it didn't get put on the Internet in 1980 because there was no such thing. Then of course, they give you a two-page explanation of what classification means. This was probably one of the more significant things I found since I came home because this was a good summary of the three months that I spent in Vietnam and helped me remember those fire support bases and where we were, and who we were with, and what we were supporting. Like I said, when I plotted these coordinates--I'm pointing to the fire support base record--I had a picture in my mind, Vietnam and where we were. Our maps were large maps, but of a small area. We didn't get the pan out, big picture. I knew I was northeast of Saigon. I knew I was thirty kilometers north, but I really didn't have that visual picture in my mind. Now that I can Google Earth it and Google Map it, I could see it made sense. This was our area of operation and this is why we moved from these points to these points. I remember some of them were really in the boonies. When I look today, by the way, at that map, there's a new super highway that runs from Saigon to Xuan Loc, which bypasses a lot of the places. When I go, if I go, I'll be most interested in seeing--it's like seeing Interstate 5 now in Vietnam. [laughter]

MG: You are planning to visit this area next year?

DB: Yes. I most certainly intend to visit all--I know already that you can't go to all of these places and I know I'm not going to see anything. Long Binh Post, which was the largest military base in the world at the time, in 1969, is now a warehouse office park. Bien Hoa Airbase is still there, but of course, the Vietnamese have done a wonderful job of sanitizing the country of the war. What they kept is what they wanted to keep. I don't mean this in a propagandist stage, or I'm not meaning this negatively, but most tours will take you to the Cu Chi Tunnels because that's a phenomenal story. [Editor's Note: The Cu Chi Tunnels are an underground tunnel system in Cu Chi, Vietnam, which is northwest of Saigon. They are only a part of the tens of thousands of miles of underground tunnels that the communists constructed. They are a popular tourist attraction today.] It's amazing when I think about it, that the Vietcong were literally under the streets of Saigon. Nixon, when he announced the invasion of Cambodia said, "Our mission is to wipe out COSVN," which was the acronym for the headquarters of the NVA and the VC. Well, it turns out, it was on the outskirts of Saigon. They didn't have to go down into the Ho Chi

Minh Trail. The American Embassy in Vietnam is now a war museum. I know people who have been back and they said, "Dennis, if you're expecting"--it's not like Normandy, by comparison, where we went. Pointe Du Hoc looks like it did in 1944. The rest of Normandy doesn't, but Pointe Du Hoc does. Or if you go to Sainte-Mere-Eglise, where the 82nd and 101st Airborne had these famous drops, you could look around; you can get the sense. I don't think that's the case in Vietnam. Hue has been restored. Da Nang--China Beach doesn't exist anymore. Xuan Loc, my friends, the Kiwis, they went back. My friend Ron wrote a report of what it was like. No sign that there were--they looked for markers in the ground and they found a couple of things. For the most part, there's very few traces that the Americans were ever there in 1969.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about this project or what you showed me online with the map of all the firebases?

DB: Sure. Yes. Well, there's a lot of interest from veterans and stuff, but there's a couple of gentleman who took it upon themselves to locate with information that was available to them. I found mistakes, but they went back and looked at old maps, or diaries, or operation reports, or whatever they were able to get their hands on, and get the coordinates for all these landing zones, fire support bases in Vietnam, over the course of the American involvement. If you know the name of the site, Fire Support Base Nancy, Libby, Concord, you can just go through that chart and pull up the latitude and longitude. Then, you type in that latitude and longitude in Google, guess what. Red dot comes up. You take that map and then juxtapose that against a map of Vietnam, and you could go back to some of the military maps--I showed you some of the contemporaneous maps from Vietnam at the time--put them side by side. They say, "Here's what it looked like from a map of Vietnam in 1969. Here's where it is on Google Earth." You can recreate the locations pretty accurately. Like I said, when you put your feet on the ground, it's not going to look anything--well, it shouldn't. Those are the ones I remember. We may have had an occasional day trip, pardon my expression, to a particular fire support base that we didn't name. Interestingly, on that list they have a lot of unnamed locations.

MG: You were pointing out where some of the Australian forces were and the New Zealand guys. [Editor's Note: Australia was involved in the Vietnam War from 1962 to 1973. Over 60,000 soldiers served in the country and 521 were killed. New Zealand was involved during the same time, however they committed 3,000 soldiers and thirty-seven were killed.]

DB: Yes.

MG: Can you talk maybe a little bit more about your relationship with them and then their relationship with each other because maybe it was different by this time?

DB: Very good question. You know how Yankees and Confederates feel about each other?

MG: Yes.

DB: That's how the Aussies and the Kiwis feel about each other--big internal rivalry. They mock each other's national anthem. "Waltzing Matilda" is the one of [Australia's] anthems and the Kiwis had their own version. I don't remember it, but it was off-color and it ended up with something with toilet paper wiping a certain part of your body. That much I remember, but there was a natural rivalry between the Kiwis and the Aussies. We were with the Kiwis more so.

Now, they were a very small part of--I'll call them ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] because that's what the Australian-New Zealand allies were called, the ANZAC forces. The Australians, called the First Australian Task Force, they came over as units and went home as units, unlike the American involvement; I went over by myself as an individual replacement. Once the war got going, that's how most GI--unlike Iraq, where we now send over units by unit--we learned our lesson not to send people over just as individuals and make them feel part of the unit and learn some *espirit de corps*. They were in the RARs, Royal Australian Regiment. There's One RAR, Three RAR, Four RAR. The group of Kiwis I was with was the 161 Battery. Most of the ATF was Aussies. The infantry was Aussies. The command was Aussies, but the Kiwis were artillery. There may have been non-artillery Kiwis, but I don't remember too much of them. This 161 Battery was a very, very tight knit group. Since we were in support of Aussie operations, we also got to meet and greet the Aussie commanders. In the yearbook, there's a couple of pictures and the pictures that I showed you of the Aussie commander. I would speak with them because we'd go on operations together. This is going to come as a surprise and I think I mentioned to Shaun, one of the first things you have to overcome [are] the language differences. The accents were extraordinary and the idioms were quite different. Guys from the south would talk different than guys from the north, but let me tell you, guys from the United States, whether north or south, spoke a lot different than the English spoken by the guy from Melbourne or Sydney. When they would call in fire, it was often times: "Repeat. Say again." We don't say repeat in artillery. Just a quick anecdote. In the artillery, you never say "repeat," because repeat is a command given to the guns to do it again. "Fire," they say. When you're talking on the radio and stuff like that, to break that habit, you always used to say, "Say again." When you were talking to the Aussies or the Kiwis on the radio, there's a lot of say agains because they didn't quite understand the idiom. Of course, their food and drink was different. They hated our beer. I gave an anecdote already about it. There was a beer strike and they wanted no part of our beer.

MG: Maybe if students access this interview or they are learning about Vietnam, I think they'd be surprised to learn about New Zealand and Australia's involvement. Can you talk about their motivation and involvement in the war?

DB: Well, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization [SEATO] and ANZAC--there was a treaty obligation that they were committed to. [Editor's Note: The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, or SEATO, was formed in 1954 by the United States, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan to oppose communism in Southeast Asia. It was disbanded in 1977.] Australia and New Zealand was part of the Commonwealth of Nations, but had a great deal of independence. The Queen was their ultimate royal monarch. I already shared my terrible anecdote about what happened when I toasted the queen, most inappropriately. I won't repeat it. It's already part of the interview.

MG: I think I remember that.

DB: If not, forget about it. They were there by treaty obligation. Of course geographically, if you believed the Domino Theory--Southeast Asia, China, Russia, Vietnam falls, the rest of Southeast Asia falls. Southeast Asia falls, it's a threat to Indonesia. The threat to Indonesia ultimately is a threat to Australia and New Zealand. To them, they thought there was a higher motivation. I didn't get that sense talking to them individually, but that was the political

malarkey that they were sold. They were mostly enlisted personnel. I don't remember them--some of the Australians were drafted, I think, but the Kiwis were all enlisted. One of the other things I remember were the Maoris, the Aborigines, indigenous population of New Zealand and Australia. The Maoris were a huge part of the New Zealand lore and there were quite a few very different looking, not Anglo looking, New Zealanders but Asian, Polynesian looking Maoris with different names--Taylors, and Turners and Rosses were not their names. They were these beautiful twenty-seven syllable names. They were very friendly. We also had Thai soldiers. We also had Koreans who fought, [and Filipinos]. Well, Filipinos were basically fought with the Americans. We had a division of South Korean soldiers. We had a division of Thai soldiers. Very motivated, very well trained, very good for it. They were not slack. They were the best of what those countries had. They were more motivated than the typical American unit.

MG: I also wondered if they gave you some kind of cultural education.

DB: In Vietnam?

MG: In Vietnam, yes.

DB: Well, the answer to that is, there was an in-county orientation. As I mentioned to Shaun, I had a sixteen-hour Vietnam orientation in Fort Meade before I went. Then at 90th Replacement, you get a three or four day orientation. To answer your question directly, no, we were not given a piece of paper that said, "Popular expressions, do's and don'ts." You learned dos and don'ts. There were a lot of expressions that were very demeaning, which we picked up. In Korea, if I recall, and again I don't mean this offensively, I'm just trying to answer your question. The Chinese were "Chinks." The North Koreans were "Dinks." Some "Gook" talk. In Vietnam, the enemy, they were "Gooks." There were a lot of derogatory expressions. We learned a few of the curse words. One of the expressions we used quite often was, "*Di di mao*," which meant, "Get out of here. Get lost. We don't want you around here." Actually, the expression was "*Di di Mao, Gook*." It turns out that we would use that term also with our colleagues in the South Vietnamese Army, which we did not have much respect for, and for good reason. They were not well trained, not well motivated. This was their war, but they didn't fight like it was their war. There were some notable exceptions. This one unit that we were in support of, the 18th ARVN Rangers, were phenomenal. They were a terrific unit. If the rest of the South Vietnamese Army was like the 18th ARVN Division, the war might have had a different outcome, but they were lazy fighters. They were careless. They were sloppy. This was not a war that was going to be won very easily. It was going to be our war to win or lose, unfortunately. Maybe this would be a side anecdote. I had a radio. Of course, it was Armed Forces Vietnam, which is what most guys listened to. In fact, Adrien Cronauer, if you saw *Good Morning Vietnam*, he was not there when I was there. [Editor's Note: Adrien Cronauer was an Air Force sergeant who was a disc jockey for Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam from 1965 to 1966. He was the inspiration for the 1987 film, *Good Morning, Vietnam* where he is portrayed by Robin Williams.] Pat Sajak was an Armed Forces Radio Vietnam broadcaster. [Editor's Note: "Wheel of Fortune" gameshow host Pat Sajak joined the Army and served in Vietnam as a disc jockey for Armed Forces Radio in 1968.] Each unit had, like on Sunday, a half hour propaganda, a half hour to report what was going on and here are the highlights of the 25th Infantry, and of course, music. There was lots of fighting over what music you're going to listen to. The black soldiers [said], "Turn it up," when the soul music came on. Of course, when the country music came on, the rednecks would [say],

"Turn that up." The black soldiers would say, "Turn that off." There would be this good natured ripping about whose music was better and what music was being played, and stuff like that. Well, I was the odd ball out. I would tune my radio into local Vietnamese stations. I love the sound of Vietnamese music. It was very haunting and very different--completely different from my untrained ear. Guys would bust my chops all the time--"You listen to the gook music," that kind of thing. That was the exception rather than the rule, but when I could listen to it, I would listen to it. So no, our cultural education was passed down from troop to troop, soldier to soldier. You learned on the job. I since learned, for example, that this motion that we typically use of asking someone to come here, that was a derogatory gesture. They more wanted you to do something like this, not this or this--I'm pointing with my fingers.

MG: You mentioned that in some units there were rednecks and black soldiers working together. Were there incidents of discrimination or racism?

DB: The best way to answer that is, when we were engaged and at war, the answer is no. When we were back at base camp, the troop self-segregated. Let me give you a sense of what the battery looked like. You notice that all the officers are white. These are all the senior ranking officers; they're white. Well, I'll go through it real quickly with you. When you get down to the--there's a fair amount of African Americans. We had quite a few Latinos, too. Let me do it this way. Service battery is not a good example. We're going in rank. Mostly white, but--and don't forget most of these guys are drafted; other than the NCOs and officers. When you get into the batteries themselves now, when you get to the guns--it's hard for me to (…?). This is section one. This is section two. Well, in A Battery there wasn't quite as many as the C Battery. I can't give you a breakdown, but I think you'd agree there's a fair number. To answer your question, yes, most of the non-commissioned officers were southern. Most of the army was southern and they brought with them their particular biases and their cultural norms. The black soldiers, who were from the north exposed to that, reacted differently than the black soldiers from the south who saw re-creation of what they were used to at home, just in Vietnam. There was an undercurrent, and often times, an overcurrent. We didn't have any fighting. We didn't have any fragging incidents--one soldier shooting another because of race--but there's a racial tension. It usually came when we were in base camp away from the war. When you're at the war, you put that nonsense behind you. You raise a very interesting question. When I arrived in country, our battery executive officer was an African American, who as I later learned, stayed in the Army and I think made colonel. He was a career guy. The number of officers total eighteen, twenty-one. Out of the twenty-five officers in our battalion, we had one African American. When he left, there were none. In July of 1969, there were no black officers. Today's Army that would not be the case at all, not even close. Back then, that was the case. We had a lot of illiterate, uneducated, poor, very strong--that's good soldier right--guys. We may have had an equal number of Hispanic to African American. But total, I'd say twenty percent, which was probably a reflection of the country overall. Let me just add one other thing. Infantry probably had many--infantry was a little different than artillery. Artillery was a specialized branch and I'll just leave it at that.

MG: I think you had mentioned in part one of in your interview that you had experienced some discrimination in Vietnam being the only Jewish guy.

DB: Not in Vietnam. Not discrimination. I had in the Army stateside, part of because of my reassignment and how I lost my assignment to the NSA.

MG: That is the incident you were referring to.

DB: Yes. In fact, just the opposite; I was a curiosity in Vietnam, because even amongst the battery, the 101 non-commissioned officers, there were no Jews.

MG: Did you ever run into any other Jewish guys on R&R or as you moved around?

DB: Again, good question. Nothing that we made a point of. No.

MG: You had talked about when you were in Fort Meade, you were on the golf course and sort of waiting. You were waiting to see what was going to happen to you.

DB: Right.

MG: Did you feel like you had enough or the proper training when you arrived in Vietnam?

DB: Oh, absolutely not. No. This thing happened so quickly. If you look at that chronology, and as I mentioned to Shaun, when I got my original orders assigning me to Fort Meade, Maryland, I thought my ticket was written for a two-year stateside assignment. Remember, the day I reported to active duty however was the date of the 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.] We knew a lot of things were going to change. I was watching guys get orders for Vietnam. I was witnessing the tremendous turnover in the war. I saw Johnson's call. 1969 was the greatest number of Americans in Vietnam during the whole war. [I] saw all that happening, but not to sound aloof, but not me. Even when I got the bad news that I wasn't going to be in the NSA and I was assigned to Fort Meade, there was no artillery unit at Fort Meade. The Army doesn't move you on a daily basis. They even said to me, "Lieutenant, you're married. You got an apartment. You're here. We'll keep you here for a while." From May until some date down the road, I knew there was a chance that it would happen. There was a possibility. Being artillery, I knew that if I was called, it was not going to be good. I was counting the clock, but enjoying Fort Meade nonetheless.

MG: I was going to ask if you were married because you were pretty certain you were not headed overseas.

DB: Yes. I mentioned that to Shaun. I got married when I did. We figured if I go in, which I was going to be called, and I'm going to be (…?), let's get married. It's not a bad way to see the country or the world. You're not going to Southeast Asia. If you have children, and we wanted to have children, that's less expensive in the military. I got married with the--I would have never have gotten married--Judy, are you listening? I would have never gotten married when I did if I knew I was going to Vietnam. It's crazy. I think as I mentioned, a very sad story about my friend Bill, who not only was he married, but he left his wife pregnant and he never saw his kid.

MG: I wanted to ask a quick question about *Tour 365.*

DB: I also want to mention (…?), so I want to go back. Before I forget, my daughter student taught in Australia. It had nothing to do with my service. She was at BU [Boston University] and they happened to have a program where they did student teaching in Australia. Of course she knew I was in Vietnam and what it meant to me. In Canberra, in the capital city of Australia, they have a Vietnam Memorial. She went to visit it and she brought me back this magazine, which is not their equivalent of this, but it's a little story of Vietnam.

MG: "The Australian War Memorial remembers those who served in Vietnam."

DB: So this is, "Let us tell you about Australia's role in Vietnam." I haven't looked through this in a while. It mentions the 1 ATF, the First Australian Task Force, when it established its base camp at Nui Dat. I spent a lot--not a lot, but a fair amount of my time in Nui Dat, which was southeast of Saigon. Background. See if they mention--their list, their role. Hold on for one other second. I knew there was another book. You might want to turn it off.

MG: Okay.

[Tape Paused]

MG: The *Tour 365* magazine, was that unique to your unit?

DB: No. That was army wide.

MG: You had talked about being awarded your Bronze Star but I thought you received two Bronze Stars?

DB: I did. One I was issued when I came home. Here's the two. One is for operations during the period 20 May 1969 to June 20, 1969, which falls into that operations period. Then the second one was for the entire year. So this one, the second one came; I didn't know I was getting it. [It] came when I was home, March 28, 1970. The first one came actually--and I had pictures. I was called to the battalion headquarters and they actually had a ceremony where they gave me [the award]. You don't get a second Bronze Star; it's called the first oak leaf cluster. I already got the one. I only got the one medal, but if I was to wear this--you've seen all the award stuff. This is the standard series of medals that an officer--this is the Vietnam Campaign Medal. This is the flag of Vietnam, which became the Vietnam War Medal. This is the National Service Medal. Then you get a little one of these. I would wear that as the Bronze Star and if you ever had occasion, you actually wear the star.

MG: Did you ever have an occasion where you would wear it?

DB: No. In fact, I've kept the stuff stowed away. I've had no occasion to. That's why the box looks the way it does.

MG: You had mentioned when we were looking at the yearbook that some of the captions were pretty funny and levity was important.

DB: Yes.

MG: Can you talk a little but about that? Things you would do to break the ice in Vietnam?

DB: Playing cards. It's a lot of boredom. I mentioned to Shaun, when you're not doing fire missions--let me just explain about what our mission was. When you're in general support that means just what it sounds like. You're supporting another unit in the course of its operation. A lot of infantry groups had their own artillery, but they had light artillery, 105s. We were medium artillery. We would be called in support of that artillery, that infantry unit, or a larger campaign. Unless it was a serious engagement, most of our artillery was what we call indirect fire. It was artillery based on intelligence rather than on direct contact or forward observer calling it in--unobserved fire more than observed fire. The classic form of that was H&Is, harassment and interdiction. The only people it harassed were ourselves, because as we learned later, after the war, it was terribly ineffective. It was a waste of our time. What it required of us was nightly, at random times, but scheduled random times, for us to fire one round out of one gun every fifteen minutes, just in the hope or the thought that there might be a small patrol or even a large patrol heading down that road. Guys would look at a map in intelligence say, "We know they're in that area. They want to go there. You know what? Maybe tonight they're going to go down that road, so let's shoot some artillery in there to get them out of there, kill them, scare them, interdict, harass." That's why they're called H&Is. We had to keep guys up to do that. Sometimes, we'd get fire missions in the middle of the night and we'd say to the guys, "Okay. This is for real. Now, let's do our A-game, not H&Is, unobserved, and things of that sort." I'm not sure I remember what the question was. If you weren't doing that H&I stuff, while you were waiting to do the H&Is, you're up. What are you going to do? In the FDC, we'd play a lot of cards, tell stories, talk. We had movies, if you're at a base camp. I saw *The Green Berets* in Vietnam. There wasn't a funnier juxtaposition, if you will. First of all, all the inaccuracies in the movie become very evident when you're in Vietnam watching this silly movie supposedly about Vietnam. Every so often, if you're in the rear area, we'd have movie nights. Some of the built up areas actually had clubs, NCO clubs and officers' clubs, that you go [to]. The night I got that--we were out drinking. In fact, we drove to one of those bases that had a club because one of our officers, we were giving him a back to the world party, which is what these things--I want to talk to you about. We had it at the club. I don't even remember where it was, but there was an actual bar. Now, were there any females there? Not there, but we had a lot of locals who made a living, if you will. There were a lot of guys who came over virgins and once the word was out that they were virgins, the mission was to deflower them. More than one woman was happy to oblige. Only once did I get to a place where there was the notorious Saigon Tea. You've heard people talk about the Saigon Teas? The women would drink these water-downed [teas]. The guys would drink and drink and drink. I remember this one young lady taking my hand. She said, "I'm going to read your palm. I read your life line." She gave this horrible--"Oh, you have such a short life line. You're not going to go home." This night out became get out of here. Of course, you believe that stuff after a while. There were ladies who followed the troops.

MG: I know that STDs were a problem in Vietnam. Did you have doctors coming into your unit?

DB: I had a urinary tract infection, a very bad one. First thing I said to doc, "I have not engaged." He said, "No. What you have you get just being here." We had terrible venereal disease problems.

MG: Did you want to tell me about the going back home party?

DB: Oh, yes. I'm just going to say what these plaques were when I went home. This one came, and again these are not out for display. This came from the guys in C Battery, Husky Charlie. It says, "Lieutenant Dennis Brodkin, Fire Direction Officer, for loyal and faithful service, Vietnam, 17January 1969 to 16 January 1970." Interesting, right? The whole year, 365, you nailed it. "From the officers and men of Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 35th Artillery." This one came from the battalion headquarters. It just says, "First Lieutenant Dennis Brodkin, C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 35th Artillery, January to January." For those who are interested in hanging plaques and stuff like that. It's an industry; I couldn't believe this. I said, "Yearbooks, plaques." It's like going off to camp.

MG: You had gotten married two years before you went to Vietnam?

DB: October '67. It was a year and a half. In fact, one of the things I showed on the chronology is my R&R was my anniversary, our second anniversary.

MG: Talk to me about that. You went to Hawaii.

DB: Twice. I may have mentioned it. I, and very few guys--you could probably count them on your hands and feet. I have to believe that I am by far the exception to the rule. What happened is you weren't supposed to get an R&R until you're in country at least six months. Firstly, you wouldn't even want to go on R&R because who wants to go back? Because then you got to come back to Vietnam. Married personnel could go to Hawaii. Senior officers, majors, colonels, could go to Japan. Most of the enlisted personnel went to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang. That's where the woman were the loosest and the most available, and those were dens of iniquity. It was sex from the day you landed to the day you came up. The stories were incredible. I was married; I'm going to Hawaii. A lot of guys went to Australia. Again, not to sound wrong, but round eyes--rather than being with Asian women, they wanted to go with round eyes. It was a longer flight. Australia was a very strict country, very conservative. You couldn't even read *Playboy* yet. This thought of going to Sydney or Melbourne for seventy-two hours of sexual paradise, no. Not to say that didn't happen, but that's not the main--guys went to Australia. I went to Hawaii. In April, I'm only there three months, one of the guys in the unit gets a "Dear John" letter, literally; his name was John. He was all set to go to Hawaii. His wife was just awful. I don't know the circumstances, but it really was: "I fell in love. I met someone else. Don't come to Hawaii. I'm not going to be there." There's a spot reserved for him. I don't know nothing. I said, "What's the chances that I could take his spot?" No one said no. My commanders didn't say no. This clerk that I knew, who probably worked the magic said, "Hey, I'll help you out." I call. "Judy," I said, "Completely unexpected, but what's the chances you could meet me in Hawaii?" "What, are you kidding?" The army covered your wife's expenses. I got an unanticipated R&R and then I got my regular R&R in October.

MG: I want to know more about that. What was it like to see her after being away for so long? How was it coming back?

DB: The R&R is in Honolulu and there's an American base in Hawaii called Fort DeRussy. If you could get an assignment, that's the place to get assigned. It's right on Waikiki Beach. What they did was they rounded up the wives and had them at Fort DeRussy. We were bussed from Hickam, Honolulu Airport and they lined the wives up in two columns. I think they had floral

leis for us when we come off the plane. I was just checking with my wife if it was the first R&R or the second; it was the first. She had lost a fair amount of weight. She frosted her hair. I walked right by her, honest. After collecting myself and having a big laugh--Fort DeRussy was close enough to walk to the hotel. We were staying at the Outrigger Hotel, which was right across from the international market area, right next to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. If you know anything about Honolulu, the Royal Hawaiian was always the postcard hotel. That was the one they always took--before the big modern hotels came later. It was beautiful. The Outrigger was right next to it. So, we're walking down--and I can't pronounce the main street in Honolulu [Kalakaua Avenue], but it had twelve K's in it; hard to pronounce. I was hungry and there was a Jewish deli. [laughter] That was my first stop. It wasn't New York style, but it was a Jewish deli. I had a corned beef sandwich or something like that. It was quite a transition because twenty-four hours before I was in who-knows-where, and now I'm in Hawaii with all these newlyweds and honeymooners. There were quite a few soldiers. Everybody with short hair you could tell was the soldier. We acted like newlyweds. I spent the first eight hours in the bathtub. My wife was trying to get the jungle rot off me. We got the mats to lay out on the beach. We spent all our time out on the beach. Although, we did go to a few of the--we rented a car, drove the island. We were tourists. It was almost like a honeymoon. The hard part was going back. We now go to the airport. Now of course, Honolulu was the stop for the guys going home and a place to go back. While we're waiting to get on our plane, a load of a GIs get off. They're on their way home. There was an expression, short, tee-tee, very short. We talked about language before. One of the ways we communicated--Vietnam being a French colony at one time--tee-tee boo-coo. We used a lot of boo-coo. You'd go short timer. Just knowing now--which probably wasn't a good idea, why you don't take an R&R in April or May when you still have six, nine months to go. I wasn't short. I still had the rest of my tour, more than half of my tour to go. When I went back in October for my second R&R, it was a lot easier going back than the first time.

MG: Would some guys go AWOL [absent without leave]?

DB: Yes, which is one of the reasons why they didn't allow enlisted personnel to go to Hawaii; too close to home.

MG: How did Judy spend the year you were in Vietnam?

DB: She lived with her parents. I'll tell it anyway. We had gotten married in October. I knew I was going into the service in January. We needed a place to live. I was substitute teaching to earn an income and to kill the time in Woodbridge, New Jersey--actually, Iselin. My parents lived in Iselin. We wanted to find a place to live. Judy was working in Manhattan, so we wanted a place near the train station, so she could continue to commute. We found a house very near the train station, very near where I taught, that was like a mother-daughter house. Upstairs was a very small apartment, one bedroom. It was like a studio, small kitchen. Wonderful, nice, old lady and her husband who lived downstairs, they didn't want to rent to us because they said, "You're going to leave, blah, blah, blah." I said, "No." Now I knew I was leaving in January. "No. Don't worry. We're here. We love it. My wife's working in New York." That's where we lived. We lived in an apartment above this women's house until January. Actually, I got a thirty-day leave in December and we spent a week in Florida before I shipped out. Then, she

moved in with her parents in New York and lived with them while she continued that same job in New York, in Manhattan. Then when I came home, we rented an apartment in Edison.

MG: Would you guys correspond with each other?

DB: I wrote every day and sometimes twice. One of the things you got in your sundry kit was stationary. I mentioned this to Shaun. I wrote whenever I could. Since there was so much down time, I would write often and hopefully the mail got out, so she got a letter every day. She got nervous when she didn't get a letter. She wrote frequently--not as frequently as I did. Of course, we didn't get mail every day, so there'd be five or six days that--finally, I'd get six letters and I'd try and follow the postmarks, so I could read them chronologically. The most mundane conversations. "When we get the apartment, do we want to have pink or white walls?" We talked about family. We had no children, of course, so that was good. I communicated with two fraternity brothers, not in the service. I didn't write that many letters to my parents, when I think back about it. I wrote to them, but not nearly as often, or my brothers. I did have occasion--Judy reminded me the other day, we talked about it--at least twice I had phone calls to her from Saigon or from wherever I was, Long Binh.

MG: You talked about how you would get three minutes and you did not have a lot of privacy.

DB: That's right. None at all.

MG: You had to say, "Over."

DB: The one time I called was to tell her about the R&R in Hawaii, and some other time just to say hello.

MG: How was that second R&R different? What did you do?

DB: Second R&R was interesting because there was a banking convention in Honolulu and there were no hotels available in Oahu, which turned out to be a good thing. We ended up going to Kauai, different island, different feel, completely secluded, much more romantic. It was very nice. We did some sightseeing, but it was also very nice.

MG: Did your brother serve in Vietnam?

DB: No, neither of my brothers were in the military.

MG: Something else you said in part one of the interview was that the friendships you formed in Vietnam, there was sort of a stronger bond to them.

DB: Yes, but short-lived. Like I said, I've only maintained contact with this Gary Gardenhire, [and] Ron, the Kiwi guy. I could probably pass him in the street now, but while you're there, it's a very tight bond.

MG: Just a few more things about your time in Vietnam.

DB: I'm getting my cold back.

MG: Do you need a glass of water or a break? You had talked a little bit about Agent Orange. Could you elaborate on your contact with the Agent Orange in Vietnam?

DB: Didn't know it at the time. Knew there was something unusual going on. The jungle would go from jungle to no jungle very quickly. Smell--I actually went on leave to Singapore with a fellow who flew C-130s that sprayed the Agent Orange. We didn't talk about it. He just said what he did. Aerial defoliation he called it.

MG: Were you thinking: if it does that to the forest, what is it doing to me?

DB: Didn't even think about it. It wasn't on my radar screen. I was more worried about mortars and bombs and bullets. Didn't think our own would end up killing us. Napalm. We knew about napalm. We knew about that as a weapon, chemical warfare. Artillery had the capacity to fire chemical, but we didn't.

MG: We can talk maybe later on about your involvement in the magazine you received.

DB: The Agent Orange, right.

MG: I wanted to ask you about your commanding officer. Was Harrington his name?

DB: Colonel Harrington.

MG: What was your relationship like with him?

DB: Very little contact with him. There was chain of command. I was a lieutenant. There are three guys between him and me. He awarded me the Bronze Star--"Lieutenant, job well done, blah, blah, blah." We knew he was a hardcore guy. We knew what his expectations were, but it's like the president of a company. You know what he's after, but we didn't have much contact with him. Most of my contact was with the battery commander and interestingly enough, the S-2, who's the intelligence, the major who was in charge of intelligence, because we were constantly trying to outfox, stay one step ahead--or two steps behind--what the bad guys were doing.

MG: You were a forward observer for a little bit.

DB: Yes. Again, my family expected me to be a civil pacification officer. It was tough enough to tell them that I was in the artillery. I never told them about the forward observer.

MG: Being on the frontlines?

DB: Yes. I was very, very fortunate, because I was a first lieutenant. Anytime a second lieutenant would come in, that got me out of it right away. So I was a forward observer for a very short period of time.

MG: Anything else we are missing about your time in Vietnam before we talk about coming home?

DB: I don't think so. I showed you the pictures. I shared with you my paperwork. I got to Oakland and it's January 1970. We can pick up the story there. I get on American Airlines. I

fly home to New York. It's cold. It's snowing, ice on the ground. My car had been stolen. I don't know if I told you that part. When I got to Hawaii, the last leg of the trip home, I called Judy, just to coordinate. "You're going to pick me up at the airport. I'll be on American Airlines." Well, I didn't know what flight I was going to be on. I said, "I'll call you from San Francisco once I know." She said, "Oh, I have to tell you. The car's been stolen." "What?" New York has alternate side of the street parking. So she came out of the house thinking she had parked the car there. She said, "Okay. Probably it's alternate side. I parked where I park on the alternate days." She goes to the other street, no car. Turns out it was stolen. She picked me up in a rental. I drove. I remember driving. I wanted to drive. I drove like this, head over the steering wheel. She said, "Why are you driving like that?" I said, "Just looking for mines." [laughter] We didn't have IEDs [Improvised Explosive Device], but we had booby traps in the road and stuff.

MG: I am curious about that transition.

DB: Loud noises and stuff. I'm not a good person to speak to about it. It didn't happen--Judy might think otherwise. I did on occasion jump out of my seat and duck, and go under the table with loud noises or stuff like that, but I didn't have nightmares. I think I readjusted pretty well. No PTSD that I can really identify with. I'm claustrophobic, but not because of anything that the war did to me. I think I came away with fewer scars than a lot of the other veterans for which I am very happy.

MG: What was it like to take a hot shower or eat a big ice cream sundae?

DB: All those things were wonderful. Yes, the flushing toilet. The first thing I did in Hawaii after having a corned beef sandwich was flushing the toilet. [laughter] I still had to take the malaria pill--and of course, that has a negative impact on your digestive system--on Mondays, every Monday for two months I think it was. I still have diarrhea on Tuesdays. [laughter] That legacy followed me home.

MG: I think you had talked about how you didn't encounter protesters when you came home from Vietnam.

DB: No, no. Part of the reason is we weren't supposed to be at Oakland Air Force base, Oakland terminal; we were supposed to be at Travis. So there were no planned [protests], but definitely, it was not warm. I didn't get, "Thank you for your service." Believe me, it was avoidance more than anything else.

MG: By the time you got back, your parents had moved to Florida?

DB: Yes. I probably saw my wife's family before I saw my family. I came home in January. We went to Florida in February. We had a family get together--it's coming back to me--at my aunt's house in New Jersey. My cousin had served in Korea. He came home the same time I did. They had a welcoming home party for both of us. I am told that my younger brother, who was finishing up at Rutgers, he was a senior at the time, pulled Judy aside and said something to the effect, "Is he all right?" He thought I looked really bad.

MG: You had lost a lot of weight.

DB: I lost a lot of weight. Most of the family--my grandmother was still alive at the time and she just stood over me like a good old Jewish grandmother. "You haven't eaten enough." I hadn't either. [laughter] The food was wonderful. That was a great (…?). My older brother had already moved to Phoenix. We did a Florida-Phoenix trip to catch up with [family]. I'll finish this part. While we were in Phoenix, we took a side trip to Las Vegas. I was driving. I get pulled over for speeding--I guess I was speeding. The state trooper was starting to write the ticket and my brother, not me, says to the state trooper, "Give the guy a break. He just got back from Vietnam." The guy says, "You just got back from Vietnam?" "Yes." "Okay." One of the immediate benefits of being a veteran was I got out of us being ticketed. We go to Las Vegas and I'm happy to say that's where my first daughter was conceived. Before I learned I was going to Vietnam, because I was in the service, we were trying to have a baby and we didn't. God works in strange and wonderful ways. We didn't get pregnant before, but less than a month after I was home, my wife was pregnant. Trouble was I wasn't working. I had no source of income. I ended up truly having a baby on the layaway plan. I had no medical insurance, nothing. I said, "How do I pay for this?" This was 1970. They said, "Just pay us what you can every month." Ultimately I paid off the hospital bill in monthly installments. I always remind my daughter, I could've stopped paying and they could've repossessed you. [laughter]

MG: If she got in trouble?

DB: Yes, exactly.

MG: What was your plan? What did you think that you wanted to do? Did you feel like you just needed time?

DB: Yes. I didn't get a haircut for months. I became a longhaired hippie dude. I didn't join any anti-war movements, although I felt strongly about it. Kent State happened right after I got home, so that was a horrible reminder of what was going on in this country. [Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the United States entry into Cambodia, while others had been passing nearby or observing the demonstration. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries.] I thought I would finish my Ph.D. Remember I told you I stopped in January of '67. I had all the paperwork done. I even wrote a letter to my professor who said, "Be happy to accept what you can. Do it." I tried. It was hard. When you ask me about the adjustment, yes, there is an adjustment period. I wasn't ready. I wasn't working either. Judy was our main source of income. In November, we had the baby. In July, I was still unemployed. If you ask me what I did during my time, I don't know. I was in an incubator just trying to get it all back together again. Of course the war, I'm still reminded on a daily basis what was going on. I didn't write to anybody in the unit except for Gary who came and visited me while we were in that apartment. You know what? Since I was living in the township where I went to high school and I knew people, I did get a job teaching GED at night and on Saturdays. That was part of what I did that summer. In July, I answered an ad that was in the *New York Times* for a social studies teacher in South Brunswick. Very conservative school. They needed a hippie. They needed somebody contemporary. They wanted to create a class called, "Today's Issues." I fit the bill. I didn't go to a teacher's college. I had a Rutgers degree. I had the Wisconsin training. I was a Vietnam vet. I could put two

words together. You're hired. I was hired on a part-time basis because they didn't have the budget. I got lucky again in that a woman who was teaching at the school had a very sick child, who ultimately died. So she left. They had another halftime [position] that they could give me. I taught half time for three months and in three months I was a full-time teacher, but I wasn't certified. In New Jersey you had to have a license and stuff like that. I was teaching on like, an emergency certificate. I went to Rider [University] in Trenton, for student teaching, and Newark. It was then called--it wasn't Kean--it was Newark State Teacher's College, which is now Kean, for my course work. In, I guess it was about eighteen months, I got my license and I was fully certified and all that. When I was doing the part-time teaching, I was halftime in the social studies department and halftime with special ed. kids. The second year I was teaching September, I'm still not licensed, I got a full-time position in the social studies department teaching "Today's Issues," and American history. Within the following year, I won [the] "Teacher of the Year" award. Then I became the chairman of the department. I accelerated quickly. I was teaching a class, which was a federally funded class called, "The Institute for Political and Legal Education." It was a Title III Project. In fact, I got to travel around the country training other teachers. I became like a master teacher kind of thing. I had the GI Bill, but I hadn't done anything with it, and I knew it doesn't last forever. I had no interest in being a lawyer. All my closest friends and fraternity brothers were lawyers and they all kept saying, "Dennis, what are you wasting your time teaching?" I said, "I love it. It's not wasting time. This is my life. I like the classroom." I also thought that going to law school would help me as a teacher. I'm going to go to learn law, so that I could teach law. Not necessarily at a law school level teach law, but I'm going to know the subject matter better. I knew that was quite a commitment. I couldn't afford to leave teaching and go to law school, but Rutgers and Seton Hall both had evening divisions. What's the cost? Just so happened that Rutgers cost was basically the equivalent of what the stipend was for the GI Bill. Seton Hall would have cost me money. I said, "Well, if I can go to law school at night, but it's in Newark, and I'm in Princeton." That's where South Brunswick is. That's quite a commitment. "Am I ready to make this kind of commitment?" Well, long story short. I said, "Let me take the LSATs, but I'm not preparing. I'm not investing a whole lot in this. If I get in, I get in; if I don't, nice try." I took the LSATs. I did well enough. I got into both Seton Hall and Rutgers. I took the Rutgers position because it paid everything--tuition, books, and even covered most of my mileage. I started in 1977. My kids were seven and four at this time. I became an absentee [father]. I'd leave work for school six thirty in the morning. I'd come home eleven o'clock at night. Monday through Thursday was classes. Friday night, we went out to eat. Every Friday night, one of the kids got to pick which restaurant we go to. Saturday, I went back to Newark, because I couldn't study at home, not with a seven year old and four year old. I went back to Newark to the library. Sunday was my family day. Rutgers Law School, my first year, was located the same place as Rutgers Newark. I could take the train from Princeton to Newark. You know Newark has a subway? The subway in Newark let out right where the law school was. They moved the law school, after my freshman year, to the insurance building on Broad Street. You couldn't take the subway. I had to drive. Now, it became more difficult because now after teaching, I have a sixty-mile drive to Newark and then back. I used to say to my wife, I slept between Exits 9 and 8A on a regular basis because I was exhausted. I did that for four years and two summers. Took the Bar exam in--I graduated in May of '81. The Bar exam is in July. We had formed a study group of people. I went at night. Most of the people in my study group were fellow teachers

who were looking [for a] career change, a doctor, a policeman, an insurance rep. We had a good group of people, women and men. Someone went to Europe for a week, left their house to one of my friends. We all moved in for a week, did this intensive study for the Bar exam. I took the Bar exam at Rutgers in Brower Commons. I saw something appropriate and fitting about this. Now, the Bar exam consists of two days in New Jersey. The first day is the multi-state; the second day is the state. If you don't pass the multi-state, you're dead. The multi-state is two hundred multiple-choice questions--one hundred questions in the morning, three hours; one hundred questions in the afternoon. I had been the BAR BRI representative. BAR BRI is a review course for the Bar exam. I didn't teach it, but I was the on-campus representative then. When you take the BAR BRI instruction on how to pass the Bar exam, the very first thing they teach you is time management. "Make sure you answer all the questions, but don't guess, because they subtract wrong answers from right answers. Try not to leave blank answers if you can." I said, "Okay." Well, wouldn't you know it, the morning session I get to question number eighty nine and they say, "Pencils down." Already, I know I've got eleven wrong and the margin of error is very thin. Why did I only get eighty-nine done? Because I was trying so hard to get every question right. I didn't let certain questions beat me. I said, "The worst thing you do is you ponder over a question and I should have never had done that." We go to lunch someplace in New Brunswick and I'm dying. All the guys are talking about the exam. I says, "Look, there's no way I'm passing." I said, "I only got to number eighty nine. I know I got eleven wrong already." I made sure in the afternoon session I got all hundred questions done. I continue teaching because Bar results don't come out until the end of November. Don't forget, this is before online, anything else. You got to get the thing in the mail, all right. It comes the Friday of the week of Thanksgiving. That was the traditional day. We all said to each other, "We're not calling anybody until the following Monday. Nobody is going to know how we did, just keep it to ourselves." It turns out that Thanksgiving, my father--let me get this right. This was 1977. Was back in New Jersey--1981, excuse me. This is 1981. My father was back in New Jersey for a funeral. My mother wasn't with him. I say that only because I knew that there was a family member here at the house. We got our mail. We were like the last mail on the guy's route. Four o'clock, ten after four, the mail comes. I go out to the mailbox. You know the old wives' tail: big envelope is good. I got this big envelope and I go right to the bathroom. He had a little half bathroom right by the front door. Didn't even walk in. Didn't want to talk to anybody. I go into the bathroom. I open up the envelope and a postcard falls out. I could see the postcard has directions to someplace. I'm saying, "Oh no. They're giving me directions as to where I go to retake the exam." I open it up--"Congratulations." Relief. Whatever it was, I passed. You never get your score. You don't know. If I passed by one, I passed by one. If the only eleven I got wrong were the eleven I didn't answer, could be. So, great celebration. As it turns out, everybody in our study group passed the New Jersey Bar except for one guy who strangely passed New York, but not New Jersey. He today, sits as a judge in New York. Everybody had a happy career. Everybody left teaching and went into the practice of law. I didn't. This was 1981. I had already committed to finishing the school year, '81,'82. The school board recognized my J.D. as if it was a Ph.D. I immediately moved from here on the pay scale to the top--not in terms of time of service, but in terms of degree status. My income went from nine thousand to eleven thousand. It's not like I'm making a lot of money, but at least I'm being paid at the highest level. I really did like what I was doing. A couple of my friends said, "Dennis, what are you doing? Come to our firm." My roommate from college, Len Selesner,

"Dennis, come." I thought about it and I said, "No, I'm going to continue teaching." I taught again '82,'83, but now that I had a law degree and a license to practice law, I did some work on my own. I did wills, very simple stuff. I did a house closing here or there. One of my friends from high school was the municipal attorney in Woodbridge. He said, "You want to cut your teeth? You want to practice law?" He says, "Be my deputy and you handle court on Monday nights and Thursday nights," because Woodbridge had day court and evening court. I became the Deputy Municipal Attorney for Woodbridge. Teach during the day and prosecute. I was the prosecutor at night. I probably had more courtroom experience by the time I finished the year that I did that than most lawyers do in a lifetime. I won't get into what I did there, but it was mostly vehicular--if you know where Woodbridge is, it's where the Parkway and the Turnpike meet. There are so many highways, so many traffic tickets. I have some great stories about it, but anyway that's what I [did]. Finally, my fraternity brother got the best of me. They made me an offer I couldn't refuse and in June of '83, I left teaching. I left South Brunswick High School. I wasn't fully vested in the union. I had a few thousand dollars. I bought a car. I wasn't walking away from a real big pension. I went to private practice at a law firm in Millburn, which unfortunately was a fifty-mile commute. I was living in Cranbury, but I practiced law there from '83 to '87. Then, I went to Wolff & Samson from '87 to '99.

MG: Going back just a little bit.

DB: That was a long answer to your question.

MG: That's okay. I want to revisit a lot of these things. Before law school, when you were teaching, it sounded like you had made some really nice connections at Rutgers with your history professors.

DB: Yes.

MG: I was wondering if you reconnected with any them even as you were teaching history.

DB: Actually, the people I reconnected with, strangely enough, were fellow teachers who also went to Rutgers. People back in Woodbridge High School for example, who were in the social studies department, they were more of a help to me. Genovese [was] now long gone. He left Rutgers right after the teach-in, but I didn't have much contact with Genovese or McCormick or anything like that. I'd go to training seminars, but no, at the professional level I didn't.

MG: When you practiced law, did you draw on any of your experiences as legal counsel during your stateside service?

DB: You mean the stuff when I was prosecuting the AWOL cases? No. It was a completely different animal. Military justice is an oxymoron. It's like jumbo shrimp. The trials were scripted, completely different. By the way, I was on the defense side in the Army and I was prosecuting, but most of my legal practice was non-litigation. I was a transactional lawyer.

MG: During that time at Rutgers-Newark, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was teaching.

DB: She had already gone. I had Frank Askin.

MG: That's what I was going to ask you about. I have interviewed him.

DB: Have you? Frank was wonderful. Frank was our civil procedure professor. Of course you know his career. Started out in journalism, and went to law school. Went right out of law school, because he was such a gifted student, right into faculty. Frank and I became very close. I was in the Constitution Litigation Clinic with him. I worked on a couple briefs for him in the Abscam matter. [Editor's Note: The Abscam sting operation led to the conviction of US officials on charges of bribery and conspiracy.] Frank came to our home with his wife. For whatever reason, I was the party magnet. Remember, I'm in law school now. We're older. We're not the young people right out of college. I was thirty-seven with children. Most of my colleagues in the evening division were either just getting married or were married themselves with children or pregnant, in the thirties, not the twenties, different group of people. We had people even older than myself. We were a limited group. We were sixty of us in our class. We had very little contact with the day students because our classes were all at night. We had the same faculty. That was the great thing about Rutgers. They gave us the best professors in the evening division. I know I had Arthur Kinoy, as well as Frank Askin. I would have had Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I liked to party. I liked to have social events with my classmates so my wife and I hosted a couple of law school parties and professors were invited and came. Frank was there. I got to know him better. When he ran for Congress I was asked to contribute.

MG: He was not successful in his running?

DB: No. He's not a good politician. Good lawyer, but not a good politician.

MG: Something else I meant to ask you earlier about was about the Army Reserves after you came home.

DB: Okay. When I got my commission, I'm in the US Army Reserve. I'm not in the regular Army. I had a six-year obligation. I think it's in the chronology. I tried to explain to Shaun, I was in the US Army Reserve Control Group. There's a ready reserve and a standby reserve. When you're in the Reserves, you could be in the ready reserve first. Then you get called to active duty. Now you're with the regular Army, but you're on active duty. You get released from active duty. When I got my DD-214 on January 17, 1970, it released me from active duty. I'm still in the Army. I'm still in the Army Reserves. I get assigned to the control group in St. Louis until they decide what to do with me. New Jersey has the 78th Division, the Lightning Division. Camp Kilmer is where the Headquarters were, but they would train out of Fort Dix. I get assigned to the 78th Division. Now, this is when I'm in my hippie, longhaired format. I did not like the Army. I learned that that system was not my system. We weren't a good match. The less I had to do with it, especially post-Vietnam, the better. I was so disillusioned and unhappy that I was not going to be a good officer in the Army Reserve, but I signed up. I had this obligation. I had this commitment. The training is--I don't remember the regiment, but you have to go to summer training and I think you meet once a month, maybe once a week. I can't even remember what it was, but it was a regular week meeting at Camp Kilmer. My first meeting was at Fort Dix. It was on a Sunday. I'm telling you, my hair was almost as long as yours and it was really curly and very unkempt.

MG: That's pretty long.

DB: Kids liked it. I fit in well as a teacher. I was in uniform. It was not good. I knew that I was not going to be well received. I brought the *New York Times* with me. I get out of the car. I'm telling you, I don't think I got within ten paces of whoever I was supposed to report to. I pop a salute, "Lieutenant Brodkin, reporting." He gives me one of these, "What are you doing? What is this all about?" He says, "Get in your car. You're not going home, but just get in your car." "Get lost," is basically what he told me. I read the *Times* all day. Now I'm in trouble sort of. I'm waiting to see how they're going to respond to this. This is a little fuzzy. I think I was called on the carpet and I met with this officer who was very nice. He basically said, "You want in or out?" I said, "Look, I'm not a lifer. I was ROTC." I gave him a short synopsis of my story. He said, "Do you see anything that you want to do in the Reserves?" "No." He says, "Do you want to retire in the reserves? You know you can make a nice living." I said, "No." There's a very short period--if you have the chronology handy, I can help (…?) myself. January of 1971, I got the orders. Excuse me. August of 1970 is when I got the written orders assigning me to the 78th Division. January of 1971, I received orders relieving me from duty. How long is that? Six months. I never went to another meeting. I never went to anything. In six months, (…?). In January of 1972, I get my honorable discharge from the Army Reserve. Two weeks later, I get my honorable discharge from the Army. If you just bear with me for one second, I think I have those. You've seen the DD-214 right? The first thing I get, a certificate of appreciation dated January 17, 1970. I get a piece of paper, January 12, 1972, discharge from USAR. That's just from the Army Reserve. I'm relieved from the control group annual training. I'm out of the reserves. That's January 12th. January 26th, I get my official honorable discharge. June 9th 1965, I'm commissioned. January 26th 1972, I'm decommissioned.

MG: Did you feel relieved?

DB: You know what? By the time I had gotten the "Don't bother coming back," I was feeling relieved. It wasn't for me. A lot of guys made a very good career out of it and stayed in, but it wasn't for me. I would never take any action again, but like I said I didn't join Jewish War Veterans, VFW. It's only recently that I became a member of the Disabled American Veterans; more so to help out the guys who were really disabled then myself. I'm now a member of the Disabled American Veterans. I also, as I think I mentioned to Shaun, in late '73, filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit to try and find out the mystery, to solve the mystery of how was it that I went from NSA to Vietnam. I think, as I mentioned, I got two letters back. One from the US Office of Personnel Management that said, "A search of our systems indicates we have no record under your name and identifying information." From the Defense Security Service, I received the following: "Based on the information, blah, blah, blah." They said the same thing. I'm just trying to find the sentence. "Based on the information furnished, the search of all automated indices of whatever acronym, which are reasonably likely to be responsive to your request, DSS located no records pertaining to you." The man who never was. Now I've got paperwork all over the place here and you're going to tell me that their thorough search could reveal nothing. As I say, NSA has never responded. That's the happy ending. I did go to the dedication and the tenth anniversary of the Vietnam Wall. I feel a very close affinity to that. We were there for the program on my daughter's birthday, November 11, 1992. Of course, our class, the Vietnam Memorial, I got involved in. That's really been my post. Like I say, I went to one meeting about Agent Orange. If you turn that off for one second, I'm going to look and see if I have my folder on Agent Orange.

MG: Sure.

[Tape Paused]

MG: You did not get involved in any veterans' groups, but you did support George McGovern.

DB: I most certainly did. [laughter]

MG: He ran on the campaign of advocating withdrawal in Vietnam.

DB: Yes.

MG: Can just reflect on that election? It was such a wacky time for politics.

DB: Well, obviously the outcome was horrible. I don't think any of us expected that he would win. It was very much a grassroots election. It was part of the program that I was teaching in 1972. I was working with kids in our high school, and they of course could work on--they could work for Nixon or McGovern. I was not directing one way or another. But in my non-instructional capacity, it was very much a grassroots program. I went door-to-door soliciting in Edison, Woodbridge, South Brunswick, and it was very interesting getting the responses from the quote, unquote "silent majority." You mention you're for McGovern, [people say,] "Communist, get out of here." The negativity towards the anti-war movement, even though we were hardly the radicals burning down the Pentagon kind of thing--but it was interesting. I liked the people I was working with, fellow travelers who think alike and stuff like that. The night of election, it was the quickest post-campaign party you've ever been to in your life. Within one minute after the polls closed, the election was over.

MG: Do you think that election would have gone any different if Nixon's complicity in the Watergate Scandal was clear at that point?

DB: Well, I think that you got to go back one election further. If you know what happened in '68, which has come out, Johnson withdrew and [Hubert]Humphrey came late to the--let's put it this way: he wasn't a strong advocate for withdrawal and stuff like that, but he definitely wanted to end the war more quickly than Richard Nixon did. Johnson went out of his way, militarily, to try and help the cause to end the war. In fact, pretty much had a deal in place that would have brought the Paris Peace talks to fruition four years earlier. [Editor's Note: The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, better known as the Paris Accords, went into effect on January 27, 1973, and led to the withdrawal of all US combat forces in South Vietnam two months later. On April 30, 1975, the last US military personnel, US Marines guarding the American Embassy, left Saigon as North Vietnamese forces captured the former South Vietnamese capital.] I'm not saying the result of Paris would have been different than what happened in '72. Nixon didn't do a much better job; basically gave away the farm. But more people died between '68 and '72 than the period before. Had the war ended earlier, I certainly probably would not have gone. It has since come to light that [Henry] Kissinger, who was working with Johnson in terms of getting these secret talks underway, gave some information to Nixon and Nixon went directly to the government of South Vietnam through Chiang Kai-Shek's wife [Editor's Note: National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger made secret visits to Peking (Beijing), China in 1971. In February 1972, President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger

traveled to the People's Republic of China, seeking to establish US-Chinese relations on the first US presidential visit since Mainland China became Communist in 1949.] Basically told South Vietnam, "Hang on, don't agree to the peace talks. We'll make a better deal or we'll fight." I'm paraphrasing the way this thing went down. Basically, the South Vietnamese refused to go along with what would have been [Johnson's] plan, because he had stopped the bombing. There was an opportunity in 1968 to end the war much more quickly. If you ask me would McGovern have made a difference? I don't think so, because by '72, everyone knew we were pulling out anyway. Nixon's Vietnamization, as I mentioned to Shaun, was such a farce. [Editor's Note: President Richard M. Nixon introduced his policy of Vietnamization, turning the prosecution of the war over to the South Vietnamese, in 1969.] I was in the 54th Field Artillery Group. The 54th Artillery Group came home from Vietnam, but none of its personnel came home. They sent the flag home. I was immediately put into the 23rd Field Artillery Group. So there's no change in manpower, just officially you could say that the 54th Field Artillery came home. We were dreamers. We felt we had to do something. If Tom Brokaw got a hold of--or the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, if they were still around, if Watergate broke that summer rather than afterwards, yes I think it might have made a difference.

MG: Did you ever get behind any other presidential campaigns the way you did for McGovern?

DB: That one was so disillusioning. I got involved in a lot of campaigns through the kids. I got behind Bradley. I worked with Bill Bradley when he ran for Senator. Had him in to speak to the kids in South Brunswick. I've been a lifelong Democrat--Dukakis, Mondale, I was on board with all of them, but I didn't contribute financially or waste my time--spend my time, excuse me.

MG: Fast-forwarding back to law school, I was curious if you knew what kind of law you wanted to practice

DB: Not what I ended up doing. Another very good question. You ask good questions. Because of my Frank Askin influence, and because of my personal interests, I saw myself being involved in public advocacy, public interest law and constitutional law, in particular. I remembered that Frank had worked on the staff with Frank Thompson on the Hill as a congressional staff member. I thought that was the way to go. I like Washington. We loved Fort Meade. Judy had a brother in Baltimore. We liked Washington. The thought of living in and around Washington was wonderful. I thought working for the government would be good. I didn't like litigation and I wasn't in it for a buck. I didn't see myself being a wealthy lawyer because of anything that I worked in. I didn't want to work in house. My brother at the time was very (…?). He was a major executive in the soft drink industry and they had a full-time lobbyist [position] in Washington. He said, "Dennis, why don't you and I go? I have to go to Washington on business anyway. Why don't you come down with me and you sit and talk with this guy and he'll give you good insights as to what the possibilities are." I met with him. The very first thing he said is, "You're thirty-whatever. You have great life skills background, but it's your first year out of law school. You have no experience." He says, "The starting salary on the Hill is nothing. You have a seven year old." Wait, how old are my kids now? This is in '81. They're eleven and seven, eleven and eight. He said, "If you're fresh out of college, maybe then." He said, "But if you're willing to sacrifice because you made a lot of sacrifices already." He said, "If you're willing to sacrifice and really start low on the totem pole, sure, but you're going to be doing very unsatisfying work. You're too qualified." He said, "Who else do you

know?" That's really what it was going to be all about. I really hadn't made any of those kinds of connections, other than lawyers. I had more connections in private practice than I did in public sector. We pretty much put the kibosh on that notion, because I had a house, a mortgage. [laughter] I had to earn a living. I ended up going to work at my friend's firm. It was a small firm, maybe ten lawyers. They were basically a tax firm, but they had one lawyer who did appellate work. I did work with him. Interestingly, his cases at that time were related to thorough and efficient education, whether or not kids who were disadvantaged or had mental challenges, and the families wanted the public school system to let them go to another system, but still be paid for. There's a lot of litigation in the state of New Jersey at that time and there was an appeal going on. I worked on that brief. It was interesting work. One day, I come into the office and my friend said, "Dennis, you're not doing that anymore. Our real estate practice is exploding." I said, "Real estate?" I said, "I took property." He says, "Do you want to continue and make a living?" Next thing I know I'm doing real estate work. Real estate work, real estate work, real estate work. After three years, I got good at it. I went to a closing, very complicated deal and my adversary was from Wolff and Samson. We're sitting in the lobby talking before we're called in. It was a three-way transaction. He says, "I don't want to be untoward here." He said, "But I've been impressed with your work." He said, "Do you have any interest in leaving your firm? We have an opening at Wolff and Samson." I was flattered. This is my fraternity brother, my lifelong friend. I didn't want to cut him out, but it's worth listening. I go to Wolff and Samson. Now you know who they are now, because David Samson has been all over the newspapers in New Jersey. At the time it was a good firm; fairly large by New Jersey standards, but not big by New York standards. Certainly larger than the firm I'm with. I go to their offices in Roseland, big beautiful firm, and I meet the senior partners--not Dave Samson--Joel Wolff. I fell in like with him immediately. I think it was mutual. He's a big Dodger fan. We talked sports more than law. I didn't commit one way or another. It was in the winter season. They invite me to their Christmas party. They said, "Why don't you come see us when we're not in the office." I come to the [party]. Now, I'm older now than most of their junior partners and all of their associates. It's now 1987. I'm forty-three years old. First year lawyers are twenty-five, partners are in their early thirties. I got my ego here, because I'm going to start--they wine and dine us. My wife and I liked the people. I still don't commit. One more shot, the guy calls and says, "Dennis, we're very serious. The guys really like you. They think that you're a good fit." Plus, as I later learned, they really needed a body. They threw the carrot out of financial incentive. It was too good an offer. Now, they were in Roseland, which was further than Millburn, so my commute was going to be even longer. Long story short, I took the job offer. I started there in February of '87. In '91, I made partner. That was good. My kids are going to college. Once my kids finished high school we moved from the Hightstown area to Morristown. We lived in Morristown from '92 to '99.

MG: You were with Wolff and Samson until 1999?

DB: Right. That's when my father got ill and I left the firm.

MG: Before we talk about that, I wanted to ask if your brother and your father worked for the same company.

DB: They did. In fact, that's why my father left Florida. My father, actually when he was in--we'll start this way. My brother started his soft drink career with Pepsi Cola.

MG: And which brother was this?

DB: My older brother, the one who passed.

MG: Bart?

DB: Bart. He became a soft drink executive for Pepsi Cola, which was located in Purchase, New York. He lived in New Jersey, in Wyckoff, for a short period of time. It was great. It was one of the few times he's been around. Now, as you know in the world of corporate executive-dom, they move around a lot. At the time, even though it was Pepsi Cola brand that he was working for, the bottling company that he worked for was owned by Westinghouse. It's hard for you to imagine that, but Westinghouse Electric had a soft drink company. I forget what it was called. He ends up in Detroit. He was in Detroit with Pepsi for a while. His boss leaves Pepsi Cola and goes with 7-Up in Southern California. Excuse me--Phoenix, Arizona. My brother goes with him. Again, long story short, the guy who took him, left 7-Up; in fact, got fired. My brother now becomes the head of the company. He then eventually leaves Arizona and he ends up in Southern California. My father, when he moved to Florida, worked for Pepsi Cola. My brother, because of his Pepsi connection, got my father a job at Pepsi. Now my father's working for Pepsi as a salesperson. My brother's an executive for 7-Up. To help my father make up his mind about moving, part of the reason they moved him because my father thought his position at Pepsi--now that my brother was no longer involved in Pepsi, he could be fired more easily, let's put it that way. My brother said, "Dad, I don't want to make this too much nepotism. You're not going to work for me in Los Angeles, but we have a facility in San Diego. Would you be interested? Why don't you come out?" My mother and father flew out to San Diego. Now, Miami, where they lived in Hollywood, Florida, it was wonderful, but my goodness. San Diego was it. They packed their bags and they drove cross-country. My father worked for 7-Up. My mom worked in a bank. They lived the rest of their lives in Southern California. That's what got me there.

MG: Yes, we talked about this when we were having lunch, but it wasn't on the record. Can you walk me through that again?

DB: Yes. Sure. I have some of the same ailments as [my father], but he had a much more serious form of diabetes. He was on insulin and his kidneys were more problematic. He actually ended up losing some of his toes. After he retired--he had a wonderful life. Played golf. It was wonderful. As he approached eighty, things started to deteriorate more rapidly. Finally, in the summer of 1999, my mom had indicated he had taken a turn and it didn't look good. He was battling congestive heart failure. She didn't think he was going to be around for too much longer. My brother in Los Angeles was having some work related issues and I couldn't leave it all on him. I'm three thousand miles away. I could hear in my mother's voice. My younger brother was, at this time, in Colorado, I think.

MG: Richard?

DB: Richard. I was having some issues at Wolff and Samson that were somewhat burnout related, somewhat I'm working harder than I'm being paid for related. It wasn't too difficult for me to walk away from a very lucrative practice. I was making a fair amount of money. My kids

were now done with college. Those bonuses that I was getting at the end of the year were everything I thought they would be and this could be good. But I'm hearing the need in California. I don't even know if I gave the firm thirty days notice, but rather suddenly I said, "That's it. I'm leaving." In fact, I left before we sold our house. Actually, we did sell the house but the closing didn't happen. I drove out to San Diego. I picked up my daughter, who was in Michigan. She was in graduate school at Michigan. She hadn't met her husband yet. We drove to San Diego. We had a great trip. We stopped off at Zion National Park. It was a father-daughter road trip. It was really nice. I lived with my parents from August to October. Judy came out in October. The house was sold and we found a place in Mission Viejo. I wanted to be half way between LA and San Diego. My father, shortly after Judy came out, went into hospice. I have to tell you, my father didn't know what hospice was. He thought it meant vacation. He didn't know this was where you go at the end of the road. I guess they told my mother he had ninety days. Well, he outlived the ninety days, but not by much. Just a quick anecdote. When he was admitted to the facility--it was a beautiful facility by the way. It was a very, very nice hospice facility in San Diego. He didn't have an advanced directive, so they wanted to talk to him about what his requests were in terms of life support. My mother had always been my father's caretaker. She gave him the insulin. She looked out after him. She made all his life decisions. She's sitting there while the social worker is doing the interview. They get to the life support, end of life questions. Do you want to be resuscitated? Would you want them to take extreme measures to save your life? My father's saying, "Yes," and my mother's answering "No." They made my mother leave the room. They said, "Look, it's his life. Let him answer the questions." I guess it was November to April--his anniversary, his sixtieth wedding anniversary was in January. We were able to get him out to dinner with the family. We had a big party. I would come down. I wasn't working. Judy was working. I was doing a lot of caretaking, traveling back and forth to San Diego. I saw him on a Wednesday, took him out with the wheelchair. We went to the beach in San Diego. We went to his favorite little seafood shack. He had a great day. I've learned that this is pretty true because I watched my brother die, my mother-in-law die, my father die, and my mother die. They all have good days right before they die. On Wednesday, I'm out there with my father reminiscing, and on Friday he died. My mom moved out of her apartment. They had a very beautiful home in San Diego and moved into a retirement community not too far from Laguna Beach, closer to us. Boy, this gets crazy. Shortly after my father dies, my mother--and this is probably true of caretakers everywhere--who had neglected her own wellbeing finds blood in her stool. Needless to say, she has a colonoscopy. Needless to say, they diagnose her as having colon cancer. She needs surgery. My mother was one of the most vain people I have ever met in my life. She was well dressed, didn't believe in house dresses. The kids said, "My grandmother has bling." Also, her hair was the most important thing. She went to the beauty parlor every Friday, rain, snow, didn't matter. When the time came for the surgery, she had two questions. Number one, "Am I going to need chemotherapy and lose my hair?" She said, "If so, I'm not having it." Number two--because they said she'll probably need a colostomy, she'll probably need a bag--"Could you put the incision here, so that I could still wear a belt?" [laughter] Honest to God. She has the surgery. The doctor says to her, "Mrs. Brodkin, I was able to do it where you want it." She she could wear her belt. She survived. She did not die of colon cancer. She didn't need chemotherapy. She needed it, but not the kind that makes you lose your hair. My father died in April of 2000. She died in August of 2009. So she had a very nice [life]. She had seven granddaughters. She

had three sons. She always wanted a daughter. Each of us gave her nothing but girls. She had seven granddaughters. She died quickly. Also, heart failure, but related to some other issues. When she died--well, let me go back to my brother, because he dies in between. After my mother has the colon surgery and now I'm taking care of her, my brother had gone on a road trip to Canada. He had retired. The thought was that he and I would retire together. We got along really [well]. We were very close. So we were going to look for beach houses together, that kind of thing. He comes back and he was complaining about some lower abdominal pain. Well, again, long story short, they diagnose him with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. First question the doctor asked him was, "Did you serve in Vietnam? Were you exposed to Agent Orange?" I was there and I laughed. I said, "It's not catching." I said, "I was in Vietnam and I was exposed to Agent Orange." He put up a brave fight, but it was eighteen months and he died [at age] sixty-one. Now I have a sister-in-law who needs help. She never worked. Fortunately, my brother had a nice estate, so she's taken care of. She has a daughter who's very successful, so it wasn't the economic issue, but still family. I have my mother and my sister-in-law. Literally, my brother was in a hospital in Tarzana. If you know Los Angeles, it's outside of LA, which is not near Mission Viejo. I moved in with my sister-in-law for the whole time that he was in the hospital in Los Angeles, which was over thirty days. Then when they moved him to a hospital in Orange County I can move back in with Judy. Judy would come up on the weekends to see me. All this time I'm not working because I got all this other crap going on. Finally, he's starting to get better and I start doing some part-time legal work for Westfield shopping centers, one of the biggest shopping centers. I could do lease work from my home. I wasn't a lawyer and everything had to go through a lawyer, but I could still negotiate the leases and stuff, because that's what I was doing at Wolff and Samson. My brother passes and now I got no one to take care of except myself. I go back to work, but I wasn't going to go practice law because I had to take the Bar exam and I wasn't going to do that. I went to work for Apria Health Care, which was the largest home healthcare provider in the country. You need a C-Pap, you need a hospital bed, they provided home delivery. They did not own any property. They leased all the property. They needed someone to handle their real estate portfolio. I did that until they got bought. They got bought. They were public and then they got bought by a private company. I worked there four years. Now the economy is--Wells Fargo needs people who have had experience doing foreclosures. Some of what I had done back in New Jersey--not much, but some of what I had done back in New Jersey was related. I knew the language. I was familiar with the process and stuff like that. I went to work for them from 2008 until I retired. I came to Portland in 2010.

MG: Maybe you could tell me now about your children and grandchildren.

DB: I'd love to. They're the most wonderful thing. I have two daughters, Kimberly and Sara. Kim was born in 1970. Sara was born in 1973. Kim was born on a layaway plan. Sara, I was working. She came into the world and paid for normally. Both went to high school in New Jersey. Kim went to the University of Pennsylvania. Sara went to Boston University. Kim majored in history. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. Kim went to Rutgers for her Ph.D. Rutgers women's history program at the time and I think it still is--at that time, it was named number one in the country. She lived in Highland Park. We were still living in New Jersey for a short time anyway. That was good. Then when we moved out here, she was still back in Highland Park. She met her husband, who was from Kentucky. He was a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers, also--European history. They were an item. They lived together for probably six years

before they got married. My younger daughter went from--they both took a year off after college. Kim worked at the Smithsonian. Sara lived in Boston and worked in Boston for a year. Sara then went to the University of Michigan to get a master's in library information sciences. She met her husband who lived in an apartment next to her. He was a year younger than her. He was a senior when she was a graduate student. He was a native of Michigan. He was from Grand Rapids. [He] went on to medical school. They got married and they still live in Grand Rapids. So Kim and Rick, her husband, live here in Portland. They have two children, a girl, nine, and a boy, four. Sara also has a girl and a boy. Her daughter was born seven weeks, almost to the hour, after my first granddaughter. So my two granddaughters, they think of themselves as sisters and twins. She has a son who's six. You got nine, nine, six, four. My son-in-law in Michigan is an orthopedic surgeon. Kim is at Lewis and Clark. Rick teaches at Pacific. Sara is at an elementary school in Grand Rapids.

MG: Well, anything about family life or trips you have taken?

DB: We're very family-centric. Now that we're all over the place, we make a point every year of being someplace together. When we were living in Southern California, it was easy to get them to visit. We usually took a house on the beach in Newport Beach in January, after the mad rush of Thanksgiving and Christmas. When the kids were small enough, there was no school for them to worry about and their schedules, they were still on break. That was a good time to go. We always would rent a beach house for a week. I did all the cooking and it was just fabulous. We've been doing that all--in New Jersey, when the kids were small, we were beach people. Now that they're older and school's in the way, we sort of rotate. Two summers ago, we went to Michigan. My daughter's in-laws have a house up in Charlevoix in northern Michigan. They were gracious enough to host us, all of us. We'd go to Michigan. My daughter and her kids are coming out here in July. Once a year, we're all together. Thanksgiving, we tend to do a couple of things. We'll either do it at my daughter's house. My brother lives in Las Vegas. We'll go to Las Vegas; do it there. You should know both of my daughters married out of the faith. Neither one is married to a Jewish gentleman, but both of their husbands were not very religious, so they more than compromised. Not that my grandchildren will be bar or bat mitzvahed because they won't. They celebrate Christmas. They celebrate Hanukkah. They celebrate Easter. They're very ecumenical. I think the boys are both Protestant. They both come from religious families, but the boys aren't particularly religious. The girls, not that they have left Judaism; they haven't, but they're just not very observant. Like I say, Hanukkah and Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and stuff.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about the Classroom Law Project you volunteer with? It sounds like a perfect match for how you started your career.

DB: That's a good observation. This IPLE program that I told you about is very similar to the Classroom Law Project. Classroom Law Project has a couple of components. Besides bringing kids to the courthouse--and Judy is a volunteer at the courthouse. She takes the kids on courtroom tours and stuff like that. I'm not involved in that component. There's a mock trial component and there's a "We the People" component. The mock trial program is exactly what it sounds like. The kids do a mock trial run by a national program. They give out the case and they divide it between the plaintiff side and the defense side and you compete. There's a regional competition and a statewide competition. I got involved in that as a judge. Not a judge-

judge, but you could be a non-judge-judge. Since I'm not admitted in Oregon, I didn't want to take on the role of being the judge-judge, but you could be an educator judge. That's the role I play. The "We the People" program is one that focuses on the Constitution. They'll take various issues from the Constitution. Again, it's a competition, national and statewide. Portland has done extremely well. In the last six years, the national winner five of the last six years has been a Portland High School, either Lincoln or Grant. I got involved in the mock trial. The woman who directs the program, she saw my resume, and we knew a lot of people from IPLE together, interestingly enough. She said, "Dennis, we're starting a 'We the People' program in Madison High School. Madison High School is more in the area of need. It's a minority high school. These are kids who pretty much aren't going to college. They're going to be overwhelmed against the other schools. The teacher there needs some help. We have other lawyers, full-time lawyers who are coming in as coaches. Would you like to coach one of the teams?" I said, "I'd love to," because it's exactly the kind of training that I had before. This past year I worked at Madison High School and my team was--they gave me all the girls. I had a team of four young ladies, very interesting demographic. One of the girl's parents was from Cambodia. One of the girl's parents was from Peru. One of the girl's parents was from Canada, and the other was an African American. This is an advanced placement class, but trust me, these kids were not your typical advanced placement. They weren't high achievers. They were achievers, but not what you expect when you walk into an advanced placement. They were very interested learners and so I would meet with them every Thursday. We would work through the answers to our questions. Of course, then there's a presentation, a state competition in January where they're on their own and they give their presentation. Then they have questions. The judges there are mayors, city council, lawyers, all kinds of congressman, all kinds of people. This was our first year in it. I got a lot of personal satisfaction because these kids had no confidence. They didn't think they were--we showed them a film of the group that won last year, a videotape of their presentation, and they were completely intimidated. They said, "We can never do this." These kids were lucky to put together a sentence. Now they had to give a four-minute, memorized presentation. You know what it's like to get them from that point to that point? That's what they did and they were terrific. They didn't win, but they were terrific. I'll go back again next year. I enjoyed it that much.

MG: Good. One last thing I wanted to ask you about is I think you had mentioned you are going to go to the Michigan-Rutgers game this fall.

DB: Absolutely.

MG: Is the game in Michigan?

DB: The game is in Ann Arbor. Last year, I would have gone but it was the Jewish holiday, so I was stuck here. My son-in-law is a Michigan graduate and huge fan. His father [is] same year as me, Class of '65, Michigan. They've had season tickets forever. When my daughter met my future son-in-law, they would go to games. Then they got married and we made a point--my daughter's birthday is in October--of visiting her around her birthday and we always go the weekend of whoever Michigan was playing. Since 2000, let's put it this way, I've been to a Michigan football game in the big house. We were waiting for the day that Rutgers would get into the Big Ten. Now of course, I have a rooting interest. My brother, (…?) his daughter--he had a second marriage. He has a youngster in college. She's at Michigan. He now joins us for

the Michigan football weekend. We're making a big deal out of it. My closest high school friend, who I think I mentioned, who also went to Vietnam, huge Rutgers fan. He's coming to the Michigan game this year. We're going to have a big Rutgers representation over there.

MG: One more final question. You talked about how when you went back to Madison it did not resonate with you, but every time you go back to New Brunswick, Rutgers does.

DB: There's a big difference. Rutgers was my home for four years. I had a fraternity experience, which was wonderful. I think I mentioned to you, at the end of the reunion we had a breakfast at the Heldrich, just our fraternity brothers. We maintained that. We had twelve. Out of the total reunion turnout--and I was very disappointed in how many of our class showed up--but we had the largest representation of any of the fraternities or of any other group. I'll take credit for that. I told my other fraternity brother, who I went to Normandy with--we talked about it. I said, "Abe, we got to get everybody." I call him Abe. His name is Howard, but he was our treasurer, Abe Lincoln, Honest Abe. I said, "Our reunion is next year. Let's try and get everybody together." We planted the seed early and I worked and worked and worked on that. We had twelve of our fraternity brothers there. My Rutgers experience was much--I was a loner at Wisconsin. I think I told Shaun one of the reasons I left was I was lonely. I had just met Judy. There was a desire to be closer to her. I never really bonded with the university. The year I was an RA, I was a single. I had no roommate. I'm a people kind of a guy. Again, I felt academically I achieved what I wanted to. I proved to myself I was up to it, but my social life at Wisconsin was next to nothing. I met some people from the east coast. I'd hang with them, but it was never anything real firm. Let's put it this way, I have no contacts today with anybody I went to school with in Wisconsin.

MG: When you say you are disappointed in the fiftieth reunion was it because of low turnout?

DB: Yes, low turnout.

MG: How was the rest of the weekend otherwise?

DB: Wonderful. Obviously, Rutgers has a way of stepping on its own foot and not doing things very well. They're notorious for the Rutgers Screw. It was terrific.

MG: Good.

DB: It was well organized. The food was good. The campus looked great. Weather, of course, cooperated. I felt bad, but only because it was so good. The Old Guard Dinner. First of all, the other thing that struck me, I was very sad to learn of how many of my classmates died. One of the things that they did was they had a--did you see the book that they put together?

MG: I'm not sure.

DB: I'll show you. They put together an online program where you could write about yourself.

MG: Yes, I started to go through this.

DB: Memorabilia about the class. I don't think they have a list in here. Maybe they do. Let me just see.

MG: Of who has passed away?

DB: Yes. Maybe they have it. Yes. This is University College in memoriam. Let me see where they have ours.

MG: It's too early to be losing classmates.

DB: Yes, look at this. That's too big of a list. We're seventy. Out of nine hundred, that's too big a list. Now I can go through this list. I know three quarters of the people on here. When I got this list, I was in tears. These were people I was looking forward to seeing. When you think of a fiftieth reunion--"Oh my God. Wait until I see this guy. Marty Flickinger. I haven't seen Marty." Then here's his name on here. Only one of my fraternity brothers--that was one of the things when we were putting together the reunion; we had to find everybody. Only one of my fraternity brothers passed. I figured, "That's pretty good." Then I saw the number of our class. When you go through, you see a lot of these pages. They wrote nothing and they didn't come. Now, I think I had about ten high school classmates who went to Woodbridge and Rutgers. I was the only one. I felt for sure I'd have a mini reunion of my high school guys.

MG: Well, is there anything else?

DB: I can't think. Now might be the time to add a little more detail regarding two subjects that I've touched on earlier, Agent Orange and Military Pay. I was able to go through my files and found some pertinent information on Agent Orange that I would like to make part of my record. As I've mentioned, while in Vietnam, we were generally not aware of the use of Agent Orange and its toxicity. Certainly, we knew that some type of chemical defoliant was being used; the evidence of that use was plainly evident, especially in proximity to the thickest jungle growth. Large swaths of dead plant life would be interspersed with thriving jungle growth or large wastelands would dot the landscape when viewed from a chopper from above. We thought that was a good thing because we believed the enemy was being denied areas in which they could take refuge or use to launch attacks against our positions. What we could see was better than what we couldn't see. I never thought twice about the long term damage being done to that beautiful country and its people or the possible effects on our own health. In retrospect, it was a regrettable and painfully costly program. When I went on leave to Singapore in November '69, I met an Army pilot who flew the aircraft that did spraying in III Corps and in the Delta. We talked about it briefly, but the term Agent Orange never came up. He personally didn't handle the barrels of the chemicals, but was responsible for spraying the designated areas. He was amazed at how effective the spray was in defoliating the lush growth below. Upon returning home and up to 1982, I knew, and had heard, very little about Agent Orange. As I mentioned earlier in the interview, as a result of an announcement I saw in a local newspaper, I attended a meeting at the American Legion Post in Metuchen on January 20, 1982 (twelve years after returning home) to learn more about Agent Orange. I am providing some news clippings about that meeting in which I am quoted about my exposure to Agent Orange. I also have provided a copy of a map which was given to us at the meeting which shows the areas in Vietnam which were the locations of the heaviest spraying missions. Unfortunately, I served almost all of my in-country time in those areas. As a result of that meeting and having been sufficiently alarmed about the possibility of my exposure to Agent Orange (and it's possible effects on my children), I went to a VA Hospital in NJ just a week later on January 27, 1982 in order to participate in the

Agent Orange Registry program that the VA had just instituted. I have attached a copy of a blank Agent Orange Registry form that I was asked to complete, a copy of my completed intake form at the time of my exam, and a copy of a letter I received from the VA later in 1982 after I enrolled in the Registry. I have also attached some of the pamphlets I received from the VA alerting veterans to the risks of Agent Orange and various forms that become part of the process. I also periodically received a newsletter from the VA entitled "Agent Orange Review," which provides updates on medical research, disability benefits, FAQ, etc. I have provided a copy of the July 2006 issue. It was from one of those newsletter updates that I learned that the VA had determined a causal link between exposure to Agent Orange and Type 2 diabetes and that compensation for such disability was available upon submission and approval of any claim made. Having been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, I filed a claim in August 2011 (which also included a claim due to hearing loss suffered in Vietnam) and, after a physical examination by VA doctors and review of my civilian medical records, I received notice from the VA in September 2012 that my claim had been approved. (In December 2012, I received further notice that my award was upgraded to a higher level of compensation.) I subsequently entered into a written Co-Managed Care Agreement with the VA, which allows me to receive VA healthcare treatments for specialty care (i.e. hearing loss) but allows me to continue seeing my non-VA physicians for primary care. Under this agreement, I have an annual appointment with my VA-PCP and an annual diabetes related retinal exam at a designated local VA outpatient medical facility. In 2012, I was asked by the VA to participate in a new medical study, the Million Veteran Program, the purpose of which was to collect genetic and health information from veterans so that the VA could better treat diseases and conditions that specifically affect veterans. Blood samples were taken and my medical history was uploaded into a massive computer network. This was very reminiscent of my initial Agent Orange blood screening in 1982. My DNA is now part of the vast registry of veteran medical histories. Another interesting aspect of Vietnam service was the handling of the payroll. I'd like to offer a few comments regarding my own personal experience as well as my duties as payroll officer in C Battery. Military pay was, of course, based on rank, years of service, and included payment of certain additional benefits to which the individual soldier was entitled. When I arrived in Vietnam, my base pay as a First Lieutenant was $569.70 a month. I was also entitled to an additional $47.88 monthly subsistence allowance, $120 monthly quarters allowance (imagine that, the Army paid me handsomely for sleeping in a field cot in a hooch or wherever mother nature allowed), and $65 monthly hostile fire allowance (being exposed to hostile fire was not worth nearly as much as quartering expense). So my monthly pay, before deductions was approximately $803/month. The deductions (for FICA, life insurance, field rations--yes, we paid for food!--nothing was withheld for income tax) amounted to roughly $50/month, so my net pay was around $750/month. Of course, I had no place to safely keep that amount of cash and really not too many places to spend it. My wife was living with her parents (rent free) and had a job, so there was no need for me to send her money on a weekly basis. Chase Manhattan Bank had a branch physically located at Long Binh post, so I opened a checking and savings account (called a Soldiers Savings Account). So, I directed that a certain amount of my monthly pay go directly to my checking account and a large amount to my savings account (my first experience with direct deposit). Each month, $150 went into my checking account and $500 went into my savings account (sometimes a little more). That usually left me with around $100, which was to be paid to me in military payment certificates [MPC, the military form of cash]. American dollars were

highly coveted on the black market and their use was ostensibly prohibited. The MPC was used for card games, in battery purchases of beer and soda (which went into a slush fund to help guys in need), purchase of items from a PX that existed in rear area base camps, purchases from local vendors who accepted MPC (we also used local currency--dong and piaster--for that purpose) and other mundane uses. We also had access by mail order to the large PX in Japan that sold expensive watches, jewelry, cameras, household items and audio equipment at substantial discounts. For those purchases, our checking accounts were used. I bought quite a few items that were sent home to my wife, including a set of expensive Japanese dishes that we still use to this day, some fine jewelry, and numerous other things that were much more expensive to civilians at home. I also bought things for other family members. Thus, one of the unintended, but positive, consequences of my Vietnam service was a forced savings plan. By the time my tour ended, I had accumulated close to $7,000 in my savings account. When I landed in Oakland, one of the first things we did was to take care of finances. We got paid whatever cash (this time in dollars) was due us (for unused leave time) and transferred our Vietnam savings to our local accounts. By this time my wife and I were married a little over two years, but most of that time was spent in the service. The savings were used to help us begin our non-service life together. These savings, and eventually the GI Bill (Education Benefits) and VA disability benefits represent the financial benefits resulting from my military service. In each case, they have helped my family tremendously. While the personal cost of military, especially the year in Vietnam, was, for me, very high and is impossible to measure--and certainly can't be reduced to dollars and cents, at least there has been some measurable compensation to help balance the scales. Secondly, as battery pay officer, it was my responsibility to pay all of the soldiers in the battery their pay on the first of each month. If we were at base camp or fairly built up area, I normally received the payroll by courier (ground transport or chopper) and would pay each soldier and have them sign for their money personally. The administrative personnel who handled the payroll for the units in III Corps were based in Long Binh. Our Area of Operations was usually no more than seventy-five miles from Long Binh, but getting the money was not always easy. NCO's and enlistees/draftees were paid at a much lower pay rate than officers and many of the guys sent most of their pay home to needy family members, so, for the most part, I wasn't distributing too much MPC, but enough to keep things interesting. Of course, I would have to hold their pay if individuals were on R&R or otherwise away from the battery, or make other arrangements for those who were hospitalized or otherwise incapacitated. If we were out in the field, which was usually the case, things were a lot more difficult. Our mission always came first, so sometimes I couldn't get to make the payments until things calmed down and I could actually receive the funds and/or had the time to distribute them. If I remember correctly, the battery commander or the battery first sergeant had a safe which was used to hold the funds. Periodically, there would be a senior finance officer from outside our battalion who would audit the handling of the funds, but I don’t recall much in the way of paperwork that was kept other than a list of the amounts each soldier was entitled to and their signature indicating receipt. When the battery was split, I would have to travel to the other battery location (usually by jeep, sometimes by chopper, and fully armed) to make the payments. Sometimes those trips were quite dangerous, but the payroll got through. This duty allowed me to get to know the battery personnel a lot better and to appreciate their individual financial hardship circumstances. Some of the guys came from very poor backgrounds and the pay was not nearly enough to make ends meet, but the extra hostile fire pay certainly helped. Since the MPC sometimes found its way

into the wrong civilian hands and in order to prevent corruption and misuse of the money, the Army decided, with very little warning, to suspend the use of the then existing issue of MPC and replace it with a new issue (each denomination would now come in a different color than the prior issue--the old issue was deemed worthless). So at a particular time, I had to organize and implement the exchange of the MPC for all one hundred and seven persons in the battery. If the individual soldier did not make the exchange within the allotted period, they were SOL. As it turned out, the battery was split during the exchange period and, again, I had to travel in order to facilitate the exchange. Fortunately, the MPC exchange program was conducted only once while I was pay officer. I performed this duty for about six months and was happy to turn it over to a junior officer. Then I became battery field sanitation officer. That's another story altogether and a crappy one at that!

MG: I've asked all my questions. You have covered so much. I think we have probably at least six hours between today and last time.

DB: We'll have to do some editing. [laughter]

MG: I will be here for another couple days, so if I walk out the door and you think of a couple more stories.

DB: Tell me what you want me to do with materials.

MG: Well, if there is nothing else I will turn this off and we can conclude. I want to thank you so much for your service and all your time. I do not want this interview to end because it has been so much fun to talk to you.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 2/19/2016
Reviewed by Dennis Brodkin 3/1/2016
Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/16/2016