RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS CHALFANT, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

BASKING RIDGE, NEW JERSEY
MAY 3, 2019

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Tom Chalfant, Jr., on May 3, 2019, in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Thomas Chalfant: You bet.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

TC: I was born and raised in Harrison, New Jersey, up in North Jersey, right up through high school, graduated from Harrison High School. My family moved immediately--in fact, the day after I graduated [laughter]--to Parsippany. I lived there for a total of about four years before [leaving] and I went to college (living there) at Newark College of Engineering. Everybody knows that now as NJIT, but I still call it Newark College of Engineering.

[Editor's Note: Established in 1881 as the Newark Technical School, the institution rechristened itself Newark College of Engineering in 1930. In 1975, the school became the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), a public university.]

I went to college there. I had a major of Industrial Engineering. I was there a total of five semesters. I was hypothetically a junior, but I found out that because I had dropped two courses early on in my freshman year and hadn't gotten around to making them up (even though they weren't a blemish on my transcript), I was on probation anyway. [laughter] They had some kind of rule that I didn't know about, with dropped courses having to be made up within eighteen months. So, "they politely asked me not to register for the spring semester of my junior year." So, I left school.

I had met a young lady at a fraternity party there at school. We decided that it would be a really good thing to plan a wedding. I would stay out of school for one year. I would pick up exactly where I left off, but, in that year, I would make up those two courses. I would get back in good standing with the school and pick up right where I left off. We would get married and she would support me for the year-and-a-half that I needed to finish up.

It sure sounded like a good idea to me, and it almost worked. Our wedding was set for February 12th in 1966. On January 20th, I got that little "Dear Sir" letter from the Pentagon telling me that they would like me to report for duty on February 16th!

SI: Wow.

TC: I went down to the draft board. I said, "Look, I'm already enrolled back in school. You have to give me my deferment back." He said, "No, we don't." He said, "If I were you, I would go back down there to school and get my money back." He says, "You're not going to school."

I said, "Well, okay, I'm getting married on Saturday the 12th--I'm not planning on being in the Army on Wednesday the 16th. Give me a couple months' extension. I'm not going to go to Canada--that's not me. I'm going to be in the Army--okay, you got me, I lose--but I've got some

things to straighten out. I've got some furniture I have to cancel. I have an apartment I've got to cancel and get my money back. I've got some details, I have loose ends I have to fix up."

He said, "Well, we'll give you an extension, all right." February 28th. Bless their little hearts, they gave me twelve days. So, we got married on February 12th, above the objections of my father-in-law. [laughter] He got me in the corner one day and said, "You're going to be in the Army. They'll probably send you to Vietnam and you might get killed." I said, "Hey, I understand all of that, but we still want to get married." So, we did.

On February 28th, I entered the Army.

SI: Before we get into your time in the service, can I ask a few more questions about your early life?

TC: Sure.

SI: First, tell me a little bit about your family background.

TC: Okay.

SI: What were your parents' names, for the record?

TC: Thomas--I'm Junior--and Ella May was my mother's name.

SI: Okay.

TC: My father was a World War II veteran. He had been drafted. We share something in common there. I was born while he was in Oakland waiting to board a troopship for Japan in 1945. He sort of lucked out, because he was on the high seas when V-J Day happened. So, he missed all of the fighting in Japan. It was over when he got there, pretty much.

[Editor's Note: V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States. Japan formally surrendered on September 2, 1945, in a ceremony held onboard the USS *Missouri* (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay.]

He worked in the post office, retired from there. Somewhere in his later years, he decided to try and be a part-time minister in the Methodist religion. They had a program where you could take a couple courses at Fairleigh Dickinson (not get a degree, but take a few divinity courses) and they would call you a part-time minister.

Actually, the ironic thing was, as he started out--and he would be sent to churches in North Jersey, all around--well, at one point, he was sent to the church that we grew up in, in Harrison. They were without a minister and without the funds to really be able to hire one. So, he was appointed there permanently, for about four or five years, and had a very minimal salary, but it was a part-time job for him.

He was still working at the post office, which was about two hundred yards from the church, [laughter] kind of convenient. Like I said, in 1962, when I graduated, we had moved to Parsippany. So, he was travelling from Parsippany to Harrison on a daily basis.

My mother worked at an RCA plant, a cathode tube plant. Not too many young people know what cathode tubes are, but that's how televisions used to work. [laughter] When they moved to Parsippany, she had a small job there in town, but she was not interested in having a full-time job anymore at that point.

I have a younger brother. He's six-and-a-half years younger than me. So, he went to school there in Parsippany, graduated from Parsippany High School.

SI: Do you know how the family came to settle in Harrison?

TC: Yes. My father was born in Columbus, Ohio, but it was during the recession times in the early '30s (late '20s, early '30s), so, the family kept moving east as my grandfather tried to find work. They eventually came all the way to Newark. They lived in Newark for a little while, and then, Belleville. I only knew them as being in Belleville. That's where I remember my grandparents being.

Let's see, so, my mother was born in Harrison, graduated from Harrison High School. My father started at Harrison High School. When the family moved into Newark, they had a cousin in Harrison. So, he didn't want to go to school in Newark, went to school in Harrison, using the address of that cousin.

He then left Harrison High School after his sophomore year, spent the last two years at Our Lady of Good Counsel, which doesn't exist anymore, in Newark. They were turning into an all-girls school at the time. His class was the last boys. [Editor's Note: Our Lady of Good Counsel High School operated in Newark from 1925 to 2006.] My father was a football player--that's why he went to Good Counsel. He did not like the coach at Harrison. Back then, in 1944, if there had been a Player of the Year Award, he surely would have won it unanimously.

They played eight games back then. My father would explain that they had two plays--he was the tailback on the single-wing formation--they had two plays, "Student Body Left," "Student Body Right," both of the times him carrying the ball. That was their only two plays.

SI: Wow.

TC: Actually, there was an option on each of those plays. He could drop back and throw a pass if he saw the split-end open, but he also kicked the extra points, he punted, played linebacker on defense. The numbers were kind of amazing. I've forgotten them exactly, but they scored something like 140 points that year total. He scored all but six of them and he threw the pass for that touchdown.

SI: That is a lot to carry. [laughter]

TC: Yes, yes. College was never in his sights, although I'm guessing he could've been recruited and gotten a scholarship for sure, but he had no interest. He played a game on Thanksgiving Day, the last game of his senior year. Dressing after the game, he gave his duffel bag to one of the other kids and said, "Turn this in on Monday for me, because I'm not going to be there." Friday morning, he got up with his dad and went to work as an apprentice carpenter with his father.

So, school was not what he had any interest in. My mother went and finished graduating school (in high school) at Harrison. They got married in the first week in July after that graduation. I came along not much later, ten months later, actually.

SI: He must have gotten drafted soon after he left school.

TC: Yes, we drove a similar path, he and I, yes. I didn't exactly copy him, but pretty close, yes. Obviously, I was a war baby. I mean, the idea of my mom getting pregnant and having me was, in fact, to keep him out of getting drafted, because if you were married *and* you had a child, you went further down the list of the draft order--but it didn't work. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: He was drafted before I was born. Like I said, he was in Oakland waiting for his troopship to leave when I was born. Now, jumping forward, similar situation, I got drafted, Michele was pregnant. My daughter was born while I was in Vietnam. So, somewhat similar; seems like I wasn't smart enough to not make his mistakes again. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

TC: But, I did. [laughter]

SI: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Harrison. What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in? What was the town like?

TC: Well, it was a small town, one square mile exactly, but it also had the largest number of liquor licenses per square inch of any municipality in the country at the time. It was a blue-collar town, 99.2 percent Democrat, I believe.

As a matter of fact, the one mayor when I was growing up, I believe he served for twenty-five consecutive two-year terms. He was really old when he finally quit, [laughter] but most of the time when I was growing up, he just would run unopposed. Nobody bothered. [Editor's Note: Frank E. Rodgers (1909-2000) served as the Mayor of Harrison from 1946 to 1995.]

SI: Wow.

TC: So, it was not a "blackboard jungle," but close. We weren't Newark, but we were right across the river, okay.

SI: Yes. I was curious, since your father later became a part-time minister, was religion important in your family life growing up?

TC: My mom and dad tried to make it so, yes. As a teenager (as most teenagers), I knew much better than any adult, and so, I slipped away from that. When she made me go to Sunday school, I did, but, if she didn't hammer at me and if I could come up with something else I had to do, she let me--but, yes, it was.

That was my mother, not my father, being the driving force there. He had no involvement or hardly at all. He didn't go to church with us. Usually, it was just my mother and my brother and I. That came to him later, twenty, twenty-five years later. So, it wasn't a significant part of my life, but it was a part of my life.

I grew up on the streets. I mean, we had gang fights once in a while, whenever the Latinos from the East Side of Newark would ride across the river, come across the bridge and make themselves known to us. That was a no-no. We told them how to go back to where they belonged and don't come back, but they kept coming back. A few times, we had scuffles, but that was just a normal growing up.

SI: Would a gang be formed based on your street, where you lived, or was there some other affiliation?

TC: No, I mean, it was all-Harrison versus anybody else.

SI: All right.

TC: We weren't fighting each other. It was a small town. I mean, my graduating class was 104, okay. We were a small school, a small town. So, there was very few--there were individual fights, but there weren't gangs that fought against gangs.

We would hang around at the candy stores and pizza places, and a couple of the bars that would let teenagers hang out in front, but we were all linked by phone. If we saw a car that we didn't like come heading down Harrison Avenue, we would call the other places. Everybody came to gather and see what the problem was and make it go away.

It wasn't a bad town to live in. I learned to be streetwise. Don't get into a card game with me, you won't win.

SI: Yes.

TC: I learned how to hustle a little bit here and there--don't play shuffleboard bowling in a bar with me either. [laughter] I was good, because I spent a lot of time doing that. At that time, New Jersey had a drinking age of twenty-one, but New York was eighteen. So, when I was fifteen, we were hopping what was called then the Hudson Tubes--you would now know it as the PATH trains--heading over. We used to go over to a little bar just outside of Chinatown.

Kind of a funny story, the place was called Jimmy's. The bartender owned it; he was Jim. Everybody's buying me drinks one night. Jimmy comes over, he says, "Hey, Tom, what's the deal? Everybody's buying you drinks." I said, "Yes, it's my birthday, man." "Good. How old are you?" "I'm eighteen." I'd been going there for two or three years, every couple weeks. That took him back a little bit, actually. He said, "Really?" I said, "Yes, you don't have to worry about me anymore." [laughter]

SI: Wow.

TC: Yes, it was an easy thing to do. We would just take the train back, so, there wasn't any driving involved. So, it was pretty safe, actually. It was better than what the kids out in the suburbs were doing, because they were drinking, too, but, then, they were driving.

SI: Yes. Did you go to work outside of school early? Did you have part-time jobs?

TC: No. The first job I ever had was during the time I was in college, when I first started school. I got a part-time job at a fast-food hamburger place called Wetson's. They don't exist anymore, but they were big out in Long Island. They had a store there in Pine Brook, which was a couple miles from my house in Parsippany.

So, I went to work there. I'd work on the weekends, on Saturday and Sunday. When I left school, during that year, he promoted me to a rolling manager. He now had three stores. He had one in Teaneck and one in Lodi. So, I would run from one store to the other, basically working seventy, sometimes eighty, hours each week. I was trying to bankroll as much money as I could for us getting married. I was making a lot of money from those days.

I had an opportunity to buy into another store he was planning on opening. All I had to do was come up with, like, five thousand dollars to invest with him, but, really, I couldn't come up with that much money. That was an awful lot of money back then. [laughter] So, that didn't happen. If I had done that, it's possible I could've avoided the draft by saying, "Hey, you're taking me away from a business that I own," but that's all water that went by the dam.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your education, particularly in high school. It is interesting that you wound up going for engineering. Did you have that interest going into high school?

TC: Not in the least. First of all, I was too young. My parents had cheated, starting me early. The rules back then, you could start kindergarten at four years, six months. I was born in the middle of April. They started me that September--do the math. I'm not four years and six months, I'm a little short. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: As a consequence, when I was a senior, I didn't turn seventeen until April when I graduated in June. So, I was actually a year younger.

It hurt me terribly in sports. Here, I'm playing basketball my senior year, I'm sixteen-and-a-half and I'm playing against kids that have already turned eighteen. A year-and-a-half difference at that stage is huge, both physically and emotionally and mentally.

So, anyway, I was an "A" student all the way until my senior year. Being a little bit of a wise-ass, I started looking, saying, "Wow, the last thing I want to do is become the valedictorian. You've got to write this speech. It sounds like a lot of work." I didn't want to do any of that work. When I got to be a senior, I really wasn't even doing any schoolwork. Bless her little heart, there was a little girl in my homeroom class that was doing all my homework for me.

It worked, but I made sure that I was not going to be either number one or number two, because both of them would have to give speeches at graduation. So, I dropped myself, intentionally, all the way down to fourth, to make sure I didn't have to bother with that, but I was still an "A-" student. I could've been number one if I wanted to, but I really didn't want to.

Some guidance counselor there said, "Gee, you're pretty good in math." "Yes." "You ought to be an engineer." "Okay," that's how that happened, to answer your question. [laughter] If I had it to do all over again, it would be done differently. I probably would have been in an MBA program, business program, because I got a degree, finally, after I came back from the Army.

I went back to school nights and I did finish the degree, but I never worked one day as an Industrial Engineer. I worked for about three years as a Mechanical Engineer, assistant engineer, the third guy in a three-man group where we were building power plants.

Ironically, that job was with Worthington Corporation, which was headquartered in Harrison. I started at a little office they had in Bloomfield, but, then, they moved that office back to the home place there in Harrison. So, ironically, when I was twenty-four, here I was, working about six blocks from where I grew up, but that's the only time I ever worked as an engineer.

After that job, I got a job with the title of "sales engineer." It was a sales company selling industrial pumps and the guy demanded an engineering degree. That was part of his requirements. It really wasn't necessary to have an engineering degree. You could've been just technically capable a little bit, but that was his rule. So, I had a degree and I got the job. Then, thirteen years, I stayed with him.

Then, I took a couple of stupid pills one day and I started my own company. [laughter] The last twenty-six years, I ran my own operation.

SI: Wow.

TC: One-man band. I never got around to hiring somebody, almost did a couple times, but didn't work. So, then, I retired in 2011.

SI: Before we talk about the service, are there any memories of the Newark College of Engineering? Do any professors come to mind?

TC: Oh, yes. Well, let's see, I'll tell you about my first day, my first class.

SI: Okay.

TC: Now, a lot of the kids going to NCE were kids from Essex Catholic, St. Benedict's [both in Newark], St. Peter's [in Jersey City], all of those schools, which are good schools. Here I was, from the public school. Well, this first class was titled "High School Refresher Math," something like that. We get in, the first thing the guy says is, "Turn to page 82, chapter 11." He said, "We'll start there." He said, "The rest of the first ten chapters are so simple."

Well, I took a peek at some of those chapters--here was trigonometry in there somewhere and plane geometry, which I never even saw. So, fifteen or twenty minutes into my college career, I figured I was about a year-and-a-half or two years behind already. [laughter] It woke me up.

It was really tough for me because I used to get up and take a bus that would pick me up in front of my house in Parsippany at about six-twenty, took an hour and thirty-five or forty minutes to get all the way to Newark. Then, taking that bus back, there wasn't much time for anything.

There wasn't even any time really for me to do any studying and trying to catch up. Here I was, my parents told me I had to work, because they had paid that first tuition that first semester, "But, hereafter, you're on your own." So, I had to make some money to do that.

So, I was so far behind as a freshman, I didn't bother to pledge the fraternity, a fraternity that had six guys that I knew from Harrison. They were not classmates from Harrison High School. They all went to parochial schools, but I knew them. They were friends and, if I was going to pledge a fraternity, it surely was going to be Pi Kappa Phi.

I didn't as a freshman, even though they badgered me like hell, because I kept telling them, "Hey, I don't know that I'm going to be here much longer. [laughter] In fact, I'm pretty sure I'm not going to be," but I persevered. I came back for the sophomore year and I did pledge.

The schoolwork got to be a little bit easier at that point, because I had help there in the fraternity. I had a couple tutors--worse than that, they had some of the exams already printed out. If you ever saw the movie *Animal House* [(1978)], yes, there was a lot of that stuff that was correct. [laughter] I watched that movie the first time and I said, "Wow," I'm picking guys out, I said, "Oh, yes, that's him and that's him and that's him, and that's me over there."

I have no regrets whatsoever for having done that, because I met Michele at a Friday night fraternity party. We're now married fifty-three years, so, I guess it's working.

SI: Yes.

TC: Hey, I don't know, ask her.

SI: It sounds like they had a house.

TC: The fraternity?

SI: Yes.

TC: Had a house, oh, yes. I didn't live there. I commuted back and forth. I really couldn't afford to think about living at the house there; would've been nice, but I couldn't afford it.

Those Friday night parties, I mean, I would walk from Newark over into Harrison, where my mother's cousin lived. I called her Aunt Thirza and I would show up at her place there at two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning. She would wake me up at six, so that I could walk, again, that mile and a quarter over to the bus station at Penn Station in Newark, once again, get that bus.

It would take me past where I was working there in Pine Brook. I could get off there and be at work at nine o'clock. [laughter] There was never any time for sleep, but, then, I was a young guy--you didn't have to sleep. Sleep wasn't important. Usually, I would work on the Saturdays and head home, take a shower.

Michele, I didn't have a car, so, she would come and pick me up. Then, we would drive up to Greenwood Lake, which is New York and a drinking age of eighteen. We would go to one of the clubs up there in Greenwood Lake, get home one, two o'clock in the morning and, once again, be back at work at nine and work another seven or eight hours at the place.

Yes, as you may have noticed there, my entire week was taken up. There wasn't any time for books at home. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

TC: But, I don't want to use that (any of those things) as an excuse. I could've done it better. Ironically, when I went back that last year-and-a-half at night school, my GPA was about 3.6. So, it wasn't like I couldn't do it, [laughter] but I was too young.

I should've went in the Army first. Literally, that would've been the best thing for me to have done, because I was too immature for college. I was too young. I was seventeen. Yes, if I'd have spent two years in the Army first, and then, went to school, things would've been quite a bit different, but you can't correct history. Like I said, I have no real regrets about all of the things that have happened to me, because, at this point in time, I have a marriage that has lasted much longer than basically anybody I know, including my kids, who have a history of divorce.

So, I'm okay within my skin at this point in my life. I don't look back and say, "Gee, what if, what if?" Yes, if I had it all over to do again, I mean, if this life thing is something where you do get recycled, it probably would be done a little differently, but the things that occurred and happened to me--like I said, I met this girl at a fraternity party. Well, if I had quit after my freshman year (which I really thought about doing), I would've never met her.

SI: Things work out.

TC: Sometimes, and I also look at life as it's like a card game, except that you're not allowed to fold. You have to play the cards that you have. If they're bad, well, you still have to play them. So, you've got to bluff your way through and try and take the pot. I think I can; I've done that most of my life.

SI: Okay.

TC: I've taken more pots than I've lost.

SI: That is good. Let me pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You went into the service in 1966.

TC: That's correct.

SI: Yes. This is still two years before Tet, when Vietnam moved to the forefront of everyone's mind, but were you following what was happening in Vietnam then? Were you aware of it?

[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 often seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.]

TC: A little bit, not really all that much. I was like most people back here in the States. We knew it was happening, we knew we had troops over there, but, literally, the majority of us, if you gave us a globe, we'd have had trouble finding that little country. It was over there somewhere. If you took all the names off the globe and just had the boundaries shown, I don't think I would have been able to pick it out. [laughter]

Yes, we knew that we had deferments when we were in college and those that were not in college did not have a deferment and they were getting drafted. So, I knew the risk when I took that one year off. I really thought I would beat it. I didn't think they would catch me that quick, but I was wrong. It was one of the many mistakes I've made along the way, but I only missed by that much. I almost got back in school, [laughter] just not quite.

SI: Do you think that was because you had moved to Parsippany and it was the Parsippany draft board you were dealing with?

TC: That is correct.

SI: Do you think that the fact that you were recently in town had anything to do with it?

TC: I don't know if being recent in town had anything to do with it, but being that it was a suburb and a white-collar community (and, in fact, the county was pretty much white-collar), there were less available draftees. Kids, they were from families with a little bit more income

than I was used to in Harrison, so, those kids were all going to college. So, yes, that could have sped up the process a little bit.

We had no political connections. Ironically, my father-in-law had some connection with Representative Peter Rodino there in Essex County, but, unfortunately, he said, "Hey, the kid doesn't live in Essex County. I can't help. If he lived here with you in Bloomfield, maybe I could." So, yes, I was drafted. [Editor's Note: Peter J. Rodino represented New Jersey's 10th District in the House of Representatives from 1949 to 1989.]

It was kind of a dark time for me. I was a little bit mad at the world, but mostly mad at me, because I created the possibility and I didn't have anybody to blame for that but me. I entered the Army with a couple of chips on my shoulder, "Hey, you drafted me right after my wedding." Well, the story got worse a couple days after they drafted me.

I was at Fort Dix for four or five days. They got us all out in the courtyard and they said, "You guys are special. You're not going to take basic training here at Fort Dix like everybody else, right here at home. Well, you guys are going to Fort Hood." I swear to you, in unison, about two hundred guys in this courtyard said, "Where the 'F' is Fort Hood?" It's like, "We never heard of this place.

SI: Yes.

TC: Then, the guy says, "Texas," and two guys fainted. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

TC: That was really a smack in the head. So, my married life did not start out correctly. Sixteen days after getting married, I'm in the Army. Twenty-one days after my wedding, I'm not only in the Army, I'm two thousand miles away.

I remember the drill instructor that we had, who, ironically, was a kid from Trenton. [laughter] In fact, he stood in front of us and he said, "Wow, my prayers are answered--look at what I've got. Instead of these country bumpkins I keep getting, I got some guys from the block." [laughter] He said, "We're going to have some fun for nine weeks."

Actually, they sent two groups down there. The group from that [place] was drafted out of Morristown, out of the Morristown draft board, but the other group was from the Trenton draft board, right where this drill instructor grew up.

He went up and down the line, saw somebody and said, "You, you got an older brother? You look familiar." The guy says, "Yes, John's my older brother." "Oh, yes, I remember him--I beat him up one time. Tell him who I am." He went down and got another kid and said, "You got an older sister?" The kid said, "Yes." The drill instructor just had this big grin on, "Yes, mention me to her." [laughter] He says, "We're going to have a lot of fun." He said, "Even you guys from Morris County out there, think that you're better than everybody, we're going to have fun with you, too, because you're also from the block."

It was a difficult time. He also said, at that time, "If you're really good, you can earn weekend passes." I remember, at the time, I went and talked to him. I said, "Why in hell would any of us want a weekend pass? What incentive is that? We're two thousand miles away from home. Nobody can visit us. What, do we want to go hang out in Killeen, Texas? I don't think so."

He says, "Yes, you're right." [laughter] He says, "I'm going to have trouble. We're not going to be able to convince you guys to do everything right, are we?" I said, "I don't have any incentive. [laughter] Why would I want a weekend pass?" I got through that, obviously.

They then sent me to a school in Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland to learn my MOS [military occupational specialty], which was fire control instrument technician. It didn't have anything to do with putting out fires. It had to do with the instruments that controlled the fire, the big guns, the howitzers. Binoculars were included in there. In fact, anything that had a piece of glass in it was my piece of equipment.

That was pretty nice. I mean, the ten weeks that I was there, I was able to get home, not every weekend, but most weekends. So, that was really nice, but, then, they shipped me back to Fort Hood. When I got back to Fort Hood, I summoned Michele to come down and live with me off post. I got approval to live off post with her, got an apartment, and told one of the other guys (who was also married and he was looking to do the same thing) right after I moved into the apartment. Actually, Michele hadn't landed yet, hadn't gotten there.

I told this fellow, Ron, and I said, "Well, the people next door are moving out. He just got his orders. He's shipping out." So, he ran real quick and got that apartment next door. He's the only real connection I have from my Army days. We're still in touch. As a matter of fact, Michele and I are travelling out to Chicago to hang out with them on Memorial Day weekend for a couple weeks. We've gone on cruises. We've done a lot. He's a retired cop in Chicago.

SI: Tell me a little bit more about that initial period in Fort Hood. You had what sounds like a real piece of work drill instructor. What types of things would he do?

TC: Oh, we went on full-gear, twenty-mile hikes, singing all the way. Looking back, he was tough. I mean, there's no doubt he challenged each and every one of us. He said, "Any of you guys get pissed off at me and you want to take a few shots at me," he said, "we'll go in the back of the barracks. I'll give you the first shot," he said, "but you'd better knock me out, because you're not going to get a second shot." [laughter]

One guy did challenge him, came back bloody. We were all sworn to secrecy. I mean, you couldn't talk about something like that and we wouldn't anyway, because he'd kill us next.

SI: Yes.

TC: Ironically, looking back, he was so tough that it was actually a good thing. He made the statement once to me, on my birthday, and that was an interesting thing. Let's say it's about 1900 hours (about seven o'clock at night), after dinner. One of the NCOs [noncommissioned officers]

came over looking for me and says, "The old man wants to see you." "Oh, gee whiz, what'd I do?" I didn't remember doing anything bad that day.

I toddle over to his hootch and I walk into his room. Here, he's got a bottle of bourbon and he's sipping from a glass and there's another glass there. He pours it and he says, "Happy birthday." He knew it was my birthday and he says, "So, see, I can be human." He said, "I'm tough on you guys and I know you hate me. It's the right thing for you to do. It's okay," he said, "but I just hope that, somewhere along the line, I teach one of you something that might save you."

He said, "If somebody could prove to me that something I did saved one of you guys, I'd be real happy. This would mean that my life is in the right direction," he said, "but I can be normal." He said, "I am normal now," he said, "but don't worry about it--tomorrow morning, I'm going to be the same prick I was today." "This all ends," he said, "drink up and that's it, happy birthday."

SI: Wow.

TC: I told him at the end of the nine weeks, I went up to him and shook his hand and said, "Thanks." I said, "I think you have turned me into something I wasn't before." He said, "Yes, that's the way the system works." He said, "It only takes the Army nine weeks to transform you from whatever you were into what we want you to be." He said, "I think you'll be a good soldier." I said, "Well, I hope so." [laughter]

SI: Yes. Do you happen to know if he had been to Vietnam?

TC: Yes, he had.

SI: Okay.

TC: Yes. He was one of the original guys they sent over there in '63-'64, was the quote-unquote "advisors," because he was a Green Beret (at that time, the Special Forces now). I mean, he was a black guy, I want to say six-[foot]-one, 210 pounds, with a twenty-eight-inch waist, so, I don't know if you got the picture of this guy.

I mean, he was serious when he said he could take any one of us--in fact, probably five of us at a time. I'm sure he was correct. [laughter] I wouldn't have ever thought about challenging him, but, when I left basic training, I was in the best shape of my life, 168 pounds, perfect weight.

I remember, when you got inducted, they told us, "You will be this weight at the end of basic training." I thought that was silly. I weighed about 140. "I'm going to gain twenty-eight pounds? You're nuts." [laughter] Actually, I think they told me I would be 165. I was 168, but with a twenty-nine-inch waist, unlike today. I don't know where that went. [laughter]

So, his training was very good to me. He deviated from his normal routine one day. He said he was going to spend one afternoon, like four hours, teaching us one martial arts move. He taught us how to disarm a guy coming at us with a knife, taught us how to disarm him and kill him with his own knife in less than a second-and-a-half.

SI: Wow.

TC: After we all practiced it a whole bunch of times, yes, I thought I could do this, okay. I never was worried. I said, "Now, if the guy comes from the back, well, that's another story. I've got to see him first." This wasn't part of the basic training, but he just said, "I think you ought to have this one little tool that you can, just in one little, quick swoop, you break the guy's wrist with your right hand, take the knife out with your left and jab it in his neck." The whole thing takes less than two seconds.

We practiced and practiced it that afternoon. It was really a cool experience. I thanked him at the end of it all, saying, "Hey, I hated you all this way," I said, "but I think it might have been worth it," because, hey, I didn't have any kind of background before. He taught me how to shoot a rifle. He taught me how to do everything and got us so much in shape that we knew what we were doing.

SI: Did you train with the M-14 or the M-16? [Editor's Note: The M-16 entered service in 1964 and replaced the M-14 as the standard issue rifle in the US Army in 1968.]

TC: Yes, the M-14. I never saw an M-16 until I got to Vietnam. That's the first time I ever had one in my hand. They handed it to me and said, "This is your weapon." I said, "Great; never saw one before. How do you shoot it?"

SI: Yes.

TC: No, that M-14, let's see, it weighed about eleven pounds. When you had that thing on your shoulder for three hours, running the whole time, your right arm got to be about two inches longer than your left arm. That's just the way it was. It was a heavy piece of equipment. It wasn't a toy, and don't get me on with the M-16. That was a toy--a bad toy.

I went back to Fort Hood after my schooling. I got Michele to come down to live with me. So, for about six months, seven months, from September '66 all the way up until March of '67, I had pretty close to an eight-to-six job [laughter] and went home each night, once in a while, guard duty and, once in a while, KP [kitchen patrol] duty and that kind of thing.

As a matter of fact, this fellow Ron (who lived next door to me) and I, we used to ask for KP duty every so often, because, somehow, on our salary, the food never lasted all month. Hey, if you went on KP duty, the cooks would turn their back and let you steal a loaf of bread or some cold cuts or maybe some hamburgers that we could reheat, things to get us through a couple days, because we ate a lot of Campbell's soup that last week of every month. [laughter] There wasn't anything left. That's all we could afford, but that was a great time.

Now, when Ron's wife, Lorraine, got down there, she was pregnant and she delivered the baby. Michele and I were, I guess, proxy godparents, so that they could christen him before they could be able to get home and do it correctly. We stayed in contact with them and I'm in contact with

his two sons, that one and his younger brother, went to their weddings. So, we've kept in contact all these years. Like I said, that was a great period of time for me.

SI: Were your daily duties related to repairing the equipment?

TC: Yes, supposed to be. I just had a job in the shop. Yes, that was my job as an instrument repairman. However, a couple weeks after Michele got there, I saw a sign on the board looking for tryouts for a soccer team.

The First Armored Division (which is where I was), along with the Second Armored (which was there at Fort Hood) and the artillery guys from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and the, I guess, infantry guys there from Fort Polk, Louisiana, and Fort Sam Houston down in South Texas and one other--where's the other? I can't remember--we're going to have a soccer tournament.

Hey, I grew up in Harrison, which was a soccer town. Although I didn't play soccer for Harrison High School, I couldn't make the team, turned out I found out I could play the game a little bit. So, I went for the tryouts. I made the team. So, for about six or seven weeks, I was playing soccer instead of doing my job, hey. [laughter]

When that ended, I went back to work on the job, but, then, there was another note that came up on the board. They were putting together a basketball league. So, I played basketball in high school. So, I went and tried out for that and made that team. So, there was another two months that I didn't really work. I played basketball.

When that was over in December, I went back to my unit and they were looking for a clerk to do the processing of all the work. This was before the days of computers and such things. So, I raised my hand. I said, "Hey, I've got half of a college degree and I can print pretty neatly. I can organize things." So, I got that job.

So, once again, the rest of the time I was there in Fort Hood, I was not really repairing equipment. I was just scheduling it and telling other people to repair it. As a consequence, when I finally got shipped to Vietnam, I was very inexperienced in my own job. I really hadn't worked at it very much, at least not the seven months that I should've been working at it, but I got lucky.

When I landed there, the guy I was replacing had three, three-and-a-half weeks left to go before he left and he taught me. He taught me more than I learned in the ten weeks at the school and any time after that. He was very good at the job. Worse than that, the first thing he said to me, he says, "Hey, everything you remember from that school, forget," because we used to repair that equipment in a clean room. He says, "You don't see any clean rooms around here, do you?"

I said, "Well, how do you open up those optics in this environment and keep them clean?" He says, "Well, you do the best you can, but clean? No, that's not what we're doing here." [laughter] I said, "Oh, okay." So, he taught me.

He taught me one thing that I used one time, which was very, very important. The instruments (we called it a quadrant) on the big howitzers had a level vial, a little, tiny level vial. That's how

you would calibrate the machine, is you would get it to zero and set the level vial. We would cement it in with plaster of Paris, which was a very quick drying cement. It'd dry hard in about five minutes.

Well, Frank told me, he said, one time, he ran out of plaster of Paris. I said, "Well, you're out of luck. You can't fix it." He said, "No," he said, "you can't go tell those artillery guys no." He said, "They've got a gun down and you want it to be up. It's protecting you as well as everybody else." He said, "No, no is not an acceptable answer." He showed me how to take Bazooka bubble gum, which the USO was dropping to us in these care packages, and be able to set that level vial and make it work for about five or six hours.

SI: Wow.

TC: I had to do it one time. I didn't have any plaster. They called me out there and just said, "The gun is down." I look at it. Here's this level vial, it's busted. I said, "Okay, everybody turn your back. You're not supposed to see what I'm going to do," I said, "but I'm going to do [this with bubble gum]." [laughter]

The Company Commander said, "This is no good. This is bullshit. Go get some plaster of Paris." I said, "Where would you like me to do that? You got a store somewhere out here?" I said, "I don't have any. I've been asking for it for days. They haven't gotten it to me. I'm doing the best I can. You can shoot this gun and I guarantee you it will work for a few hours."

This was in the morning. I said, "Hopefully, now that I've screamed enough, maybe when I get back to my camp, they'll fly me in some. I'll come back out here. I'll take the bubble gum out and I'll put the plaster of Paris in and we'll do this right;" turned out it was the next morning.

I had to go and do that, but they shot that gun that night. I don't think they were confident that that big bullet would go where it was supposed to, but it did. The gun worked. The instrument worked. Little things like that, you can't read in any history book, I don't believe. [laughter]

SI: Yes. Were there other kinds of "field expedient" things that they taught you about?

TC: Oh, yes, binoculars. Parallax is a problem with binoculars. That's where the two prisms are doing this, when you're looking there.

SI: Pointing towards each other.

TC: You get the double vision, okay. That's a very delicate adjustment, moving those prisms to get rid of that parallax. The way you do it is, you sight on a target fifty meters away and that's how you can [calibrate it]. You keep adjusting it until your eyes tell you that the parallax is gone and you're straight on. Well, how was I supposed to make a target fifty meters away? I was in my truck. That was my shop.

Frank just simply said, "Look, the other truck over there, that's the signal section truck, the radio jockeys." He said, "See the little stick I have standing up there? That's your target." I said, "That's not fifty meters; that's probably less than thirty."

He says, "Yes, I know." He says, "You want to ask them to move their truck somewhere? There's no place to move it. The camp isn't that wide." He said, "I'm sorry, that's the best I can do." So, he said, "I calibrate them and get rid of the parallax at a thirty-meter [range]. At fifty meters, maybe you'll have some parallax."

He said, "Between you and me, the infantry guys with the binoculars aren't looking fifty meters away. They're usually looking fifteen meters away." [laughter] Fifty meters is a long way. He said, "Nah," he said, "these are close enough." He said, "These are the things you have to do. You've just got to cheat. Whatever you have to do, you cheat."

I guess one of the funniest experiences ever happened to me is, one day, they brought me an infrared scope for an M-16. I had never seen one. They didn't teach us this in school. They weren't in existence when I went to the school. Those were still in the prototype stage. Well, I didn't even know how to take it apart, let alone put it back together.

The guy says, "Hey, can you help me?" I said, "I don't really know." I called down to the base camp--nobody down there knew anything on how to fix it. I said, "Do you have any that I can throw this one back to you and get a new one?" "No, we ain't got any. They might have some out at the depot in Cam Ranh, but it might take you three weeks to figure out how to get that." [Editor's Note: Multiple branches of the United States Armed Forces built and used facilities at Cam Ranh Bay during the Vietnam War.]

So, I just told this Special Forces guy, a LLRP (long-range reconnaissance patrol) guy, I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do," I said, "but why don't you stick around with me and we'll try and take it apart, you and me? We'll see if, eventually, we can put it back together." [laughter] I said, "I don't know if we can fix it. I don't even know what you're telling me is wrong with it," turns out it was really simple.

We took it apart and we saw a piece of dirt in there. That was making the contact miss somehow, and I sort of blew it out, cleaned it up. He looked in, he says, "Hey, it works." "Cool. Have a nice day, see you. Don't bring this thing back to me ever again, because, next time, I won't be able to fix it," [laughter] but you had to try. Like I said, "no" was not a valid answer. "No, I can't fix it," is not an acceptable answer.

There was also zero tolerance--make a mistake, no, can't. Somebody's going to get killed. A good guy is going to get killed if I made a mistake. So, every time I heard about a short round, I started shaking. I mean, I went, "Could that have been me? Is it possible?" because, hey, I'm human, I'm sure I can make mistakes.

I tried like hell never to. No one ever brought one to me that showed me that it was my mistake, but I can't tell you that I never made one. I hope not, but it was a high-pressure job.

They would jump me on a helicopter and, ironically, I flew in bubble helicopters, like the old *M*A*S*H* program, left over from Korea. Well, we had one. They wouldn't want to waste a Huey on just taking me out to a firebase, because it was just me. So, I flew I don't know how many missions, probably thirty, forty, in that bubble helicopter.

[Editor's Note: The TV show *M*A*S*H,* set in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (a MASH unit) during the Korean War, aired from 1972 to 1983. Mr. Chalfant may have flown in the Bell H-13 Sioux and/or the Hiller OH-23 Raven helicopter models. The Bell UH-1 Iroquois "Huey" helicopter saw wide use in the Vietnam War and became an enduring icon of the conflict.]

SI: Let me pause again.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: To go back to when you got your orders for Vietnam, can you walk me through the whole process of how you got overseas and the trip itself?

TC: Okay.

SI: Ending with your base camp in the Central Highlands.

TC: Sure, okay. Yes, now, what had happened down there in Fort Hood, just to complete the little story with us, we found out that Michele was pregnant on March 14th. Now, we had intentionally decided to start our family, because, once it got to the point where I did not have thirteen months left in my two-year hitch, we assumed they weren't going to deploy me. So, we thought it was a great idea to start our family down there in Killeen, Texas, down in Fort Hood. Hey, it was free and was a great hospital. It just sounded like a good idea at the time.

March 15th, the next morning, I went in. I used to wake up one guy in the barracks. I wake him up and he jumps out of bed. He says, "Beware--it's the Ides of March." Well, he was correct because he and I got called out of formation after breakfast, told to go report to the Adjutant, which is the Colonel's lackey. [Editor's Note: The Ides of March, a religious holiday in Ancient Rome, became associated with bad omens due to the 44 BCE assassination of Julius Caesar.]

We were told that we were on a "Pentagon levee," whatever that was. Nobody seemed to really know. "So, what does that mean?" He said, "What it means is you're going to get a set of orders. It's coming directly out of the Pentagon, but we don't know when. We do know where--you're going to go to Vietnam."

Well, it took them another six weeks to actually give us those orders, which was fine by us. [laughter] So, we had to pack up. Michele and I had to pack up. She had a 1963 Corvair, if you remember that little car, engine in the back, a little compact car. We stuffed [in] all our belongings, just like when she drove down to me. We didn't take the television. We left that for Ron and Lorraine. We couldn't figure out how to fit it this time. [laughter]

We drove from Fort Hood all the way home. I think we took five days, and I had a thirty-day leave. Once the date that I needed to report to Oakland came by, we flew to Oakland. We stayed there about three or four days, laying down on an air mattress on a barracks floor, 150 guys sleeping on the floor with our duffel bag next to us. That was it, no furniture, nothing. We felt like cattle there, but that was only three or four days.

I flew over to Vietnam. Other guys took troopships, but we flew Braniff Airlines, which came out of Dallas, Texas. They hired the stewardesses as models. They had rules at that time for it, which wouldn't fly today. Girls had to be a minimum of five-foot-four, maximum of five-foot-ten and they even had dimensions for waist and breast and minimums. So, every one of these girls was a Dallas Cheerleader, they looked like. [laughter] They wore miniskirts.

Their thing with Braniff Airlines was, the girls would change their uniform every hour on a flight. So, we said, "Wow, we're going all the way to Vietnam. Yes, we're going to get you girls changing a lot." They said, "Well, we're only going to Honolulu first and we'll stop there," the only time I've ever been in Hawaii.

We had a layover in Honolulu about eight hours. We were in the airport. We were not allowed to leave the airport, but nothing in the airport was open. It was at nighttime, middle of the night. So, we just walked around the airport--kind of boring, but at least I can say I was in Hawaii for eight hours. We then got back on that Braniff plane.

Unlike everybody else, where they would land at Cam Ranh Bay, at the Air Force base there, and then, helicopters the rest of the way, they flew us directly into the Air Force base (which was attached to the Army base) there at Pleiku. We called that Dragon Mountain. I don't know that they were supposed to do that. It's the only time I've ever heard of a commercial plane flying directly across the country into a base like that, but that's where they took us.

Of course, we get off the plane, it's raining. I've always described the rain as, "Put your arm out in front of you. It rained so hard that you could not see your fingers, can't see them," but it would only rain for ten minutes, fifteen at max. Then, it would stop and you'd see this beautiful rainbow. Of course, it was going to start raining again an hour or two later. I remember, they shuffled us into these barracks, into a tent. I start changing, because I'm obviously wet.

One of the NCOs comes up behind me, puts his arm on my neck and says, "So, what you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm changing." He said, "Look, it's pretty out there. There's sunshine." He said, "Sorry to tell you, but it's going to do that rain about another five or six times today." He says, "You keep doing this, you're going to run out of clothes before tonight." [laughter] He said, "Why don't you just keep those wet ones on for the next six or seven weeks, because that's all we have left of the monsoon season."

He was being facetious, but he wasn't all that wrong. [laughter] You just stayed wet. There was no way to dry off, and why would you want to? You're going to get wet again. I don't know how anyone lives in that environment. I just started shaking my head and saying, "How am I going to survive this tour with this?" I mean, there's mud everywhere. It was terrible. I didn't have any idea how I could survive in that environment.

The next morning, they told us they were going to take us for some three days of jungle training. I sort of thought that maybe we should've had some of this before we got here. They took us for these three days, which amounted to nothing more than walking around in the mud and falling and getting your weapon stuck in the mud, such that we'd have to disassemble it and clean it at night and do it all again the next day--but something terrible happened that third day.

So, on the third day, in the afternoon, they told us that they were going to take us for a grenade-throw exercise, which I really thought was stupid. Why do we want to waste 150 grenades? Shouldn't we be saving those for the bad guys? Well, anyway, they brought us in. We were two by two. They gave us the old "take five" thing, "Light them up if you got them, bum them if you don't," and I was out of cigarettes. So, I walked two or three steps forward to my buddy Dennis, who I could bum a smoke from.

Now, the kid that was next to me in this two by two said something that I thought was kind of stupid at the time. I blew him off, but he said, "Hey, how long is it, when you pull the pin, for the grenade to explode?" I said, "Well, after you release the lever," because pulling the pin doesn't do anything, but I said, "After you release the lever," I said, "about five or six seconds." I really thought it was a stupid question, because, hey, everybody knows that.

Well, I got up and BS-ed with my buddy Dennis and had a smoke. They said, "Okay, we're ready now." So, I simply told the guys, "Just everybody fall back, I'll stay right here." Well, after we threw the grenade--they took us up four at a time, they had four little bunkers.

As Dennis and I are walking back from our throw, the next group of four (which is where I had originally been), all of a sudden, we heard some bad noise. The explosion didn't sound right. We started hearing screaming and guys going around yelling, "Medic." It was a "Chinese fire drill." What had happened was, the guy that was originally next to me dropped the grenade.

The drill instructor attempted to play hero. He dove, he tried to do the "dive, scoop and throw" all in one motion. Unfortunately, he was about a half a second too late and blew his face off. He was dead. The kid that dropped the grenade, they had a tourniquet on his leg. The guy that was next, which would have been me had I not gotten out of place, had a tourniquet on his arm. We were told they were going to lose that arm and leg.

So, there's some guy out there--I don't know his name, I don't even know what he looks like. I don't remember. I remember the kid that was next to me and dropped the grenade. I remember what he looked like. I don't know his name, but the kid that caught the shrapnel and had the tourniquet on his arm, for the last fifty-one years, some guy out there with one arm hates me and he's got every damn right to do so. I almost wish I knew who he was, but, then, again, I say, "No, I hope I don't know. He might kill me."

It was my one source of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] all these years, reliving that, because (what I determined later) we had been told that this kid that dropped the grenade told everybody that he had never thrown one. I don't know how you could get out of basic training

without having done that. You threw it two times and, if you were sick the one day, you got it the second time. If you were sick both of them, you had to make it up somewhere.

I don't know how anybody could get out of basic training without having thrown a grenade, but I now understood what he was asking me. He was scared. He was embarrassed. He didn't know how to say, "I don't know what I'm doing." So, here he was, asking me for help, asking me, "How long?" and I sort of blew him off, because I was walking away.

I've thought, for all these fifty-odd years, "Gee, if only I had listened to him, I'd have figured out there was a problem. Maybe I could've corrected it and averted what happened."

I've spent some time with Rutgers psych students who were interns here at a little group that I attend. That's been my source of PTSD for all these years--a guy lost his life and two other guys lost an arm and a leg and maybe I could've stopped it. What has been told to me was, "How could you have stopped it? Were you Superman?" I said, "Well, I could've told the cadre, 'Hey, this kid doesn't know what he's doing. Take him over there, one-on-one, and teach him.'"

The one psychologist said to me, "If you'd have done that, what would that cadre, that NCO, have done?" I said, "I don't know." "Probably told you to get the fuck back in line and shut up," [laughter] because he wouldn't have been able to figure out that somebody didn't know what he was doing. We were all supposed to know what we were doing, but this one kid didn't and he panicked. He pulled the pin and dropped it. A big accident happened and it shouldn't have, but it did and you can't erase history.

It happened, but I've thought for many, many years--I mean, the last session I had with a young lady by the name of Tanya Farber, Rutgers master's program, she finally got inside my head far enough to make me feel a little bit better about it, that, no, it was sort of fate. What was going to happen was going to happen. Really, there wasn't any way I could've stopped it, but there's that little piece of me that says, "Man, if you'd have been awake and if you had really caught on to the fact that this kid was scared, you might have been able to stop it."

I look back on it, I mean, that night, I was kind of--I had mixed emotions. I was very unhappy about the thing that had happened, but, hey, I was happy it didn't happen to me. Somehow, I got out of the position of danger and I was safe. So, that's a difficult emotion to get over. That evening, I said, "Wow, they didn't get me this time and maybe they should've. They're not going to get me the rest of this time, the rest of this tour. They can't win. I already have it figured out that I'm going home with all of my appendages in their proper place."

When you're twenty-two, you're kind of brash a little bit. I was very brash. In my mind, there was no way that I would ever be a casualty. I was going to be too smart for that or lucky. I mean, that first occasion, I was simply lucky, I wasn't smart; terrible story. Once again, you're not going to find things like that ever in a history book or a movie. They never show anything like that, but it was a reality. It happened.

SI: Yes.

TC: I was in the 426th Replacement Company at the time, because my good doctor tried to look it up and he was looking in the Fourth Infantry Division. I said, "No, I actually wasn't there yet," and I wasn't in the 704th Maintenance [Battalion], which is the battalion that I was in. Those first couple days, you were a replacement and it was a replacement company. He actually looked it up and did find that I was telling him the truth. There was an accident. It didn't have any details. I'm the only one that can tell the details, and I don't like to tell them too many times.

SI: Yes.

TC: So, I'll stop right now with those details, unless you want to know any more details.

SI: No. One of the things we try to talk about in the interviews is, when did the realities of your new situation set in?

TC: Right about then. [laughter]

SI: Yes, I would imagine.

TC: Yes. The reality is, it was right then. I knew at that moment that this was a dangerous place, even when you weren't trying to be dangerous and the enemy wasn't anywhere close. The next day, this fellow Dennis, Dennis Burns--I had been drafted the same day as him. Ironically, we stood in that line where you take the step forward alphabetically. There wasn't anybody named Casale that day, so, we were standing next to each other alphabetically. In basic training, he was on the top bunk, I was on the bottom. We went to the school, top bunk, bottom. We go to Vietnam together; we made PFC [private first class] and we made spec-4 the same day.

As a consequence, when we got there to Pleiku, this lieutenant looked at us and says, "Wow, you two guys are twins. You're identical. I can take your résumés and erase your names, flip them back and forth and doesn't make any difference. Either one applies to either one of you. You're identical. It was like this was a copy except for the name up there at the top."

He says, "One of you guys is going to stay here in the base camp. The other guy is going to go out forward." He said, "I'm the one that has to make that decision and I really don't know how to make it. I can't pick between you." He said, "Why don't you guys drink a little bit at the NCO club tonight and we'll talk about this tomorrow morning?"

Now, I said I wanted to go out forward because I thought I was better suited for not having the base camp arrangements, with the shined shoes and a belt buckle. That wasn't me. I'd be much better out there in dirty fatigues. Of course, Dennis said, "Whoa, you're married, I'm not. I should go out there. You ought to stay here, safe in the base camp." I said, "Well, how safe is it here in the base camp? Maybe it's not so safe anyway."

We actually decided and told the guy the next morning that, "Well, Tom will go out forward and Dennis will stay in Pleiku, but we're going to switch halfway," but we never did. When it got to be the halfway [point], he was doing a good job for me, getting me parts and whatever he had to do to support me, and I was doing the job out there.

We just said, "It wouldn't even make sense for either of us, because, if he came out forward, now, he'd have to learn a whole bunch of new tricks. [If] I went down to the base camp, I'd have to learn a bunch of new tricks." We said, "No, we will just keep it where it is and that's it," and that's the way it was.

He had a safer tour, but I don't know that it was better. He bitched a lot about, "Well, they're still doing the 'Mickey Mouse' stuff here, with checking your bunk and making sure everything's clean." He used to bitch and say, "You don't have that problem out there, do you?" I'd say, "No. Half the time, we don't wear the fatigue jacket. We're just in a t-shirt and nobody cares. Everybody's on a first name basis, including the officers."

We got a new company commander when I was out in Dak To at one point and he was out of West Point. He gets off this helicopter (Huey). Here, he's got his starched fatigues and his shined boots and his belt buckle and he looked really sharp. What's the first thing he wants to do? He tells one guy to go gather everybody. He's going to put everybody in a formation and he's going to introduce himself.

Well, at that point in time, I was kind of short on that deployment. I was under sixty days, along with one other guy, the gun mechanic, who was sort of my partner. He was also under sixty days. We were the two E-5s in the company, the only two E-5s. We were spec-5s. That rank doesn't exist anymore. Today, you would be a tech sergeant. We decided--he's asking everybody to go over there--so, we sat over on the stairs on my truck, smoking a cigarette, drinking a beer.

He waved to us three or four times and we kept saying, "Uh-uh, not me." Well, he came over after he introduced himself to everybody else. He started walking toward us. We literally stopped him, said, "Don't move any closer." He got to be about ten or twelve meters from us, said, "Don't come any closer." He says, "I'm going to get you guys."

I said, "Calm down for a second, idiot." I said, "There's a guy up there on that hill right now--believe it or not, the enemy has binoculars. Believe it or not, they have rockets and mortars. They can hit right here. You have just given them the best target they've ever had. Don't you know that that shiny stuff that you have is coming off the sun? I mean, he can see you and he's laughing his ass off right now, 'What is this idiot [doing]?'"

I said, "So, we don't want you anywhere close to us, because, if he's firing and aiming at you, we don't want to be close enough to get hit." I said, "You brought everybody in our company;" now, we only had about forty guys. A company's supposed to be about 120, but we had about forty. I said, "You just had those guys all together. Don't you realize that one rocket would've gotten you all?" I said, "If they'd loaded up fast enough and aimed fast enough, they could've put a round right on top of you. You'd have wiped out our company."

I said, "So, that's why Tim and me stayed over here. We're a lot smarter than those idiots." I said, "So, we're going to have to do some teaching to you. [laughter] Obviously, West Point didn't teach you how to handle a guerilla war." Well, we taught him that night.

We were attacked and we're all in a bunker, in the one bunker that he should've been in. We're looking around and said, "Where is this guy?" Well, after the second round landed, he comes toddling into the bunker. We ask him, we said, "Come over here. Sit down with Tim and me. Why did you give them two shots at you? The first one missed." I said, "After the first one missed, I'm in this hole in the ground. I'm not going to give him a second shot."

He said, "Well…" We looked at him and, here, he's got his belt and his canteen and his first-aid kit and his pistol and his helmet. We said, "Hey, we're all friends down here--you don't need a gun." I said, "If something happens, we'll hear it. We have a radio and we're listening to the perimeter. We'll get up and out of this bunker if there's a need to. We'll go find our weapons and be ready to do what we have to do," I said, "but first things first--you're supposed to get in this hole in the ground."

I said, "What do you need the canteen for?" I said, "We got beer down here--it's better than water. [laughter] We keep beer in this bunker all the time. We keep a carton of cigarettes all the time. We have everything we need until this blows over." The next morning, we saw him in fatigues that looked like they were roughed up a little bit and scuffed up a little bit. No longer were his boots shined and his belt buckle was scratched. He didn't have the railroad tracks [captain's rank insignia] on his shoulders.

We said, "Now, you understand." I said, "Out here, we're actually all equal. We know who you are, and you know who I am. Everybody knows everybody else's rank. We understand those things. We don't need to show them," I said, "but the last thing you'd want to do is have those captain's bars sitting up on your shoulder. Man, now, you're a target." [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: "Why would they want to shoot me? They'll shoot you first." So, he finally caught on. It took him twenty-four hours, but we had to teach this guy real fast, because, otherwise, he was going to bring us into jeopardy. I couldn't allow somebody else to put me at risk. There was enough risk without doing things wrong.

We said, "Look, we walk up to the mess tent to get some coffee," because they never had any food. It was just coffee, usually. "No more than two of us within five yards of each other, nobody [else]. If ten of us are going up there, we'll be in five groups of two," I said, "because, if the round lands and hits them, I don't want it to hit me. I want to be ten yards away, where it's not going to hit me." I said, "We all travel in one group, that's silly, stupid." So, he finally understood. It took him that long, but he caught on.

After a while, he was a pretty good guy, but, boy, when you were out in the field, there weren't any rules. The only rule that we all lived by was survival. "I'm going to survive. I really hope the rest of you guys do, too, but that's not my responsibility, that's your responsibility. Don't expect me to babysit you, because I can't do it. [laughter] I'm going to save me first. If you get smart enough to come with me, okay, cool, but, if you're not smart enough to do what you're supposed to do, well, then, I can't be responsible."

When we were at Dak To, we were probably in rocket attacks (rockets and mortars) somewhere around twenty-five times. We actually lost track on how many. We were counting at first, and then, we somehow lost track. It got to be a joke to some extent. We would have a lottery. Everybody threw a buck in and picked a time when the first round would land. You took the pot if you were closest to the time. Some guys say, "Well, ten o'clock," and other guys were saying, "No, one in the morning," but we expected, every night, to get hit. Most of the time, we weren't disappointed. Most of the time, they fired three rounds.

We sort of figured out why. They would come out of their holes in the ground, out there in the mountains west of us. Two guys would carry the broken-down mortar gun on one shoulder with a round on the second shoulder. The other guy would carry two rounds, one on each shoulder. That's all they could carry. So, if there were two guys, they would fire three rounds. If it was three guys, they'd fire five rounds; never an even number. So, what would happen is, the third round would land and twenty minutes would go by. We said, "Oh, okay, I think the party's over. They're done." Mostly, they were done. They didn't fire again.

SI: Yes.

TC: It was just harassment. They weren't really interested in killing us all. They just wanted to make sure we weren't getting any sleep. That was the idea. So, they would just keep us awake. Lots of nights, I didn't get any sleep, spent it in the bunker.

I know people would ask me a question, which I really can't answer, "Well, gee, what did you do over there?" "Well, I ducked a lot and I spent a lot of time in the bunker." That's what I did. If you had any brains, that's what you did.

I showed you the picture there of my tent getting blown up. That was the second round. The first round, I'm in the bunker. The second round (and we heard it when we're in that bunker), I said, "Wow, that was close. That was right outside. [laughter] That wasn't far," and then, we found out where it was. It wasn't very far.

SI: Yes. For the record, you showed me some photos from your time at Dak To. The one you are referring to is a picture of your tent peppered with holes.

TC: Yes. Well, hey, no, they "air conditioned" my tent. It was very nice of them. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: Fortunately, it was not the monsoon season now. It was the dry season. I hope they fixed or got a new tent before the monsoons, [laughter] but I left before that happened.

SI: Were the hootches sandbagged up to a certain point?

TC: Oh, yes.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I am looking at a photo now of the tents. There are sandbags up to about three or four feet.

TC: Yes.

SI: You described how you got out to Dak To. Can you describe it a little bit, what it was like physically and what the purpose of being there was?

TC: Yes. I was, first, in two different camps in and around Pleiku. When we got to the second camp, they told us not to get too comfortable, because we weren't going to stay there very long. Why they moved us there and only stayed there five weeks, I have no idea, but that's what it was.

They came up one day and asked for a couple of guys from each company to go on a landing party. We took a convoy about eighty miles north to Dak To. We were told what we were going to find there was an old French camp with a little airstrip and that that's where we were going to be housed hereafter. The idea of the landing party was each (the four or five guys from each company) were going to mark out our areas in this camp and build a bunker. So, that was a lot of work with the sandbags.

I remember, the guy in the truck in front of me yells out, with his arm out of the window, saying, "There's the village of Dak To." I look to the right and I didn't see anything--that's because it had been overrun. It had been burned to the ground. It wasn't there anymore, really.

When we pulled into this campsite, we knew (with our maintenance company) where we had to be, which was at the very end of the little airstrip. That's where we were told to set up our house. We marked out enough room for [where] we could have all our trucks, because we had a lot of trucks. There was a small arms repair truck, there were two radio repair trucks, there was my armament truck. So, we had to have a place to put all those.

We were saddled with unloading any of the planes that came in, because where our campsite (our little area) was, the next twenty-five or thirty yards were going to be the actual tarmac. At the end of the airstrip, the plane would make a right turn and park there in that tarmac. We would unload them and he would turn around and head back home. So, we did that.

Unfortunately, my buddy Tim, the gun mechanic--now, he was from West Virginia and we used to have lots of fun teasing each other back and forth, calling us "Reb" and "Yankee." It was all in fun. He looked and he said, "Yankee, look here--we're sitting here down in this here valley. Look over there, west--what do you see?" "It's a mountain." "Look north." "It's another mountain." "Look east, there's another mountain. Look south," and there is this little mesa, a little elevation, not really a mountain, but a little, tiny hill, which is where the village used to be.

He said, "Hey, man, you know down there at the Jersey Shore," he was engaged to a girl from Florence, New Jersey, he said, "down there in Seaside Heights, you know that little stand where

they had the metal ducks that come around in the water and you shot them off with a BB gun?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Guess who the fucking ducks are? Look where we are, man. We're in this hole and how much you want to bet they're up there in them hills?" Oh, they were there.

What we also found there was a wooden barracks that had been built, which was housing 103 little orphans left over from this carnage in Dak To. We found out what our mission was and why they were positioning us there--the first major inlet from Cambodia of the Ho Chi Minh Trail went right through Dak To. [Editor's Note: The Ho Chi Minh Trail, used by the North Vietnamese to move supplies and men into South Vietnam, ran through Cambodia and Laos.]

We were going to sit in this valley because we were going to make it hard for them. They were going to have to go up and over one of them mountains in order to go south, if that's where they were heading. That's why they had destroyed the village, because it was sort of in their way. Yes, we said, "Yes, that's all we're doing here, is we're just sitting here like ducks, but we're making a blockade. They have to come through us if they want to head to Saigon," and that's why we were there.

We didn't know it at the time, but, at that time, they were building up to the Tet Offensive. They were bringing in materiel. They were bringing guns and equipment across the river, constantly, and heading down those trails (there were three or four of them) where the Ho Chi Minh Trail would come into South Vietnam. They all headed towards Saigon.

We blocked one of those trails. That's why we were sitting there. The officers wouldn't have told us that and would've argued that wasn't why we were there, but, hey, yes, that's why we were there. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: We got shelled a lot because of that. They were unhappy that we were sitting there, because it was going to make it much, much more difficult for them to build up for this Tet Offensive. During the month of November, we had two of the largest battles of the entire war (in terms of US casualties). There was a Hill 875 and a Hill 882. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Dak To took place from November 3 to November 23, 1967.]

Now, we named these hills by the elevation above sea level in meters, because we didn't have any names for them. This was unchartered, unmapped territory. The Vietnamese didn't have any names for these mountains. The Montagnards (the primitive people that lived in the Central Highlands), they had names for them, but the Vietnamese couldn't understand their language, so, we had trouble getting that. So, we didn't use names. We just used the elevation above sea level.

The Battle of Hill 875 lasted for about three-and-a-half days. Ironically, I always thought that I was right there and listened to that battle on the radio, but it wasn't. It was the week before, which was the Battle of 882, that I listened to, because once I read this little book about Dak To and I had the chronological things explained to me, turns out I was on R&R in Singapore during 875. The one I listened to on the radio was 882, the week before.

We hated listening to that radio, because our guys, along with the 173rd Airborne that was out there, they went up this hill and they got about a third of the way up. All of a sudden, the gooks--I can use that word, I know it's not supposed to be used now, but I can use it--came out of their tunnels at the bottom of the hill. So, now, our guys were in a crossfire and they were screwed. They couldn't get any air support, too close. So, they had to fight their way up the hill or down the hill, both ways, really.

We had lots of causalities. Hill 875 had six hundred, roughly, casualties, four hundred wounded, two hundred dead. The week before at 882 was about three hundred casualties. I think it was about sixty or so dead. Hey, that was a lot of guys.

SI: Yes.

TC: That's a lot of fucking body bags that I watched get loaded on to choppers. What hurt us, listening, we're a maintenance company, okay. We're not infantry guys, but, hey, I know how to shoot an M-16. I've got one. Our guys were in trouble five miles away. So, why didn't they tell us to saddle up, jump in a chopper and go help them? We'd have all been most willing. Nobody would've said no. It wouldn't have been like you had to twist anybody's arm to do so.

Our guys were getting their asses kicked. We felt like we should saddle up and go help them, but they never asked us to and I think that was stupid. Here we are, sitting in this camp. I'm not thinking about fixing any binoculars at the moment. I'm listening to this radio, because this is going on. I'm hearing guys screaming into the radio for some help. I mean, it was terrible.

They never once asked us to saddle up and go help these guys. We had two hundred guys in this camp. We could've made a difference. We could've had the enemy, the NVA [North Vietnamese Army]--we weren't fighting the Viet Cong, we had the North Vietnamese Army. We could've gotten them into a crossfire, coming up behind them at the base of that mountain, okay, but they never asked us to do it. Here, we're hearing guys dying, and then, we're watching body bags getting loaded onto a chopper, onto a Huey. Honestly, that made us cry. I mean, maybe we could've made a difference.

Bringing that up with body bags, something that we did in our area was to get everybody on a first name basis. For the most part, I didn't want to know your last name--don't tell me where you're from, I don't care if you're married or not, don't tell me your wife or your girlfriend's name. I only knew those kinds of things about three or four guys that were very close--everybody else, just first name--because, if I ever saw you in a body bag, it would hurt a whole lot less if I only knew you as Shaun, I didn't know that you were from Rutgers and New Jersey. It wouldn't hurt as much. I only know you as Shaun, some guy.

SI: Yes.

TC: So, we never told everybody too many stories about each other. We didn't want to know. We would get a new recruit, we called them FNGs (fucking new guys). We would tell them, point blank, "You got a nickname? If you don't, we're going to make one up, [laughter] because we're going to call you something, but that's all we're ever going to call you at that point." We

got a guy who came in, his name was Robinson. I said, "From now on, man, you're Robbie and that's it. Don't tell me where you're from--I don't want to know."

SI: How long does it take to develop that kind of approach to dealing with people?

TC: Very quick, very quick. It was already established when I went out into the field. Like I said, this guy that I replaced, his name was Frank. I happened to know his last name, was Frank Marino, but I didn't know a lot more else about him. I can't tell you where he was from. He never told me and I didn't want to know. I don't know if he was engaged or anything. I have no idea. That's the way it was, all right.

I knew a lot about this one guy, Tim, the gun mechanic, because we were partners. I mean, there were a lot of times that we actually went out to a gun together. His job was to make sure it would shoot and my job was to make sure the bullet went where it was supposed to go, very simple. So, we were close. I know him. He's Tim Atwood. I know where he was from and I know he was engaged to a girl from New Jersey that went to school down there in West Virginia. He knew all about me.

That was good, to have one or two people that knew about you, because, if I knew everything about you, you were my close buddy and you did go down--we never said the words "die" or "kill," or anything like that, "go down," just like the cops say, "Officer down"--it would be my responsibility, since I was your closest, to write to your wife, your girlfriend, your mother, and tell her what happened, okay. There was one or two guys that were close to you.

I eventually had to train a guy to replace me, because there weren't any replacements showing up. They were going to extend me if no replacements showed up. I remember telling my company commander, "You don't want to do that, extending me." I said, "I'll go ballistic." I said, "I've got a wife and a baby at home. I'm going home and I'm going home vertically. I'm not spending any more time than I was committed to."

A warrant officer that we had, who was an old "lifer" NCO, and then, he went to warrant school, so [that] he could become an officer, came to me and said, "Hey, you're an E-5." I said, "Yes, so what?" "No," he said, "as an E-5, you are authorized to teach your MOS." He said, "You can certify someone in your MOS." MOS is military occupational specialty.

I said, "Really?" I said, "Wow, we've got about twelve truck mechanics and these trucks ain't going nowhere. They change the oil when they don't have to and there isn't anything to repair on the trucks. Go ahead and give me one." That actually is that kid on the left, with the shirt off.

SI: Yes.

TC: He looks like a truck mechanic, doesn't he? They gave him to me. I just told him, I said, "Man, I've got about three or four weeks to teach you everything I know, and I'm going to. You're going to learn it and I'm going to certify you, because I'm going home." I said, "If you don't work out, maybe I'll blow you away and go get another one. So, it's in your best interest to learn this."

SI: Yes.

TC: Ironically, literally at the end of three or four weeks, three-and-a-half weeks, he knew my job as well as I did and, in some parts of it, he may actually have been better. He was a natural. I got lucky, okay. I sent him out on two missions by himself. He went out with me a couple times, and then, I sent him out twice on his own.

I radioed back to the artillery guys, I said, "Did he do a good job? Are you happy?" The one guy laughed and said, "Yes, keep sending him. We don't want to see your ugly ass anymore." I said, "I can comply with that request. [laughter] No problem, you won't see me anymore. Have a nice life."

I went to the Colonel, the brigade commander. I said, "Whatever form I have to fill out, come up with it and I'll sign it, because he's my replacement. Then, I'm going home." I'll never forget the kid's name. It's Kent, K-E-N-T, Clark--Superman backwards. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: And he was a kid from Iowa; that's about all I know of him. The Army screwed up--they gave him a job as a truck mechanic. He said he hated it. Then, we got to playing with this little instrument. My toolbox was jeweler's screwdrivers and quarter-inch and three-eighths-inch wrenches, not six-inch pipe wrenches, stuff like that. Like I said, he was a natural. I got lucky.

When I finally told the "old man," I said, "Look, I'm too short. I'm not going on any of these missions anymore. I'm not leaving and going out there into the firebases. It's his job now. No reason for me to do it." I said, "Besides that, can I go home early?" [laughter] His first answer to that was, "No, you're sticking around until the end of February," but, then, we got attacked on January 31st, which wasn't a big deal.

We were getting attacked all the time, as I said before. We didn't think anything much of it until the next morning, when we actually were listening to Hanoi Hannah on the radio. Turns out we could get better reception from Hanoi than we could from Saigon, so, we didn't listen to the USO radio, we listened to Hanoi Hannah. [laughter] She played the same music, but she told us that morning, she said, "You guys have to quit now. We attacked every one of your bases last night."

[Editor's Note: Trịnh Thị Ngọ (or Hanoi Hannah) broadcast English-language radio propaganda programs directed at American troops. In this recollection, she is referring to the beginning of the Tet Offensive.]

SI: Wow.

TC: We said, "What? Was that real?" We got on the radio and called down to our base camp and said, "You guys get hit last night?" "Yes, and everybody else did, too, we understand. They hit Da Nang, they hit everywhere, Cu Chi." "Oh, wow, really? Maybe these guys are getting serious." So, I literally went to my company commander at that time, I said, "Look, I have a

replacement now. I'm supposed to leave here in four weeks, on February 27th. Let me sneak out of here now." I said, "I don't need this." [laughter]

He says, "I'll give you a release, but, unfortunately, I can't get you out of here." He said, "You've got to find your own way." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He says, "Well, I can't ask a chopper to take you to the base camp to get you out of here. They're too busy at the moment, no free rides." I said, "Well, what does that mean?" He said, "The only way out of here is to take a convoy." He says, "You're going to have to go get volunteers to drive that eighty-mile road."

I went walking around to everybody and I found enough volunteers to drive seven trucks and two armored personnel carriers. I had some help with my buddy Tim, because he was leaving, too. We went on a convoy. Everybody thought it was a beer run, for them. For Tim and me, it was, "We just ain't coming back with you guys." That's how I got to Pleiku, to Dragon Mountain.

We got hit on that convoy. Fortunately, I was pretty tight with the chopper pilots, because they were flying me out to the firebases all the time. I said, "Hey, how do I get 'Puff the Magic Dragon,'" one of the gunships, "to escort us?" He said, "Well, he's not going to escort you, but we talked to him." He says, "I'll be close by. I'll be doing recon the rest of the time. I'll come away from you, and then, I'll come back." He said, "I won't be more than two minutes away from you. All you've got to do is call me."

So, when we got hit, somebody started screaming, "Incoming," and we all dive on the side of the road. We called him and he came along. He sprayed on one side and sprayed on the other side and he said, "It ought to be quiet now. Whatever was making noise isn't there anymore." That was the only time we got hit during the convoy.

SI: Wow.

TC: We got lucky. We got across the Kon Tum River [Dak Bla River?], which was dangerous because they always had that bridge booby-trapped. I guess I went across on convoy on that bridge six times, three each way. [Editor's Note: The Dak Bla River runs past Kon Tum, the capital of the Kon Tum Province, located in Vietnam's Central Highlands region.]

Every time, we had to be very careful, one vehicle at a time. That wouldn't be enough for him to waste his ammunition, his dynamite. If you put three or four trucks on the bridge at the same time, he would've blown them out of the water. We head down to the base camp…

SI: Do you want to take a break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

TC: So, we got into the base camp there at Dragon Mountain and we got some orders to take us to Cam Rahn Bay. We get to Cam Rahn Bay. Here's this PFC MP [military policeman] looking at a bunch of pieces of paper and he says, "You three guys aren't on this manifest." "Well, of course not, because this was kind of a 'hurry-up' thing here. No, we're not officially here." He says, "Well, I can't put you on that plane."

I said, "Well, I think you should, because here's three E-5s that are going to be very unhappy if we don't get on that plane. By the way, we don't care if there's a seat. We're going home and you ain't going to stop us." He finally got the idea that we were serious and he put us on the manifest. We had seats. I don't know who he bumped off and I don't care, but we got home.

SI: Wow.

TC: Found out we landed in--I don't know, I should probably tell you some more things about being in-country before getting home.

SI: Why don't you continue with that? I can cut back to a few things later.

TC: Okay. We went through Manila, the only time I've ever been in the Philippines, never got back. We landed in Fort Lewis, Washington. We found out that the Army had the ability to treat us properly. We landed there, it was, like, six PM.

This colonel who greeted us getting off this plane told us all, he said, "Look, we can feed you guys, let you get a shower and a good night's sleep. Then, tomorrow morning, we can start the process of exiting the post and getting you out to where you need to go. Those of you that are exiting the Army, we'll physically do the entire discharge. Those of you that are still in the Army, we'll get you off to your new duty station."

They fed us. "Oh," and he asked, he said, "now, we can do it like that, or, if you would prefer, we have a call system. I can call everybody into the base," something like 110 people who would man all of the places that we would have to do. We'd have to get some shots and we had to get a new uniform. They had to make them, everything like this, but there was a whole system. He said, "We'll call them and they'll have to work all night. If that's what you'd prefer to do, stay up all night and get out of here first thing in the morning, it's up to you guys." Well, he knew what we were going to answer. [laughter]

There were, like, two guys said, "Yes, well, I can wait until tomorrow." "No, man, we're doing this right now." So, they fed us a meal of three-quarter-inch thick T-bone steaks cooked on a grill, some French fries and as much milk as we could consume, because we didn't have any milk in-country, never saw any, didn't even see powdered milk most of the time. We were told, "You can have as many of those steaks as you think you can eat. When you get into the line, you tell the man how you want it, rare, medium-rare, whatever. He'll make it exactly the way you want it. If he doesn't, hand it back to him." They really treated us right. [laughter]

French fries, they were great, been a long time since any of us had eaten any of them and those wonderful steaks, and then, they gave us ice cream sundaes for dessert, okay, anything we wanted, strawberry, pineapple, chocolate, whatever you wanted. We said, "Wow, how come they weren't treating us like this all the time? One last meal." [laughter]

We then began the process, which took about three or four hours total. We were starting at along around nine o'clock (maybe even a little later, might have been ten), after we had eaten and

showered. Then, because they had to take the measurements of everybody, they'd make a uniform for you to go home in, because we didn't have them anymore.

They got lost over there somewhere. I actually had my khaki uniform, short-sleeve, in my duffel bag, but, when I reached in there, I found out it was a little moldy. Oh, yes, Vietnam was a little bit humid--oops. [laughter] So, they had to make me a new uniform. They had to measure me up and make a new uniform to go home in. It was February, so, it was going to have to be the dress greens, not the short-sleeve. They had you get your shots and you had to get your last payment. I forgot what else there was.

Oh, there was the one little session where you had to sit down with a lieutenant, where he tried to give you the reenlistment speech. He said, "I have to do it." I said, "No, man, you're wasting your time. I'm going to say no." He said, "But, you've got to listen to me first." Actually, if I hadn't been married and had a baby that I was going home to, boy, he could've possibly convinced me to reenlist. He actually was making me a pretty good offer.

I could be an E-6 and, if I gave him three years, I could decide, wherever I wanted in the world, to be there the first year. He said, "The next two, okay, you take your chances where we're going to send you," but he says, "Yes, you want to go to Hawaii for a year, Germany, Italy? Where do you want to go?"

It almost sounded like a good idea, but, no, Michele wasn't interested in that. I said, "I've got to turn you down, but you made a pretty good offer. If I didn't have this, these extenuating circumstances, I probably would've said yes," because I really didn't dislike the Army, I really didn't dislike my deployment in Vietnam.

I didn't like being shot at--I mean, don't get me wrong. Everybody I know, kids used to ask when I'd do the tours [at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial], "Were you scared?" My answer to that was, "Yes, and, by the way, if any of my brothers tells you he wasn't, he's either lying to you through his face or he's so screwed up in his head he can't remember, one or the other." Of course, we were afraid. You're seeing body bags all the time--you knew one of them could be fitted for you. It could happen.

Yes, you're [afraid], but the fear was a different kind of fear. I tried to explain to kids sometimes, I said, "Have you ever been afraid in a big hurricane, thunder and lightning, raining like hell and wind all over the place? It's kind of scary, right?"

I said, "Well, that's fear. It's the same kind of fear that we had in Vietnam, but you couldn't let it become external. You had to put it back here somewhere and leave it there and don't think about it every minute, because, if you thought about it every minute, you'd go nuts. You had to push it into the background a little bit, somehow, and make believe you weren't afraid--but you were. When rockets start landing, man, that's a scary bunch of stuff."

SI: Yes.

TC: But, that's it.

SI: Yes. To go back to more experiences in Vietnam, in any of the camps you were stationed at, did you have to do perimeter duty and things like that?

TC: Oh, yes, definitely.

SI: Do you have any memories from that, because I have been told that those can be some of the most tense times?

TC: Yes. One time, on guard duty at Dak To, during October, when we had first just gotten there (we went there about October 12th or 15th, so, a couple weeks later), I had a guard duty. It turns out I was the ranking guy on that night. There weren't any E-5s--I was it.

So, that meant me being designated as sergeant of the guard. Now, there was an officer. There was a lieutenant or a captain who stayed up with us all night. He was in his hootch, and then, listened to the radio.

I was in the command bunker, bunker one. I think we had twelve. The only difference between everybody on guard duty and the sergeant of the guard is, I couldn't go to sleep. We had three guys in each bunker and they would take turns. Two of them [would] be asleep, one'd be awake, take two-hour shifts. I just had to stay awake, that's all, and man the radio.

Well, this night, one of the bunkers comes on the radio and says, "I've just received incoming fire." Now, he was all the way [at] the diametrical furthest point away from me. I really didn't hear that shot that he says he received, but I'm not going to call him a liar. I said, "Okay, let's wake everybody up." So, in each bunker, the one guy that's awake is getting the other two stirring. Then, I heard small arms fire.

It was another bunker called in, a bunker a little closer to me. He says, "Yes, I just received fire, too." I said, "Yes, I heard it." I said, "Now, we're ready. Everybody find a hole in the sandbags to position yourself." We would make little windows, so [that] you could sit there. Then, the first thing I told everybody was, "Disconnect (cut) the wire on your Claymore mines. Report back to me in order, starting with bunker one. Tell me you've done this."

[TAPE PAUSED]

TC: Claymore mine, we would set them out in front of the bunker, but I always told everybody (and I was told when I got there), "Don't ever think about firing that thing unless you can see it," because the enemy had a nasty habit of crawling under our wire, out there somewhere, and turning the Claymore mine backwards.

It just stuck in the ground with two prongs and it was concave. Well, they would turn it backwards to where if you ever pushed that button and fired that thing, you were firing at yourself. So, that was my first order to everyone, was, "Cut the Claymore mine, that wire--don't even think about shooting it." I made the right decision, because that next morning, we went out there and there were five or six of those Claymore mines turned around.

SI: Wow.

TC: What the enemy would do was, he would crawl, turn the thing around, and then, fire a shot over our heads somewhere to wake us up, hoping we would push the button on that Claymore. It was just a standard practice. We all knew then. I wasn't a hero. I wasn't smarter than everybody else. It was just you sort of knew that's what the plan would be, but we didn't want some silly little PFC who was just in-country a couple weeks and didn't know to go and fire that thing.

We went and we started firing. I mean, I woke up the artillery guys. We brought over the two M60 [Patton] tanks we had and they started firing. We had two armored personnel carriers with fifty-caliber machine guns on top and they were firing. We finally, [after] twenty minutes of it, said, "Okay, that's enough. They're not firing back anymore," which means they weren't there anymore. There was probably only two guys to begin with, okay.

After they fired that one round each, they took off. So, whatever ammunition we wasted firing at them, they probably weren't there. Ironically, we went out in the woods there a little bit that morning and we did find a couple of bloodstains on some bushes. So, we either hit an animal (water buffalo, maybe, or something) or we got one of them. We don't know which.

After that, I was told that I would never be on guard duty again, not because I did something wrong, but because in my company, I was now going to be pulling what's called CQ duty. We had--a CQ is company quarters--in each area, somebody had to stay awake and man a radio. We had three officers. We had a company commander, an executive officer and a warrant officer.

So, they were, at that time, doing it every third day. They asked this fellow Tim and me, who were now E-5s, they said, "Well, hey, you're not officers, but you're close. Would you do it with us? You have to volunteer. We can't make you do it, but, if you would do it, then, it's once every five days. It makes it a little easier on all of us." So, we said, "Sure."

Since I was doing that now every fifth day, we were told we wouldn't be called for guard duty anymore. Not that it was that big a deal, but those three people in the bunker would carry with them six M-16 rifles, because those damn things jammed all the time. So, if you had somebody firing--you're two guys firing and one guy loading--you were going to run out of weapons pretty quickly, because one would jam. You'd put that one down, get another one. So, the rule was with guard duty, "Everybody that's called for guard duty over there, bring two weapons with you. You might need the second one." [laughter]

SI: Wow.

TC: But, that was the only time I remember our perimeter being breached. There may have been some other times. Sometimes, when we were in the bunkers in a rocket attack, we did hear some squabble on the radio from the perimeter that, "We think we saw something," that kind of thing, but none of the stories of where they physically went on some *kamikaze* routines.

There were stories in other camps where these guys would sneak under the wire with a knife, run to a tent and their job was to kill as many of us as possible before we killed them. It was a *kamikaze* mission. They did this with civilians. I told you that the village of Dak To had been overrun. They left all the little kids, ten, twelve years and under, but they killed all of the adults, except for a couple of the teenage girls who might have been pretty. They took them with them.

Teenage boys, they would put a pistol up to the kid's ear and say, "How would you like to join our army?" They used them as shields and they would use them as these *kamikaze* missions. They would get them all coked up--by the way, there was hashish out there--and send him on his mission. Some of these kids would do that. We heard these stories in other camps--never happened in my camp, but we were ready for it.

SI: Yes.

TC: We slept with that M-16 right next to you.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire your weapon?

TC: Oh, yes. Well, that one guard duty, we fired, but the only other time was on a mission in that bubble helicopter that I would go to the firebases [in]. I didn't hear it, but the pilot screamed at me at one point, he said, "We were just fired on. We were just hit. Return the fire." So, I turned around. Now, I'm going to have to do this lefty, because I'm over here on the right side.

I fired a round and I said, "Whoa, what the hell am I firing at? All I can see is green down there. It's triple canopy. Where are those bad guys you're telling me about?" He said, "Just keep watching for a puff." I never saw one.

So, that was the only time I ever fired the weapon, but I fired it once and said, "Whoa, I've got to stop. I don't know what the hell I'm shooting at. There might be good guys down there." You never saw what you were shooting at anyway. The infantry would tell you that, most of the time, they didn't see what they were shooting at.

I was involved in an incoming and turned out to be an attempt to overrun a firebase. Unfortunately, I was under orders to leave town. I couldn't stay, because I was the only one with my MOS in the entire brigade. Actually, two brigades--the Third Brigade didn't have anybody with my MOS.

So, I was physically under orders from the brigade commander, the Lieutenant Colonel, telling me, "You go out to a firebase, that's fine, but, if they say, 'Incoming,' you get on the radio. You get that ride and get out of there." I would've preferred to stay, because I wasn't better than those guys. It sort of looked like I was running away from them, but it's what I had to do.

The one time I had to do it, the next morning, I get called down to the Colonel's hootch. Here was this company commander from that artillery firebase. I walk in and see him and I say, "How you doing? How'd things work out yesterday?" He goes, "Okay, it quieted down right after you left. There really wasn't anything anymore. They took off." I said, "Okay, good."

Then, the Colonel stands up and says, "I just got done telling Captain So-and-So that you were acting under my orders. So, now, he understands. If it happens again, he won't be running into here to complain about how you left," because the first thing he does, when he sees me running to the radio, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "I'm calling my ride. I've got to get out of here." He says, "You're nuts." He said, "They're going to blow that plane out of the sky. You can't land here." I said, "Well, he's got to take that chance and I've got to take that chance, because that's what we've been told we're supposed to do."

SI: Yes.

TC: Hey, then, I mean, the guy didn't understand that I was the only one with my MOS anywhere. He couldn't get his guns fixed by anybody else, but he understood it that morning. We were good friends after that. I mean, I had to go to that firebase another three or four times. We were on great terms at that point, but he was pissed at me that afternoon. [laughter]

SI: Yes. I wanted to get more into everyday life issues. It seems like the food was either bad or not there.

TC: Ninety-five percent of the time, when we got to Dak To (the first two camps I was in), we had food, C rations only once or twice a week. When I got to Dak To, all we had was C rations. We had three cooks. If I tell you they were heroes, I really mean they should've gotten medals, because it didn't matter whether we were under attack or not, they would get up at 0300 and they would go out and start to make coffee and start to make bread.

They always had flour and yeast. They would make, I don't know, twenty loaves of bread. We always had breakfast, one slice of bread. They always had a big jar of grape jelly, Welch's grape jelly, or peanut butter, one or the other--not both, only one or the other. They would attempt to make toast in the broiler. It usually meant that the stuff was blackened and you had to scrape the black off, but that was always breakfast. I mean, if it wasn't for them taking that kind of chance, we would have had no breakfast, but that's all we ever ate there.

There wasn't any food at lunch or dinner; those were C rations. The C rations that had the fruit cocktail and the pears and the peaches were in very high demand. [laughter] People would kill to get those, because they actually were good. I mean, the fruit cocktail was just Libby's fruit cocktail. The only other thing that I always thought was edible was, there was one can of spaghetti and meatballs, Chef Boyardee--you're not old enough to know about them--spaghetti and meatballs in a can. It was edible if you could heat it up.

So, what we used to do, we had a couple guys who were welders that would work with the truck mechanics once in a while. They would make stuff that we would want made. They found a way to make a pair of tongs, okay. They had some kind of rubberized handles. You could hold them, that they wouldn't get hot.

So, what we would do is, we would open up a Claymore mine. What was in there were all the pellets, but it [the explosive charge] was on one side, the pellets were on the other side. When it

got stuck together, they came together. So, you had to pick the little BBs out of there. Now, you had this what looked like Styrofoam, but it's really C-4 that could ignite, a nice blue flame.

We now had these wonderful tongs and we had a little set-up. You could put your can on top of this little set-up, take a piece of C-4 and put it underneath, "flick your Bic" and light it up. You would heat that can in three seconds. It was boiling, okay. We had the tongs, so [that] you could actually pull the can off there--couldn't eat it yet, had to wait a minute or two [laughter]--but we could heat up that spaghetti and meatballs. That was good, that was fine.

Some of the other stuff, I'm sorry, it wasn't edible; at least I couldn't eat it. I'd have had to be real desperate and hungry before I would eat any of that stuff. The worst one was, it was a trick that was played on me when I first got out there in the field and met this guy, Frank, that I was going to replace.

He asked me, "Hey, you hungry?" It was late in the morning. I said, "Yes, sure." So, he reaches under his little bunk and pulls out a box, reaches in, gets one of the cans and flips it to me. I said, "Hey, what is this?" It was the bread--you ever eat bread-in-a-can?

SI: No.

TC: Me either, but they put bread (a little biscuit) in a can and there was a second little baby can on top of it (inside the can) with either jelly or peanut butter. I said, "I'm not going to eat this. Come on, give me a break." He said, "No, I want you to look at that can--look careful," and I finally saw what he was telling me. The date on that can was August 1945.

It was left over from World War II. Somehow, it skipped Korea [laughter] and landed in the Central Highlands. This can with a piece of bread in it was damn near as old as me. It had been in that can for twenty-two years. It was 1967.

I said, "Wow, where'd you get this?" He says, "Now, we pull this trick on everybody. We have this case of C rations dated August 1945." He said, "No, I wouldn't have let you open the can, even if you wanted to." He said, "We play this trick on every new guy that came in, handed them the 1945 can and see what he would do with it." [laughter]

SI: Yes.

TC: The C rations kept you alive, I guess, but between you and me (and don't write this down, even though I'm recording it), I think we sort of lived on beer mostly. Literally, if I did not have a mission, if I did not have to go out to a firebase on any given day and I was just in my camp, I'd probably drink eight or ten cans of beer a day. I'm sure all the pictures of me, except these, have me with a can of beer in my hand, and probably a cigarette in my mouth.

A lot of days, I didn't eat anything more than that piece of toast in the morning, because there wasn't anything else that I was much interested in eating. Some of the other stuff was unbelievably terrible--some kind of a bean thing that I didn't even know what it was, scrambled eggs of some kind in there, made with powdered eggs in the first place, stuck in a can--ah, no

good. Like I said, the Chef Boyardee spaghetti and meatballs was actually edible if you got to heat it up--cold, nah, no good.

We would eat a whole lot whenever we were able to get out of the camp there, those few times where I had to head down to the base camp for supplies or something, had to do that a few times.

SI: You mentioned the orphanage on the base, but did you interact with the local population?

TC: No.

SI: Did they keep them there the whole time or did they get them out?

TC: No, they were gone about two weeks after we landed.

SI: Okay.

TC: It was kind of funny. When we landed there, we got in camp, the guys from the 173rd Airborne (who were taking care of them) said, "Okay, it's your turn for babysitting now. We'll turn these kids over to you," but, like, two weeks later, they were gone.

Now, what we had done in our little area, there was this little girl and I want to say she was three, maybe she was four, I don't know, and don't even ask me her name, because she couldn't tell us. She was pretty much speechless--talk about PTSD. She had watched her whole family--her parents, her grandparents, her uncles, her aunts, everybody--get massacred.

So, she didn't speak. We had some ARVNs, the South Vietnamese Army guys, and they tried to get her to speak and tell us her name. She was so shell-shocked, if you would. She needed psychiatric help is what she needed, but we took her every morning.

Somehow, we had a feather duster. One guy had it--for what, I don't know. There wasn't anything to dust, okay. We were in a dustbowl to begin with. We handed her this little feather duster. She would come over every morning and she would go into our tent and we had six bunks, cots. She would use that thing on each one of them, and then, we would feed her some C rations, which was actually good food to her. She would smile, but she wouldn't touch the food until she did her little job. It was kind of funny.

So, we named her. We called her Kim, because we didn't [know her real name] and she answered to that when we would call her, but she did that for about a week or ten days. Then, we realized one morning that they were all gone. Where they took them, I don't know, but we didn't even notice them leaving, don't know how they left, don't know whether they airlifted them or put them on a truck. We have no idea.

Nobody noticed. All of a sudden, they're gone. That was horrible. We almost wanted them to stay there, but it was really too dangerous. Once again, one round could've hit that building and killed them all. So, we never heard from them again or anything about them. They were gone.

When I saw those kids, it made me understand that maybe this is why we're here, okay, that those bad guys that we're fighting are actually bad guys. How could they do this? Well, they did it because they were fighting against the South Vietnamese and civilians were fair game. It wasn't something that they thought was wrong to do. Of course they would kill South Vietnamese civilians--that's who they were at war with.

Now, we had a Montagnard village about a click (a kilometer) away from us. Now, these people, I mean, it's one tribe. They're all cousins, okay. They're all related, one family. We would send volunteer teams, usually four guys with an interpreter, to go out to their little village. Now, they had to go out there unarmed; can't go walking in there with a gun in your hand. Everybody had knives in their boots, but nothing that you could see. I volunteered for that mission, never got called.

So, I never did it, but guys would tell us some funny stories about what went on. One guy told a story about [how] the first thing they do when they get there is, they have to drink some of the sake wine that the Montagnards would make, rice wine in the goatskin--would hoist it up over your shoulder and take a slug out of it--and smoke their little peace pipe, which was hashish.

I mean, the marijuana plants grew wild all around that area, so, we had it. Guys would cut it up and bring it in. It was just growing wild. Me, I never bothered with that, because I wanted to make sure my head was mostly intact at all times. So, I begged off, but most of the guys did.

These teams would go out there and they would smoke that peace pipe and drink that sake wine. Having done that, they were about pretty well stoned. I remember one guy telling a story, he says, "Yes," he says, "they told us through the interpreter that the young girls were available to us." He said, "I made a mistake--the one I picked was the chief's daughter. He was not happy about that. The *other* girls were available, not his fifteen-year-old daughter, okay."

SI: Yes.

TC: He said, "They threw us out right away. We weren't so sure they weren't going to be stabbing us." We had to send those teams out to that village to pick their brains about, "Gee, have the bad guys been around here? Have you seen any?" and see if we could get some information from them. Usually, it was non-descript. It wasn't very useful, but we kept trying.

We would send a team out there every couple days, just to see if they saw anything that we might want to know, because we were sure [the enemy was near]. We had aerial photos of a base camp just inside Cambodia, just over the river, an NVA base camp that we estimated had somewhere between five and seven thousand troops. So, it wasn't like we were fighting a couple of peasant farmers, which is what was being told to everybody back here. No, we were fighting a real army and that real army was well-trained. They were good.

Things that people forget when they start evaluating our "misdeeds" in Vietnam and our "failures" in Vietnam, the thing that people don't remember or think about is, hey, this was a home game for them. They were used to monsoons--we weren't. We weren't trained for that.

We didn't know what to do with it or how to handle it. We weren't used to having 115 and 120-degree temperatures, either--they were. They knew how to handle it.

So, the word back here was that we were fighting a bunch of peasants called the Viet Cong. Gee, that wasn't the case. The North Vietnamese Army was legitimate. They were a well-oiled machine and they were fighting for something important. They were trying to reunite their country. It was torn apart from them and they wanted it back. They probably were in the right to do so, but, when I saw the ruthlessness of what they did in Dak To, I said, "Okay, I can hate these guys now. Look what they did to civilians, little kids."

SI: Would you hear, through the news or other means, about what was happening in the United States with the antiwar movement?

TC: A little bit.

SI: How did that make you and your fellow GIs feel?

TC: Well, there were a couple of guys that were from New Jersey--I don't remember their names, not relevant, but, along with me, those two guys, we were getting *The Star-Ledger* sent over to us once in a while. I remember seeing the front page with the Newark riots in the Summer of '67. We looked at this and started laughing and said, "Wow, we're over here, but the war's back home." So, we were getting that kind of information.

[Editor's Note: The Newark riots lasted from July 12 to July 17, 1967. They began after the police arrested an African-American cab driver and rumors spread that he had been killed in custody. The riots resulted in over two dozen deaths, over seven hundred injuries, fifteen hundred arrests and property damage exceeding ten million dollars.]

What pissed us off with *The Star-Ledger* constantly was, we were usually fifth and sixth-page news. I told you about these big battles we had in Dak To. Hill 875 was about a three-inch column on page seven. We looked at it and said, "Well, it's obvious nobody gives a shit about us back home, not even enough to put it on the front page. We're seventh-page news."

That made us very unhappy--here we are--and we knew we weren't going to get a very nice reception when we got home. We understood that. We got that information already; we were told. There were times when you had to sit and question, "What the hell are we doing here? Why? Why do we give a damn about this little country? Let them go Communist--who cares?" However, we were following President Eisenhower's "domino theory."

He said in a speech to Congress once, when he was gathering support for the operation in Korea, he said, "We can't let these little countries fall to Communism there in Southeast Asia, because if we do, we will start a domino effect. If one falls, it'll knock down another and another and another and they will all be Communist. We have to stop this," because, at that time in history, the Communism was a bad thing.

[Editor's Note: The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, during the Truman Administration, and ended with the signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953, during the Eisenhower Administration. President Dwight D. Eisenhower put forth the "domino effect" concept during a press conference in April 1954. He sought to rally American public support the French then fighting to retain Indochina, shortly before the fall of Dien Bien Phu.]

So, John Kennedy heard that and understood it. He was the one. I mean, everybody blames Johnson for getting us into the war--it wasn't. It was Kennedy before. Kennedy was the first one to send troops to Vietnam. I look at it all the time, "Why did he do that? Did he care that much about Communism?" I don't know, but I think back to who he was. John Kennedy was a Navy guy, *PT-109*. If you look at the map of Vietnam, look how much coastline they have. I think it's something like 1,200 miles.

SI: Yes.

TC: "Wow, wouldn't it be nice to have some naval bases there? [If] we ever want to invade China, if that ever comes to fruition, we're going to have to go through this little country. It's the way you get there." So, I think John Kennedy looked at this country and said, "This is strategic, from a naval standpoint, and we ought to make sure it stays in good hands." The end result was it didn't, anyway.

Guys have gone back to Vietnam and said, "Hey, it's a beautiful country." I already knew that. If you've ever been down at the New Jersey Memorial [the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial, located in Holmdel, New Jersey]--I'm sure you have--there's a big photo right at the beginning (on the wall) of these beautiful rolling hills and lush green. That's what we had when we were in the Central Highlands. That's where that picture was taken.

It was a beautiful country. It wasn't after we were done with it. Some of those hills, we think we knocked them down a few meters; might have been 875 when it started out, but, after we were done, might have been only 870--and barren. I mean, we destroyed a lot of stuff.

You want to know something funny? We weren't allowed to cross that Mekong River into Cambodia or Laos. The reason we weren't was, the Pentagon, the United States Government, had made an agreement with Lon Nol, the Cambodian premier or whatever, dictator, that we would not fight on his land. We would not destroy his land. We made the same agreement with Laos, but we said, "Hey, wait a minute, we have these pictures." [Editor's Note: Lon Nol served as the Prime Minister or President of Cambodia intermittently from 1967 to 1975.]

If the pilot who took the pictures had ever been caught, he'd have been court-martialed and thrown out of the Air Force, because he wasn't supposed to fly across that river either, but he came back with these pictures of this seven-thousand-man base camp. Hey, it was in Cambodia. "You're letting *them* play in your backyard? Why can't *we* play in your backyard?" but we weren't allowed to.

That made us kind of ticked off, because we're saying, "Hey, we're getting shelled every night--can't we go and get them? Can't we saddle up and go across that river and blow up this little

camp of theirs? Can't we do this?" No, we weren't allowed to. "Can't we send a couple of F-4s [McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II jet-fighter bombers] and they can knock that camp out?" not allowed to.

So, they were allowed to stay there. That's why Tet was capable, why it was something that they could do. They had a lot of work to bring all this materiel into South Vietnam, did a lot of work, but they were allowed to do it. We didn't stop them.

SI: Okay, let me pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This concludes today's interview session. I look forward to continuing our discussion. Thank you.

TC: You bet.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 12/28/2019
Reviewed by Isabella Kolic 11/20/2020
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/8/2021
Reviewed by Thomas Chalfant, Jr. 3/1/2021