RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS R. SIANI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. Thomas Siani on April 19, 2013, in Robesonia, Pennsylvania. First, thank you very much for inviting me into your home today to conduct our oral history interview.

Thomas Siani: You're welcome.

NM: To begin, I want to learn some basic facts. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

TS: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 11th--not a good day--1947. [laughter] It was a good day then. [Editor's Note: Mr. Siani is alluding to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC.]

NM: I would like to learn a little bit about your family background. Can you tell me about your father, what his name was and what he did?

TS: Yes. My dad's name was Clarence Thomas Siani. He was born in Cape May, New Jersey. He, and my mother then, were up in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and he was a World War II veteran, served in the US Navy also. He then, I guess, went to Baltimore, worked at a shipyard, and then, he went in the Navy during World War II, and then, they lived in Philadelphia. He worked for the Budd Company and, when I was about two years old--I have two sisters, I'm the youngest--and then, they moved to Deptford Township, New Jersey, in Gloucester County.

NM: What was the Budd Company?

TS: The Budd Company, it was in Philadelphia. … I think it was also a defense contractor. I'm not exactly sure. He was a factory worker there, and then, when he moved to South Jersey, he got a job at a company called (Langston?), which is in Camden, New Jersey. So, that's where we resided.

NM: Was your father always from that Philadelphia/South Jersey area?

TS: Well, he was from [the] Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area, what happened is that I think work, like a lot of World War II veterans, took him to, first, Baltimore, where they were married, and then, we ended up in New Jersey and our primary life was in New Jersey. I was about, like I said, two years old, I think, and we were living in [the] Germantown section of Philadelphia. My father was concerned about kids running out in the street and stuff like that. So, he moved to Deptford Township, New Jersey. … Back then, it was a farming area. There were a lot of [farms], some poultry farms and a lot of pig farms, and, of course, people used to laugh about that, [laughter] but, basically, that's where I was raised.

NM: Do you know anything about your father's family history, in terms of its ethnic makeup?

TS: Oh, well, my dad, he was Italian and Welsh. My grandmother was Welsh. My mom, on the other hand, her history, we can trace pretty good. She was German and Irish. So, I'm, like, a

twenty-five percent mix of all those four. So, my mother, her family came from Cork, Ireland, and, I should say, my grandmother on my dad's [side], my dad's mom, … they were from Wales, … and then, my grandfather was from Italy. So, that's kind of, pretty much, the background of all that kind of stuff. It was a pretty diverse, well-assimilated American family, I should say.

NM: Tell me a little bit about your mother.

TS: My mom was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. They were all from the coalmining areas. They were tough, I mean, they were. [laughter] They did not have it easy and, during the Depression, like a lot of Depression era men and women, they had it tough, I mean, but my mother was also educated. My mother was very smart. My dad went to eighth grade and he quit school to support the family. He was the oldest one and … my grandfather worked in the grocery fields. So, that's kind of where my dad worked, at a grocery store, when he was a young boy, when he dropped out of school. My mother, on the other hand, … she was a high school graduate and she went to, at the time, I think, King's College in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton area. … So, she graduated from that, but she never actually pursued--even though I thought she was very smart and well-read--she never really pursued an educational background for herself and employment. She was just a typical World War II wife. She was an at-home mom and she worked very hard and we lived out in the country area, in Deptford. At the time, it was a couple acres and we had some animals and stuff like that. So, that's where I got a little exposure to all that kind of stuff and I loved it--I mean, always been an outdoor person, which is why I live out here. I love the country life. … If I could live on a thousand acres in the middle of nowhere and be in the center, I'd be very happy. So, that's kind of what my mom and dad did. My dad was a factory worker his whole life and had some medical issues and stuff like that as life progressed and it was a hardship on the family, because my mom didn't get a job, and so, it was [tough]. Deptford Township kids were--they weren't the high-end kids. I mean, they were hard-working families and were decent people and, I think we were raised with a sense of doing what was right and not cutting any corners. My dad, if he gave me any gifts, he gave me the gift of nothing, which made me extremely independent. At first, I was resentful, when I was younger, but, as I grew older, I got to appreciate that, because it made me self-reliant and didn't have any false illusions about what I had to do to make it. [laughter] It was all on my shoulders, not his.

NM: In Deptford, you mentioned that you had a few animals and it sounds like you lived on a few acres.

TS: Oh, yes, we had some pigs, we had chickens, … we had goats. In fact, one time, I brought a goat in the house--my mother just about had a heart attack. [laughter] Then, we had a bad hurricane, Hurricane Hazel, in the late '50s. It was similar to Sandy, in a sense, except for this Sandy hit the shore areas, this hit the inland areas and it was a nasty hurricane and there was a lot of damage. So, our barn was destroyed, and so, at that time, I think my father got disgusted and he was kind of overwhelmed with things and the barn was torn down. … I don't know if he made an insurance claim or anything like that, but that kind of ended the "agricultural experiment" with my dad, shall we say. [Editor's Note: From October 5 to October 18, 1954, Hurricane Hazel killed thousands in the Caribbean before making landfall as a Category 4 hurricane in the United States, where it killed ninety-five people and caused over three hundred

million dollars in damage. From October 22 to October 31, 2012, Hurricane Sandy (or Superstorm Sandy) claimed the lives of 286 people internationally and caused over sixty-eight billion dollars in damage in the United States, the second-costliest hurricane at the time, behind Hurricane Katrina.]

NM: Tell me about some of your earliest memories of living in Deptford. What was it like to live there as a child?

TS: It was a fun time. I mean, we were all outdoor kids. I mean, the parents sent you out, you played the whole day. You know, you played in the snow, played sports. We were into sports a lot, played a lot of baseball and football and all the other kind of stuff, and there weren't helmets when you had to ride a bicycle or anything like that. Everything was a free-for-all and kids were very active and, consequently very thin and very fit. … It was a hard-working community. Like I said, I don't think anybody cut any corners or, I mean, I never heard of welfare or anything like that. It just didn't exist. You just worked and Deptford Township was also a mixed race area and I never quite understood that when I was young, because you just lived, but there were a lot of African-American kids. … We all grew up together and we all played sports together and laughed together, fought together and it was, I thought, a harmonious thing, from my perspective, but I don't think it was probably that way for them, because I think there was isolation, on their behalf, and I got that as I got older. You could visibly see that, but I don't think there was any [problem]. You know, they worked just as hard as anybody else. I don't think there was a free ticket out of Dodge in Deptford. You just worked. As a young boy, at the age of twelve, I started working. I worked on a poultry farm. I worked for seventy-five cents--actually, no, excuse me, forty cents--an hour and, evidently, the guy paid me cash and didn't take out any taxes, right, [laughter] which I didn't know at the time, and I worked seven days a week. I used to feed chickens, collect eggs. You had to collect eggs by hand. Now, it's all an animated, computerized system where they're putting 125,000 birds in these houses. I know, because I've had to service them in my business today, but, back then, we used to do this by hand. We used to feed the animals by getting two five-gallon buckets of corn and mash and dip it into a fifty-five-gallon almost a type of a drum, which was made by a cooper. I mean, it was that old. It was a wooden drum and it was filled with mash and the other one was filled with corn and that's how you feed the chickens. You go on in there. … I guess that was a precursor to what they call free-range chickens. … So, I worked part-time since I was twelve years old and I … bought everything myself, from that point, and I still was active in sports. Then, when I got to be about fifteen, I worked on a pig farm, for a man by the name of Bill Exley, nice man, was very nice to me personally and all the workers, worked hard, though. … Even during high school, I recall, I had to go out and collect garbage at night and you had to collect garbage at night. Somebody wouldn't show up for work, he'd call me up and say, "Tom, can you go out on one of the trucks tonight?" and I would go out and I would go out and get done at six o'clock in the morning, take a shower, and then, go to school the whole day, play sports, and then, sometimes, he'd call me the next day, but I always worked on the weekends at least. I was very active in sports, very active in work and paid for everything myself, at a very young age, bought my own car in high school, had my own insurance and saved money. I'd always been a saver, so, I learned. I didn't want--my parents were poor. I mean, they were what I would call "middle-class values with not necessarily [a middle class income]." My dad worked hard. He was an honest man, but we

weren't anywhere near middle-class financially. We were probably a little less than that, but, in values, yes, as far as hard work and stuff like that, but my dad had a lot of medical issues. So, he was dealing with that and my mother didn't get a job. She worked a little bit, part-time. So, there was a lot of strain on the family that way. So, I just worked. I kept on working, … and my sisters worked, too. I'm the youngest one. They didn't get out easy themselves. [laughter] So, they had to work.

NM: Were these jobs in Deptford?

TS: Oh, yes, absolutely, probably still are. Bill Exley, he had a son, was older than me, so, I'm sure his dad's not alive, but his name was Bob Exley and he ended up becoming a teacher, I know. … He also had a landscaping business, which he started and I think he turned into a nice business for himself. So, sometimes, if the father didn't need me, I'd go help cut grass, especially in the summer months, and do stuff like that, anything. I just worked, I mean, and I was active in sports and stuff, but I just did all that. I was fairly active.

NM: Were the sports organized sports?

TS: Oh, yes, every level, I played sports, baseball, football, played midget league. I mean, like I said, all the kids, we were kind of comingled. We pretty much did the same thing. … By the time I got to high school, you knew everybody in high school, because I think most of the kids had a part-time job. A lot of them did, some didn't. I mean, there were a few kids in our school that I would consider very smart kids and academically-oriented and their parents, I guess, pushed that, but I think, for the average kid in Deptford, it was you were just going to get out of school and work or do something like that and, pretty much, we all followed that same path. There were exceptions to that. There were some very smart kids in our class, that some became doctors and whatnot, … but, basically, it was a middle-class, hard-working environment in Deptford.

NM: Looking at your ethnic background, what was your religion?

TS: Catholic--oh, don't make no bones about it. [laughter] My mother was an Irish Catholic. I mean, that was it. There was no other religion, and my dad was. The Italian families are strong Catholic families. That's the way we were raised. I went to Catholic school when I was younger, but the nun flunked about seventy percent of the kids in the class. So, it was, like, humiliating at the time and stuff like that. So, my parents pulled me out and that's when I entered public school, but I was a little bit older than the [other] kids and it kind of stuck with me, because I think that I felt as though maybe I wasn't capable of doing better. … It wasn't really until I got, took, like, organic chemistry at Rutgers, that I felt as though, "Jeez, I don't think I'm that dumb after all," [laughter] but it kind of stays with you. So, that's why I geared myself towards sports and athleticism. I thought that was kind of going to be my ticket out of town, so-to-speak, but I always had a desire to leave Deptford. I didn't want to see myself living my father's life. I mean, it was an honorable life. I mean, he worked. … I wasn't ashamed or anything like that. It was just that I just had a strong desire that I was going to be different, in a good way, and so, that kind of was the catapult … and the impetus for my whole entire life.

NM: In terms of after high school, what did you see yourself doing then?

TS: I wasn't sure. I thought I could maybe get a scholarship playing baseball. I was an all-conference baseball player and I was fairly good at baseball. I mean, I've played since I've been little and I was a person who could hit a baseball, even though I was small. I mean, even [in] Little League, I led the league in home runs and stuff like that. I could just hit. So, I thought that was my ticket out of town, but I didn't get a lot of interest. I was also the captain of the football team and I wrestled, but I wasn't a great wrestler, because some of these kids, they start when they're, like, six or seven years old and wrestling's a technique more than, you just can't go in there [and] strong-arm guys, but football, I was good. I mean, we had [a good team], because of the African-American kids. They were great at track. I mean, Deptford, I don't think they lost a track meet in many, many years. They were awesome. I mean, I look at the kids today even, running track from our area and around in here, and they wouldn't have made … the high school track team. I mean, these guys were that good, and so, consequently, baseball was my big sport and I really liked it and I was pretty good at it.

NM: Did you have any plans for going to college?

TS: Well, I did, but I didn't take academic [courses]. I did have interest by Glassboro State at the time. I don't know what they're called now. I think, … is it Rowan University? [Editor's Note: Glassboro State College later changed its name to Rowan College (1992) and Rowan University (1997).] … At the time, it was Glassboro State Teachers College and, also, Rider College had an interest in me playing baseball, but, when they looked at my grades, I had good grades, but I didn't have algebra, I didn't have geometry. My oldest granddaughter, I mean, I'm amazed by her. She got an academic scholarship at Canisius College in New York and this kid had two years of Latin, two years of Spanish, and inorganic, organic chemistry, Williamsville High School in New York, one of the best, trigonometry, physics. Everything you could possibly have in high school, this kid had and did well. I thought, "Jeez, if I had one half of that, I probably would've been okay and gotten the athletic scholarships," [laughter] but, … in my junior year, the Vietnam War was going on and there was a reality to a lot of young men, especially, "You're going to get drafted." I mean, there was no easy way out and they did give … college deferments. … My personal view is, the teachers colleges and the teachers' union was the direct result of the Vietnam War. I mean, people were flocking, men, young men, were flocking to teachers colleges, and then, I think what happened was, when they became teachers and they got their deferment and everything else, from being drafted, I think what ended up happening is that they didn't like the pay, because a lot of them were men. Years ago, most of the teachers were females, and so, I don't think they were happy about that and I think they started the unions and we all know where that went. … I'm not saying it's good or bad, I'm just saying I think that's the way it was, but, for me and a lot of high school seniors, the reality was starting to hit, "What are we going to do?" Just the question you asked is the question we were asking, "What are we going to do?" People were getting drafted and young men in Vietnam were eighteen and nineteen years old--scary thought now, looking back, but, your testosterone level's high when you're eighteen and nineteen, sometimes, and your brain cells diminish with an increase of testosterone--and I think a lot of guys either wanted to go or tried to find a way to get

out of it. I don't think many people just said, stood up and said, "I want to go." So, my dad brought the Navy recruiter over to my house and he said, to me, "You may as well go in the Navy, because," he said, "you have a better chance of not getting killed in the Navy." [laughter] So, I thought about it and I thought maybe that wasn't such a bad idea and I arranged to take the military test. I didn't do so hot, because, I remember, the test I took, when I got done, … it was multiple-choice and I goofed the sequence up. I thought, "Oh, my God, they're not even going to take me in the Navy. They must think I'm an idiot," and so, they did take me and I signed up, enlisted under a 120-day program, 120-day delayed program, I should say. … So, by February of 1967 is when I was actually in the Navy, but I was still in high school. So, high school, I got out in June and, July 7th, I went to the induction center at 401 North Broad Street in Philadelphia and that was my first day. I also … want to state for the record, by the way, because I had a brain injury and they didn't know a lot about brain injuries back then, I had something called retrograde amnesia. God, there's two types of amnesia associated with a brain injury, a more serious type, which is anterograde, which is you can't remember what you did from the day before, but, with retrograde amnesia, from the date of the incident, you lose part of your memory prior to that and the only way you can get it back is to speak with people that you served with or went to school with. … I can remember going to one of my high school reunions and they're telling me stuff and I'm looking at them with a blank stare on my face. [laughter] I honestly didn't know that occurred, and so, I'm going to have some blanks in my military history here.

NM: Okay.

TS: And I hope I don't have any inaccuracies. So, if I do, I apologize in advance. … I had pieced a lot of this together.

NM: This is a result of your injury.

TS: Oh, yes, the injury, yes, when I was almost killed in Vietnam. It was the blast itself. I mean, I was so seriously injured from that that the brain injury thing was overlooked, and they didn't have the technology they have now, where they can do these CAT scans and brain scans and stuff like that. … Anyway, I went to 401 North Broad Street. I don't recall if my mom or dad dropped me off. I got there, it was casual. It was an induction center. A lot of young men, eighteen years old, mostly, were lining up and they were being drafted. Some would be into the Marine Corps, not many. The Marine Corps didn't like draftees, nor did the Navy, but the Army, they were going to the Army and they were taking every so many guys and the doctor was saying, "You're going over there. You're going in the Army," and these guys were like, "Whoa, I don't know if I'm going to like that." You don't have a choice, that's just it, you're going in. Navy guys, we were brought to another part of the building at Broad Street, and then, we were sworn in by an officer and we took the oath. … You know, I think with the military, a lot of people maybe don't understand, but, if you're a military person, you are the protector of our Constitution. You don't understand that when you're eighteen or nineteen, but that's what you are. You are sent out there, essentially, obviously, in defense of our country, but you are a protector of our Constitution, this brilliant document, that so many people want to tinker with sometimes, but that's your job. … That's what you take an oath to protect and so, that's where it started, 401 North Broad Street in Philadelphia. [laughter]

NM: Can you tell me about the process of your training and education in the Navy?

TS: Well, from that point on, they marched us on a train at Philadelphia in a group. We were allowed to take so many clothes, [laughter] took an overnight train to Chicago, and then, … the Navy picked us up in one of their buses and brought us into Great Lakes Naval Training Center, which is where I went. Within two minutes, you knew who was in charge, believe me. I mean, they were screaming and hollering and I'm not going to use profane language now, but, just, I learned a lot of new words when I was in boot camp, because they hammered you. [laughter] You knew exactly who was in charge and it wasn't you. … All Navy boot camp is geared toward ship life, besides discipline and marching and PT and learning how to shoot a weapon, or piece, as they call it. There's a lot of drilling, stuff like that, but there's also a lot of classes and you're so tired sometimes. At night, they'd have you standing watches. At night, they're coming in there and you spend all this time folding your clothes in a neat way and making your bunk and they come in there at two o'clock in the morning, turn those freaking lights on and everything's turned over, ripped out of your lockers and thrown on the floor. … You had to hang your clothes up and it had to be, like, three fingers apart. Well, your three fingers might not be the same size as the company commander's, shall we say, and he ripped the clothes off the line, threw them down there. You had to re-wash them and re-put them up there and hope that his fingers were going to be the right size or they're going to get yanked off again, and that's kind of how boot camp worked. … I was very fortunate, in boot camp, there were a couple of other New Jersey guys. One guy, by the name of Sullivan, he was a funny guy, but there was another guy, I felt very sorry for him. I'm not going to tell you his name, because it was very embarrassing to him, but there was also an older guy from Texas and he was probably about your age and he was in the Navy Reserve. So, he had a little more experience and a little more maturity, rather than an eighteen or nineteen-year-old, and I was three weeks out of high school when I was in the Navy. I mean, that was a strange, quick adaptation to what my life was going to be. … You know, you couldn't get out of the military then. You had to be so outrageous to get a discharge from the Navy then. You were in and that was it. You were stuck and, if you didn't like it, you're just going to have to lump it, but the guy from Texas, (O'Hare?), his name was, he was older and wiser. He used to tell us, "Listen, it's all a game. Just do what they tell you to do. Don't get upset, don't take it personal. It's all a game," and so, pretty much, I was kind of nervous about all of that, like a lot of guys, about what's going to happen, and he calmed us down, I think. He put it in perspective for us, said, "Look, it's just a game. … They're telling you they're in charge and you're not in charge. Play the game, do what they tell you to do." I mean, everything was, "Yes, sir." You would salute anybody. Somebody walked by you that was in the military two weeks longer than you, you would salute them. [laughter] I mean, the environment was very intense, shall I say. I think boot camp was about twelve weeks and I made it through okay. There were some incidents. The one guy from New Jersey--again, I'm not going to mention his name, because he'd be awfully embarrassed by it--he had a large overbite in his mouth and he flunked every inspection. I mean, he flunked every inspection known to man and there was a guy from Wisconsin, his name was Potter, he would tell me, "If So-and-So flunks his inspection one more time, I'm going to laugh." I said, "Don't laugh." I said, "Just sit there," and so, they usually stood you by height and I'm not a tall guy, neither was he, he was the one in front of me, and the guy was getting ripped pretty bad about, … "Dirty shoes, didn't you shine your shoes? You're a

bleeping pig. Dirty white shirt," they pull your undershirt and just about ripped it off the guy, stomped on his shoes. He was really nasty to the guy and he stood right in front of me and I was at attention, waiting for my inspection. Then, he turned around to this New Jersey resident and he said, "Close your mouth, you bleeping squirrel," and the whole, everybody in line, just started laughing. We lost it. I mean, they took us to the drill hall and I think we must have laughed for the whole six or eight hours we were in that drill hall drilling. I mean, they just ran us into the ground, but that was the one kind of a funny incident I had during boot camp. After boot camp, we were given leave, I think for fifteen days. I went back to Deptford in September. … It was July 7th I went in and September, some time, middle of September, latter part of September, I went home and I was kind of proud. I mean, I'd made it through boot camp and I was in my Navy uniform. I went to a football game and I wasn't given any adverse treatment or anything like that, and then, I was given orders to go to the USS *Taluga*, AO-62, [a fleet oiler]. It was in dry-dock at San Pedro, California. Well, military doesn't baby you. I mean, how I got out there, they gave me a ticket on a plane, that was it. How I got to San Pedro, I'd never been to California, I'd never been out of New Jersey much, I was in Deptford mostly my whole life. My parents took one vacation, I think to Maine, and so, that was an *I Love Lucy* episode for my dad [laughter] and my dad, he would get lost and he had to have things mapped out by AAA. I'm so different from my dad in that regard, because I can travel all over the country and my wife and I, we don't care if we get lost. "If you're heading east, we're going to hit the Atlantic Ocean, if we head west, we'll hit the Pacific Ocean, who cares?" … So, I had to hop on a plane. I was kind of anxious, because you have to report for duty on time and I landed at the Los Angeles Airport and I didn't know how to get to San Pedro and I had to ask a few people and they said, "Well, you can get a bus, go to Long Beach and hop on another bus to San Pedro." That's what I did and I walked on this USS *Taluga* and they had civilians on the ship. I didn't know where the heck I was. I mean, I was just totally lost. It was quite an intimidating process for a young kid out of high school for three months, and so, I boarded the ship. … Actually, guys were pretty nice. It was, "You're out of boot camp now. You're one of us, but you are going to get all the crap details," and I got them, every one of them. [laughter] I did every lousy job on that ship. I was a deck seaman and it was an interesting experience. The best part of my Navy career was actually on the USS *Taluga,* in retrospect. The ship, after being [in] dry-dock for a couple months, took a couple dry runs, shall we say, went to Acapulco, Mexico. That was cool to me, because I'd never been anywhere in my entire life and, now, all of a sudden, I'm at sea, but I was concerned about getting seasick. I remember that and there was an older veteran, who was actually very nice--the other guys thought it was funny if you got seasick--he actually said to me, "Listen, don't worry about it. Until you get your, quote, 'sea legs,' make sure you always have something in your stomach. Eat a few crackers. Don't eat too much or else, you get rough seas, you're going to be barfing," but he said, "Just don't eat too much … and, if you feel as though you're going to get a little bit woozy, always eat crackers." … I actually never got seasick. So, the ship took a few dry runs, … made some practice runs. I did a lot of what is known as general quarters. I'm sure you've heard of that. They have drills for general quarters where you have to man the guns and they have these five-inch/thirty-twos [five-inch/thirty-eight caliber naval guns] on this ship and they have gunner's mates. I was a deck seaman, so, you had to pretty much go where they assigned you. On a funnier note, my general quarters station was [as] a hot shell man and they put these large asbestos gloves on [laughter] and you're supposed to catch the shells when they recoil out of the five-inch guns, and you can't miss it. [laughter] "You can catch it. Hey, Siani,

you go over there, you catch the hot shells." I said, "What are you supposed to do with them?" "Well, if you're out at sea, throw them in. Otherwise, put them down over here and stack them and they'll recycle them," or something like that, and so, that gun'd fire. I mean, the noise is very loud on these guns, I mean, very loud. I'd sit back there and catch this thing during GQ. So, then, the ship left and did what was known as a WestPac cruise. WestPac cruise was, it was called "going online." You're off the coast of Vietnam. I mean, we made stops in Hawaii, which was fun. We made stops in Sasebo, Japan. That was kind of fun, never been to any of these places. It was an amazing experience for a kid out of Deptford Township, New Jersey, believe me, went to the Philippines, … which is our main station. In the Philippines, Subic Bay was where the ship, the oiler--it was an oiler, of course--and this was where you did the refueling. You would load up there and you'd spend two or three days in a small town called Olongapo City. I had never saw so many strange things in my life. I was so young and so naïve, I couldn't believe. I'd never seen some of the stuff I saw, like, in this city. We left the base and the people then were very impoverished and the Filipino people, I loved. They were absolutely just delightful people. They were smart, they were nice, they were very nice to us. I mean, some of them were nasty--you could have that in any area--but I remember, I had my watch stolen. I wore one of those elastic [bands], which is why I wear a different type of watchband, I had an elastic band watch, a Timex. It wasn't that expensive, but it was a gift, a graduation gift, from my parents to me when I graduated from high school. [laughter] I was walking down the one street in Olongapo and you weren't allowed to go on any side streets. They were off-limits, and some kid ran up and just grabbed my watch off me and shot up an alleyway. I thought, "What the heck is this?" I never had anything stolen in my life, and he got it and the guy said, a couple of the guys with me, "You can't go up there." I said, "He stole my watch. I want to grab this guy." "Can't go up there, out of bounds. You're going to get [caught]. The shore patrol's going to take you back. You'll get court-martialed for that." I said, "Huh?" but, actually, Olongapo City was bars, cathouses, bars, cathouses, all the way down, and everybody had their favorite spot and it was just a bizarre thing. … Then, after a couple days, the ship was loaded with the oil, had avgas [aviation gas], JP-5 [jet fuel], it was called, and then, it would head to the coast of Vietnam. … I have some pictures in there of some of the refueling stuff. We would refuel anything, minesweepers, destroyers, aircraft carriers, even the [USS] *Enterprise* [(CVN-65)], and they were a nuclear, a nuke ship, but they needed avgas. So, we refueled them. You'd have ships on each side of you. Very tough life at sea, very, very tough for a deck seaman--every night, you stood a four-hour watch and you still had to work during the day and, if, during the middle of the night, they had an UNREP [underway replenishment], it's called, a refueling operation, there was port and starboard crews. If it was your crew, you had to get up. So, if you had to refuel at eight o'clock at night and, at twelve o'clock, you had to stand watch, you didn't get to bed until four in the morning. They let you sleep an hour later if you had what was called the mid-watch, until seven in the morning, had to get up and do the same thing, day after day, work. I chipped paint on that ship. I was a deck seaman. I used to man the highline. I don't know if you know this, they used to take guys from one ship to the next on a highline. They'd put him in a basket and they wouldn't use the winch for that, only humans could do that, and so, a guy had a little microphone out there. I can remember the guy's name, Hastings. He used to holler, "Heave around on your highline," and guys would have to pull. [laughter] We used to feel like slipping him in the water … but you didn't. … That was kind of a fun thing, but that ship, you worked, and, when you're online, … definitely, you'd be working very, very hard,

refueling anything, destroyers, like I said, cruisers, destroyer escorts, minesweepers. Guys on the minesweepers, by the way, … they got rocked around pretty bad. I mean, we got rocked around, but these guys in these minesweepers, I didn't even know how they could eat food, those things were rocking so much. … Sometimes, we had very bad weather and it was rough. I mean, you're standing a watch. … I would go from, it was called the starboard wing, and I would start there, and then, I would go in their boathouse, the pilothouse. That's where the duty officer was on deck and the captain's quarters were right behind there. So, you always had to be quiet. You didn't want to tick off the captain of the ship, believe me, and so, … we would stand like a half-hour on one wing, and then, they'd bring you in the pilothouse and, if it's raining, raining like that, you had to get out there and stand out there and be soaking wet, and then, they'd bring you in the pilothouse and you would operate the [radio]. You'd be in contact with the radarmen and stuff like that and you'd have a headset on and you'd be communicating. If they found a contact, you'd have to report to the officer of the day, "Contact, 020, portside," and the officer of the day would acknowledge it and repeat and he would say, "Aye, aye, sir," to make it official. … Then, you would do that for a half-hour, and then, at first, I didn't, but, after a while, then, I was a helmsman, and they have, like, these rudder indicators and stuff like that. So, if you couldn't keep the ship within the five degrees of rudder on each side, I mean, the ship just can't wiggle down the ocean. I mean, they want to keep it direct as possible, not always easy. It takes a special touch, and so, then, the captain of the ship would give you an order, "Give me twenty degrees rudder." "Twenty degrees rudder, aye, aye, sir," and you would repeat it back to him, and then, the ship would turn to that degree, and then, he'd tell you when to go back to zero rudder and stuff like that. … Then, you went back and you stood watch, and then, you had to go to the fantail of the ship. Well, when you were loaded with fuel, the ship sat very low in the water and, if you were in rough weather, you'd have to be very careful not to get washed overboard. In fact, they had man overboard drills. They'd just throw a dummy into the water and the ship would have to stop and they'd man general quarters and you'd have to go get him out of the water, lower the small boats and get him out of the water.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: You were talking about man overboard drills.

TS: Yes, okay.

NM: Please, continue.

TS: Okay, so, the man overboard drills, we had to do that and they'd have to lower the rescue boats and go after him, bring him back, and that was part of the standard procedure. You didn't know when the captain of the ship would order that, but it was usually deep in the ocean. If you fell overboard, you probably were going to die. I mean, the water's very cold. Even in warm weather, it's cold, and it's very, very rough and, even if you have a life preserver on, you get bounced around pretty good. So, you have to be always cautious and … there could be a danger, especially during storms. … The ship still moves and you still have to stand watch when you're out at sea. So, it was a very demanding job for most crewmembers on the ship, always standing watches. It was 24/7. You never got out of that and you still had to work the same day. I mean,

you were well-fed on the ship. Most everybody got along pretty good, I mean, close quarters, very close quarters in the Navy. We were on water hours a lot, too. The ship couldn't produce enough water, so, they had water restrictions. So, sometimes, they'd have a master-at-arms sitting in there when you took a shower and, if you're on a deck force, you're getting dirty, and it was no pleasant task not being able to take a shower. … The racks were three-tiered racks and they folded up, so [that] you could clean them. The lockers were very small. So, all this stuff from boot camp and training was now becoming clear now as to why they did it. Quarters were tight. Berthing spaces were tight. This was an oiler. It was fuel. … The ship was loaded with a lot of black oil and JP-5 and avgas and we slept in the forward compartments, where the avgas was. You were not allowed to smoke or anything like that. Most guys in the military smoked back then, by the way, including myself. I smoked for the four years I was in. Boredom does it. In-between watches and stuff like that, you're bored out of your mind, but you still have to stay awake. Black coffee and cigarettes was a standard fare in the military, Navy, at that time. So, on and on it went for my first cruise of nine months off the coast of Vietnam. Sometimes, we could see land. One time, we were actually anchored off the coast. I could very clearly see land. I had a great curiosity at that point in time. I wanted to go. I mean, I know a lot of guys probably didn't want to, wouldn't have done what I did, but I just kept on seeing that land. We were anchored and I think it was a place called Vung Tau, which I later had been to on land, but it … just kept on staring [at me]. I thought to myself, something was driving me to want to go there. So, after we completed our nine-month cruise, and, by the way, we also stopped at, like, Kaohsiung and Keelung and Taiwan and stuff like that. So, I mean, we did a lot of fun things, too, once in a while, on the ship. Hong Kong was another area. A lot of these ports, they make the oilers anchor out and take a liberty boat on, because they didn't want to take a chance of an explosion. So, Hong Kong was a very nice place. We got to see things. It was an interesting place to see. I liked the people in Taiwan, Kaohsiung and Keelung. Of course, they were the Free Chinese and they broke away from the Communists and they were just nice people, just like anywhere else. … You have good and bad and whatnot in any society and they were pretty much indicative of all that. So, it went for nine months and I just had this desire. So, when the ship got back, I probably made one of my bonehead mistakes I've made--I looked into being a Navy SEAL. … The only way you get to do that is, you have to go to, it's called BUDS [Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL] training, basic under[water] demolition team training, UDT [Underwater Demolition Team] school. So, very hard to get in--you have to have an impeccable background, for security reasons, and then, you have to be able to pass a very, very tough physical. It's very hard, very hard even to have a chance to take a test, and so, I was lucky. I had good military recommendations and stuff like that and certainly had a good background and was athletic, and so, they thought I had a chance of maybe qualifying. So, it took a lot of recommendations, and civilian recommendations and military recommendations, just to be invited. So, I was invited. I went to Coronado, California, naval amphibious base, for a tryout and it was pretty intense. [laughter] I mean, they have this large Olympic pool there and you had to swim--I'm not sure what it is today and I could be wrong with the distances--but I think it was four or six hundred yards, freestyle, just swim. I think you had to hold your breath, too. So, they had to see how long you could hold your breath underwater. Then, you had to swim. Then, you get out of the pool--and I may have the order reversed, too, been a long time, one of those memory things--and got out of the pool and you had to then, with not sneakers, but your boondockers you wore, which were kind of like a half combat boot, run a mile or a mile-and-a-

half in a certain time. Then, you get done, you had to just go up to the pull-up bar and do chin-ups and pull-ups and push-ups and this and that, and didn't say anything to you. They were all business down there, believe me, all business, no goofing off, and went back to the ship and, a couple weeks later, they told me I was accepted. I was very surprised and kind of elated, kind of thought it was a pretty big honor to even be accepted, and I went there and that training was the most hellatious training. You could take any sporting activity you've ever done, even from wrestling on, and you can take boot camp and you can multiply it by a thousand. They start you out by--I remember being in San Diego Bay, the water temperature was freezing, and they had all this black muck on the bottom. If you took your helmet off other than when he told you, then, you quit. Probably eighty percent of the people drop out, get sick, and training was very rigorous. I mean, you had to put this black muck from the bottom and stick it on your head, have it drip down. Officers and enlisted men slept in the same quarters. They treated everybody the same, rotten. [laughter] They cussed at you. They had to shave your head again and go through the whole [thing], kind of similar to a boot camp thing, but it was boot camp times a thousand. I mean, you had to run, you had to do night swims, you had to do pools, you had to run seventeen miles to Tijuana and get sand scraping your thighs, saltwater grind on you. It was just brutal. They have these things called rock slides. You go out in the mud and slop around in that, and then, at nighttime, you had to go out in six-man teams and you had these IBS-es, inflatable boat, small, on your head and carry these things, very demanding. I got sick, and so, after getting sick, I decided maybe this wasn't for me; … kind of, in a way, my one regret in the military. If I had a Mulligan, I kind of wish I could get that back again, because that was the only thing I actually ever dropped out of. I mean, eighty percent of the guys do. It's very tough training, but the guys who make it through, I really tip my hat to. They have great perseverance, great strength, tremendous athletic ability, and a little bit of luck by not getting sick. It's very easy to get sick when you're doing all that stuff, especially night swims in the ocean. I mean, you'd have these life vests on if you were going out there in these IBS-es, in the rough water, try to get through these breakwaters in California, on the ocean side. By the way, you had to run from the bayside to the ocean and sit there and sing songs and stuff like that and it was tough, tough, tough, I mean, really tough

NM: Your involvement in the SEAL training was spurred because you wanted to go to Vietnam.

TS: I wanted to go to Vietnam. I wanted to go where the action was. … When I was on that ship and I looked that one day, and, like I said, I think it was Vung Tau, I am not sure, we were anchored off it, just kind of staring at it. … By the way, I should also state that the USS *New Jersey* [(BB-62)] was there, our home state ship, and I'll tell you what, anybody who's ever seen these things fire, those sixteen-inch guns, have not seen anything. I tell you, these things, the whole side of the ship just goes, "Boom." I mean, this thing just goes. I mean, that noise is loud. That's the other thing, [for] people that are not in the military, the noise is horrendous. You start firing these weapons, the noise is horrendous, but that USS *New Jersey*, I saw it fire. We were a distance from it. I don't think we refueled it. I don't remember refueling it. Maybe we did, but I just don't remember it, but I remember seeing it and, I remember, we were at a distance and it was firing … into the coast of Vietnam. I just thought to myself, "I don't know how anybody can survive that. I just don't know how they can survive the bombardment." It's hard to describe how loud and how these things just kind of recoil back and unfurl … these sixteen-inch guns all

at one time, "Bah-boom, bah-boom." … It was incredible. I've never seen [anything like it], I mean. We had to fire these five-inch/thirty-two-inch [five-inch/thirty-eight caliber naval guns] guns on the *Taluga* for target practice and stuff and they used to, by the way, bring ships and they would tow ships behind them, like these old, beat-up things. We had to try to hit it. So, I mean, you're always prepared. I mean, in the military, you were prepared, 24/7, you were on your "A" game. I mean, there's no messing around and you can see where discipline comes [in]. You're just told what to do. You don't question it, you do it. That's what an order is, "Aye, aye, sir." You heard the order, you understand it and you were to comply with the order. There's no messing around, but to see that USS *New Jersey* was phenomenal, but getting back to the UDT school, that was a disappointment and you have to get through that before you can even go into the next phase of training and that's usually the toughest part. It's all tough. The guys who make it, that are Navy SEALs, America can be proud of them. They are incredible. They've done some things that not too many people can do, and so, I didn't make it. … Then, at that point in time, they came up to me and they said, "We can do one of two things. You can go back to your ship or we can send you to Vietnam." I said, I didn't hesitate, "I'm going to Vietnam." That's where I wanted to go.

NM: You were serving on the *Taluga*, then, you went for SEAL training, and then, you were on mainland Vietnam.

TS: Yes.

NM: Okay. I was not sure if you went back to the *Taluga*.

TS: Oh, no, no. They gave me a choice, no, and, again, it was called BUDS training, UDT school. That's the first step. SEAL training's down the line a little bit, but, yes, that's what I wanted. That's the ultimate goal. That's what you want to become.

NM: Since you had volunteered, what were the terms of your enlistment? How long did you have to serve?

TS: … I signed up--well, what you do is, you sign up actually for six years. You owe six years to the government, four years of active duty and two years Reserve. Those that were in the Reserves, they were kind of, at the time--now, our military's so stretched with all Reservists that it's wrong--but, at the time, the Reservists spent two years of active duty and four years of inactive Reserve, where they could be called, but they were called US Navy Reserve, USNR. We were USN, United States Navy, or, like, the Army would be USA versus USAR, and that's the way it was. Now, my enlistment was for four years. I actually think, I'm not sure, I can't remember whether or not I had to extend, because I think you needed two years after UDT school and SEAL team training left. So, I may have had to extend. That's gone from my memory. I just don't recall that. So, they gave me a choice and I think I took a short leave to go home. I think I asked my dad for some money. He said, "I'm not going to give you any money," [laughter] and I said, "Well, send me my own money," and I think I went home for a short leave, came back, and here's an interesting story that should be told. I didn't know there was an antiwar movement, because there wasn't one when I went in. This apparently was going on behind-the-

scenes and, when I got orders to go to Vietnam, I was told to report to the Norton Air Force Base in California and we were supposed to be flown by civilian airlines, Continental Airlines. However, I don't quite recall where we met at, but it might've been some other spot, but we were taken by the military, on a military bus, to the gates and all protesters out there. That was my first reality check. I had no clue. They hated us. They were throwing crap at the bus, they were holding signs. We were, like, shocked. One guy was holding a sign that says, "Hell no, we won't go." Another guy said, "We are the victims of the war," and I had a hard time with that statement, so did a lot of guys. How are they the victim of the war if I'm going to sit in that plane, getting ready to be sent over to Vietnam? I didn't understand that. They had angry [looks]. … The window was down, a guy threw a bottle, a beer bottle. Something hit me on the [head], just nicked my head. I'll tell you what, there were mixed military branches, we were all getting ticked off. I thought, [if] they stopped that bus, we'd have got out, we'd have probably just whacked those people. They were nuts. They were protesting. They were so vile towards us. That was my first time that I ever experienced anything like that, coming from Deptford Township, New Jersey, and, now, I'm in California and these people were just nasty to veterans, military people. I didn't realize they hated us. I mean, I just [did not know]. Even when I was in Long Beach, California, … when the ship was in--I actually saw the *Queen Mary* being brought in when the ship came back from Vietnam--but we'd go to Long Beach, I mean, there was no discourse towards us. There was no mistreatment of us, but, then, all of a sudden, I don't know what happened. This was in May of 1969 and I had no clue how quickly the country had turned against the military and hated us. They hated us. I mean, they hated us. I thought, "Huh? You hate me and I'm taking your spot." I said, "I'm having a hard time figuring that one out," [laughter] but that was reality.

NM: When you were on the *Taluga*, did you have any contact with your family or friends back home in New Jersey?

TS: Some. Yes, my dad wrote to me a lot and it was an interesting contradiction, which I'll tell you later. You'll see the difference in treatment by my own family when I came back, but not then. It was kind of a honeymoon stage. They were very nice to me. My one sister, my older sister, who's now deceased, would send care packages and stuff like that, and I thought that was very nice. So, they treated me good. There were a couple friends I communicated with. When I was in Vietnam, by the way, I later found out that Ike Hardy, he was in the Army at the same time, right where I was in Vietnam. He was a little bit away, protecting my perimeter. … I saw him at a high school reunion, he was telling me that, and another fellow, I still communicate with a little bit, not much now that I'm basically retired, a little bit more, name was Bill Magann. He was another one of my classmates. He was in the Air Force. So, he was in Thailand, working with the Air Force in communications, and I was in Vietnam and the other Deptford graduate was … right outside of our perimeter, Ike Hardy. Another Deptford Township guy was killed within a couple weeks, Kenny Mokuau. His name's on the Wall down there, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial--nice, we played sports together as kids. So, in one class, at the same time, one was killed, he was in the Marines, he was only there a couple weeks, Kenny Mokuau, I heard. These are things I learned later on, by the way, not at the time, but, at that time, I was on my way and I was kind of nervous and kind of anxious, like a lot of guys that didn't know what to expect, but I just wanted to go. … So, I was on [the bus], these protesters were outside of the

gate and the bus finally made it through the main gate at Norton Air Force Base. That base has closed down, too, by the way, I was told, and we were on a civilian airlines, Continental Airlines. The plane stopped at, made a refueling at, Hawaii, which we didn't really get off the plane, Wake Island, from Wake Island, it went to the Philippines, Clark Air Force Base. From Clark Air Force Base, it went to Da Nang and the plane landed and we went into a small--it was actually a large base--but it was called Camp Tien Sha, arrived there. There was something called Monkey Mountain behind it. It was kind of an interesting thing--the very first night, they had an artillery attack. I never heard artillery, [laughter] never heard mortars and rockets in my life, loud, very loud sound, and the start of a long affiliation with the flares and trip flares going off at night. When you start seeing these flares go up, you know something's coming and … that's what happened and they shot off a rocket. It didn't land in the base, it landed just beyond the base, some rocket attacks. They were off course, but I was sleeping. I tell you what, I was awake real quick. I clanked my head on a bunk. We all ran to a bunker. We were looking at each other, thinking, "Welcome to Vietnam, here we go." We didn't know what was happening. … I'd never experienced anything like that in the Navy, and so, it was a reality check, "This is what you signed up for. You wanted that and, now, you're going to get it." … You know, after that, it was all okay, but an interesting thing was, … the base was a transition base. It was a base where … some guys were working on the base, which was a relatively large, secure base, in relative terms, but other guys were getting ready to--it was a staging area, shall we say--getting ready to ship out to different bases, and others were getting ready to leave country. Well, the guys who were leaving country were really ragging on us. I don't think I can say on the tape what they were saying, but it was--everything was 365 days. That was your tour. So, "I've got two days left, two days and a wake up, you blankety-blank," MF-er, to be specific. Another guy walks by, "How many days you got left? Hey, hey, MF-er, how many days you got left?" mocking us and stuff like that. "You've got 365 days left--I've got two days left, you," they were bleeping us and cursing at us. … I mean, it was done in jest, it wasn't done [maliciously]. It was just busting on you, you know what I mean, busting your chops. … So, that was the beginning of my--actually, it was my second tour in Vietnam, because I spent nine months off the coast. … I didn't know where I was going to go in Vietnam at the time and I was there four or five days, I guess, getting checked in and getting my weapons and equipment and uniforms, and you had different uniforms you had to wear. So, they said, "Maybe you ought to get a haircut." I remember, I got a haircut, it was an old Vietnamese guy. I tell you what, he puts that razor to the back of my neck, I'm thinking, "This guy might slash my throat." [laughter] I just thought, "I'm not going to make it." … I don't know why I just got this kind of like a panic attack. This guy has the razor and he's shaving my neck and I never quite had it. It was real weird. I think he was just trying to do a good job, but, in my mind, you get real paranoid and you thought, "He's going to slice my throat." [laughter] I said to one of the other guys, I said, "Did you get a haircut?" He said, "Yes." I said, "That guy give you the creeps?" He said, "Yes, I thought he was going to slice my throat." [laughter] … So, he didn't. He was a nice man. He did nothing of such, and so, I got orders to go to Tan My, Vietnam. Tan My, they took us by boat. I think it was a YFU [harbor utility craft] and we towed a Mike boat [Landing Craft Mechanized, Mark 8 or LCM-8] behind it and Tan My's, I think, about fifty, sixty miles north of Da Nang. I remember entering … from the ocean, South China Sea. It was a small opening to Tan My Cove, it was called, and, when you came into the [cove] from the ocean side, I know that the pilot, the Navy coxswain, I think he was a chief, actually, was concerned about sandbars, because where the ocean comes in to

where the Perfume River came out was a large sandbar and you had to worry about that. … Then, right out front there, there was a PBR boat, patrol boat, river. They're small boats, they're fast. They were manned by a three and four-man crew, basically, and they were responsible for the security. If you looked off to your … starboard side, heading kind of in a westerly direction, was the Perfume River. That's the river … I spent a lot of time on. That would lead right to Hue, the City of Hue. … I think it was five or six miles from Tan My to Hue. So, we kind of went straight in. They dropped us off, took the, I think it was a pusher boat, was a Mike boat, landing craft, Mike boats, and I was a boatswain's mate, third class, by then, which is a … small boat operator, and so, they brought us in and we came in with the mail. … The Tan My Cove kind of curled around and, flanked on the one side, just for logistic purposes, was the South China Sea. It's a resort area now, I understand. I could see why. It was actually, you could envision it being a beautiful place--was not a beautiful place then. We were flanked by the South China Sea. There were security towers all along the ocean, with the concertina wire, barbed wire and everything else, security guys, and that went to the south of us. To the west of us, ARVNs--I don't know if you [know who they were]--the ARVNs were the South Vietnamese Army. They had our security on the other side and I think the Marines were responsible for the security on the base. There weren't a lot of Navy guys in-country, so, I can't recall how many exactly there were, in and around. I was assigned to the boathouse and the boatswain's locker, and so, I did just about everything. I ran boats. I … did dispatching. I was in charge, had these skimmer crews and you'd run officers or whatnot from there to the PBR base or the causeway and stuff like that. To the south of us, sometimes, you could see some very heavy fighting, jet planes, Army. A lot of the 101st Airborne guys would land the Chinook, or, as we called them, "Jolly Green Giants," at the base at Tan My. It was not a big base, but they blew the sand all over the place and, I mean, the sand was going all over the place; … at nighttime, could be a very dangerous spot. The trip flares started going up at night, you know something's coming. You'd hear gunfire at night. At the causeway, we had to worry about sappers. So, guys would stand watch. I don't know if you've heard of a concussion grenade. A concussion grenade is thrown into the water. It's unlike a fragmentation grenade. They're like pineapples, round things. We didn't use them. We used concussion grenade. They were more cylindrical. They came in, like, a wooden box and had, like, rope handles and you opened it up and they were in these canisters. You peel off a piece of tape, you take it out. It was a cylindrical grenade. It was to kill people in the water, basically. You had to worry about sappers coming up. So, every so often, you'd hear these grenades going off in the water, "Bah-boom, bah-boom." You'd almost go to sleep by that and what's funny about it is that there was a pattern that almost lulled you to sleep of hearing the flares go off, small gunfire from security people and the grenades going in the water. If the pattern changed, then, you were on high alert. There was a bunker there, too. I have pictures, which I can show you later on, of the bunker. Of a more human interest story, when I first got there, there was a little dog … they had as a pet, which we adopted, the next crew coming in, and it was called Funny Dog. She'd just gave birth and we all went in there, gave birth, and she had these little puppies and guys were quite touched by that. That dog meant a lot to them. … The Perfume River, I remember, they told us that I think eighteen or twenty Navy guys were killed a few months before that. It was a lot more secure when we got there. I think the guys who were there a few months before us actually took a lot more than we took, but, make no bones about it, the Perfume River was still a dangerous spot. I mean, you're taking a boat up, I'd sometimes help with the mine sweeps, sweep the rivers--they had these, a lot of flotation gear in back of the

Mike boats, and you'd kind of pull that and it would kind of, you'd try to see if you can scoop up or deactivate these mines that are on the river. … The further you got to the Hue River ramp, the more boats were in the water, more people were round. … You'd get the creeps sometimes. … These people in these small boats, you thought you didn't know when one of these idiots were going to pop up and start, open up on you, but the PBR guys pretty much were in charge of the security and they'd come in and, sometimes, they'd call in the helicopter support on the rivers. … Sometimes, you'd hear popping and you didn't know if it's shooting at you, or all I knew was that, you know what? You can be so paranoid in a combat zone, it'll drive you crazy. You almost, sometimes, you resign yourself that, "You know what? The worse that's going to happen is, I'm going to be dead and I won't know it anyway, so, just do your job." Everything's about doing your job. … Tan My was a fuel farm, right there, and I guess that's why they sent me, because I'd been on the oiler, but oilers would tie up off the coast and there was a large buoy and it was flotation gear and you would tie the fuel oil up and some of the boats at Tan My had bladders in them. They had an overland pipeline by the time I got there, but, before, a lot, they'd take the fuel up in these large bladders, on these, they call it LCM-8 boats, Mike boats. There were three men on them, a small boat, Mike boats. You had a coxswain, like myself, you had an engineman and you had a seamen, deck seaman. … Again, I did a lot of different things at Tan My, but some guys, just all they did was run the boats all day, twelve on and twelve off. We were not allowed in that water [at night]. If you were on the water between dusk and dawn, they'd blow you out of the water, no activity on the water. I think, two weeks before we came here, one of the Mike boats hit a mine. … I didn't know the eighteen or twenty Navy guys who were killed. I didn't know them personally, but they pretty much told us about it. So, it could be a danger zone. Tan My was no safe place. There wasn't a safe place in Vietnam. Some of the other detachments, in Dong Ha and Sa Huynh, I think they had it worse than us, and south of us was Cua Viet, but Vietnam was an interesting place. The bathrooms, or heads, I have pictures of that, two fifty-five-gallon drums were sawed off, fuel oil was placed in them. They had, like, a two-seat thing, with a door. I found it funny that they made one for the Vietnamese people. We had a lot of Vietnamese people do the work. … They would pull these fifty-five-gallon sawed-off drums out and burn them and the smoke would just be spewing up in the air, all over. I'm surprised guys didn't have problems, respiratory problems, later on in life just from that stuff, but, when you first get in-country, by the way, you're given malaria pills and you have to go. Now, funnier story was, that I recall now was, … I said I had to use the bathroom. Guy said, "Bring your piece." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Bring your piece and a flashlight." I said, "What's this for?" "You'll see. Just bring your piece." I thought, "What? Are these guys infiltrating our camp at night?" and, by the way, the sand was so hot during the day, you needed, it was, like, wooden pallets, platforms, that were on the ground. That's how you had to walk everywhere, even with shoes on, hot, I mean hot. … It was over a hundred degrees and it was just roasting hot. We had no air-conditioning, we had no computers, we had no phones, we had no way of communicating with anybody back in the world, other than by a letter. … I went out there to use the bathroom and I sat on there and I heard a noise in the sawed-off drum. There were rats. Rats were crawling around there. So, guys would bring their piece to shoot the rats, but they couldn't shoot them in the fifty-five-gallon drum. The diesel fuel they had in there would leak out all over the place. I'll tell you what, I stopped going. If at all possible, you did not go to the bathroom at night, did not want to go sit on those things. … The rats were crawling in there. … It was kind of a joke to the guys after a while, but, as far as what we did on the base,

the responsibility was fuel oil, take up cargo. There's a Tan My ramp, it was called, and you would take it the six miles up to the Hue River ramp and drop the supplies off with the I Corps. I was in I Corps, by the way, northern part of Vietnam, and you were trying to resupply all the 101st Airborne, Marine units that were in I Corps. Sometimes, there was some serious fighting going on, in and around our base. You could just see it, hear it, jet planes, Chinook helicopters. There was also ROK [Republic of Korea] Marines there. I don't know if you know what they are. They are from South Korea. They were nasty guys. They'd bring the prisoners back on base and they'd have them blindfolded and we heard rumors--I never saw this personally--but, all I know is, they never came back. When they took them up in the helicopters, they didn't come back. We'd see new ones come in, but we never saw the ones [that left] and guys used to tell me that they were tossing them out and I don't know if that was true or not. Like I said, I never personally witnessed that, but, definitely, prisoners they'd brought back [did not come out the same way]. 101st Airborne guys came back, they'll always have my respect so much. They were in charge of our perimeter on the one side, 101st Airborne. That's where another Deptford Township grad, he was in the 101st Airborne, I believe, Ike Hardy. He was there. It was kind of ironic, in a way, that he was protecting my own security and we grew up together, playing Little League baseball and high school football and stuff like that, and it was kind of interesting. So, basically, that's all we did. I had a strange incident. Guys on the boat, I was out there, we traded--I have a picture of this little dog--traded a bottle of Jack Daniels with a Filipino tug. We were just out at the head of the Perfume River and got a little dog. So, we named the dog "JD," after Jack Daniels, brought him back to the base. He was the happiest little puppy, loved that dog to death. One day, they seemed awfully quiet, "Bam," I heard one gunshot from the ARVN soldiers. They shot the dog, just ripped the whole side of the dog's head off, practically. Oh, I tell you what, we were PO-ed. I thought, the guys were getting their weapons, "We're going to just start shooting those people." … We were so mad at those ARVN soldiers for shooting that dog. … The funny thing is, I ran up to little JD, I picked him up. I thought he was dead. He was laying in the sand. His ear was blown off the side of his [head], just shredded. I looked at this poor dog, I felt so bad for this dog. I'll tell you what, I was very angry. He opens his eyes. He sees me, he starts wagging his tail. … I'll tell you what, it was like I couldn't believe the poor dog lived. Somebody went to the [bunker]; we had a combat bunker, where all the communications was on base. I didn't do it. I think there was a Lieutenant Anderson, I recall, I think he did, or one of the other fellows, ran up to the combat [bunker]. They actually found a veterinarian in I Corps, in a town called Phu Bai. So, they said to me, I had a military driver's license, which I'll show you later on, with the hole in it, they said to me, "Siani, we're going to take you up in a Mike boat. Take a vehicle. You have the military driver's license. We're going to drop you off. You're going to drive to Phu Bai. There is a veterinarian there. I said, "Where's Phu Bai?" "You'll find it. We're just going to drop you off [on] the other side of the Tan My Cove. Just ask some guys, they'll get you to Phu Bai." So, I took one guy--somebody held the dog. We had a little towel. We tried to pick up the piece of the ear and the side of the head that was torn off and he was absolutely still alive. It didn't hit him in the middle of the head, I guess, and I was so thankful. I didn't think he was going to live. I just didn't think that little dog was going to live. So, they dropped me off. I took the weapons carrier with the dog and somebody helped me; I don't recall who it was. I had no clue where I was. I tried to get to Highway 1, which is the main highway from Hue to Phu Bai, which was southwest of us. A couple of the Army guys in the infantry, I asked them, or Marines or somebody, and they pointed us to Phu

Bai. Phu Bai, mostly Marines and Seabees [US Navy Construction Battalions], a lot of Seabees were there. The Seabees did a good job, too, over there, and we found this veterinarian, took the dog in there to the veterinarian. He says, "You guys wait outside." "Yes, sir, we will wait outside," waited outside--all of a sudden, now, just west of there, very heavy fighting. I mean, artillery's going off, jet planes are flying in, "Bah-bam, bah-bam," helicopters with the mini-guns just were flying over our head, "Bam, bam, bam." They were just relentlessly attacking an enemy force of either VC [Vietcong guerillas] or NVA [North Vietnamese Army], very heavy fighting. We're thinking, "What the hell? Is this base going to be overrun while we're waiting for this dog to get operated on?" … After a couple hours, it stopped and, about an hour after that, the vet came out and said, "He's going to be all right." His whole head was bandaged up. He's wagging his tail, he's so happy to see us; so, put him on the weapons carrier, start to head back towards Tan My, to be picked up by a Mike boat or a ferry, which we had one Navy man operating. [As] we left there, I'd never seen refugees in my life like that. I had never seen people with nothing and they were coming from the area where the heavy fighting was just at. They had everything on their back. They had these little conical hats and they had, like, a wooden pole that they carried. The look on their faces never, never left my brain--never in a million years could that leave my brain. It was one of the most horrible sights I've ever witnessed in my life. I never saw such despair, angst on their faces. It was so sad. Americans were very giving, by the way. We used to give a lot of the Vietnamese, C rations, cigarettes, give little kids stuff all the time. I mean, this is just Americans guys. GIs over there in Vietnam [were] very kind to civilians. I mean, there was some nasty stuff going on, make no bones about it. … War's war and it's not a clean [thing]. You know, you don't come out with clean hands, sometimes, believe me, and you do things that you're always going to regret, but that was a time when I just, … if I could have given them the shirt off my back, I would have given it to them. I felt so bad for them. So, we had some C rations in the car, weapons carrier, excuse me, and we gave it to them, just gave them the whole [thing]. I didn't care. I just felt so bad for these people. I just couldn't--that just stuck with me. Here I was, so happy that the dog was alive, so happy that … his life was saved, and then, just so sad to see these poor souls that were just--they didn't do [anything]--I mean, what do people deserve. I mean … this is crazy. It was just heartbreaking to see that. Then, I think we ended up taking [a ferry]. There was a ferry boat, I think a Navy guy [ran it], had like two ramps on each side of the ferry. It was a makeshift barge that went across the Tan My Cove, and so, I hopped on that and just got on the other side. To make matters worse, a couple of the Vietnamese ladies were giving birth. They just … had to give birth, they just [did so] right on the side of the road, for the whole world to see, no privacy, nothing, no hospitalization, gave birth. Just cut the baby's cord, the baby was [there]. It was just like, my God, this was like Third World living, these poor people. … This is just hard to believe people can live like this. It was so bad. So, we got back on base and everybody's all happy the dog was alive and he was there until we left and I had two more incidents I could probably tell you about. I had a lot of strange things happen to me in Vietnam, which you'll conclude. I was electrocuted. Guys were at the base camp, playing football, and somebody kicked the football, and I'll show you some of the pictures. It's all sandbags on these tin roofs and somebody had a buoy next to one of the hooches, they'd call them, and I said, "I'll get it." … I climbed the hooch, I was fairly athletic and I went to put my hand on the roof and there was a bare wire on the roof. I got electrocuted. It just knocked me right down on to the sand, flat on my back, hit my head, was laying back. They took me to the infirmary. I was absolutely unconscious and I started to

come to and they told me they were getting ready to stick a big needle in my heart, start my heart. I says, "What?" They said, "We're going to stick the needle in you, but you're okay now. It's okay, don't worry." I looked at that thing and I thought, "Jeez." I thought I was going to have another heart attack. I don't know what I had, but I tell you, I was definitely knocked unconscious. So, I had light-duty for two or three days. That's my first time off in the Navy. [laughter] Nobody gets sick. I don't care how sick you are, you work when you're on a ship and stuff like that; so, had a couple days off, and then, just shortly after, then, I think it was about, I think, early October or mid-October, early November, monsoons came. You talk about being miserable, try going out on a boat in the middle of a monsoon. The temperature probably dropped to in the seventies, from, like, 105 or something like that. We were freezing to death, soaking wet. You could not stay dry. I ended up getting jungle rot, because I stopped wearing socks, it was so hot. Also, a lot of guys, we used to see the 101st Airborne guys come in the base and they didn't wear their dog tags around their neck--they started wearing them on their shoes. So, we all started wearing dog tags [on our footwear]. We'd put a dog tag on each one of our combat boots, but I didn't wear socks. It was so hot, I didn't want [it]. The less you wore, the better off, and, fortunately, the dress was kind of informal, especially if you were out, like, on the boats. You were really supposed to wear a lifejacket and flak jackets, did not, [laughter] probably got sunburned. I had a lot of skin cancer, stuff like that, later on, pre-cancer growths and stuff like that. It's all from that. You know, they didn't have sunscreen and guys didn't wear hats. Sometimes, they did, basically not. So, monsoon started, had another incident. Rains were so heavy that boats couldn't go out. Everything was so flooded … and they needed fuel. They had an oiler out off the coast and the guys, the crew, couldn't make the connection from the hoses to the large buoy, which pumped the fuel oil into the large tanks on base there. They were worried about not having fuel for I Corps. … So, the commanding officer asked for volunteers, "Somebody go out there and try to tie this thing." I said I'd do it--not one of my brighter moves, either. So, me and two other guys went out there and took a pusher boat … and went out there and these are flat-bottomed boats. We hit the breakwaters, I'll tell you what, it was nasty. I'm telling you, this thing was just, "Bam, bam," twisting and turning. It was like being on the worst roller coaster of your life. … I definitely wore my life[jacket], we all wore lifejackets. It was like, "You kidding me? Why'd we volunteer for this?" but you know what? They needed it and we thought, "We're going to do it." … I think it was actually right around Thanksgiving and it was storming, raining, torrential. We saw the buoy and we were able to navigate the boat up close to it. So, I said, "You know what? You get close to it," to the other fellow, was a coxswain, I said, … "Put a rope on me," and I said, "Tie it to the cleat on the thing and I'm going to try to leap off." I actually was kind of scared. If I didn't make [it], land on that buoy, I'd be in the water and the screws kept on coming out of the water as the boat was twisting and turning. I said, "Man, I'm going to be dead. If I miss this thing, I'm dead," [laughter] and I knew that. I said, "Just try to get close." I said, "I'm going to leap on there," and I just tried to time it just right and I had the rope tied around me and I jumped on that. It was a very large buoy, about half the size of this room. I slid--I landed on it--I slid all the way across and I had to catch myself and I quickly tied on to one of the bars with a half hitch to stop me from falling into the water on the other side, because I would've just probably drowned and got tangled up in the line. So, I don't know how I did it, but I saw that, I guess it was about a six-inch rubber hose, and I know how we used to hook them up on the *Taluga*, when they'd bring them over from one ship to the next. … I managed to get it on there and these guys on the ship, the crew, they were

cheering us like crazy. They couldn't believe we were crazy enough to do that, but we did it. We got back on. They were calling, they waved us over to the ship and they made us dock up there and it was a Merchant Marine ship, loaded with oil, and they started pumping it. Man, they were happy, and they radioed in to the base that the hookup was made and they started pumping in. They brought us on the ship and they made us a Thanksgiving meal and they brought over, they had bourbon and all kinds of [liquor]. I tell you what, I didn't drink that much, I drank then. [laughter] I'll tell you what, I don't know how we ever made it back on the boat. If they had DUIs for boats, we'd have got one. We were just so scared. I mean, it was just--it was worse than getting shot at, because it was just such a dangerous situation; … finally, made it back, went down the coast again, in the inland, through the sand. We didn't get--well, it wasn't going to be a sandbar there, too much water, made it back to the Tan My Cove and just came up, "Good job, sailors." That was it, not a big deal, just did it and we did it and another day in the life, and so it went, and monsoons was miserable. … So, those guys were still running fuel up, when they could, they were still taking cargo up, when they could, and trying to resupply I Corps, and Perfume River's still a dangerous place and on and on and on it went. Every night, sometimes, could be very terrorizing. I mean, like I said, you start hearing the sequence of the trip flares going off--I will say this, I never liked a Fourth of July celebration since that, since those days. I try to be a good sport about it, with my wife and kids--hated it. Those flares going up, to me, were just nothing more than a reminder of the whole camp being lit up and gunshots going off. … By the way, sometimes, on base, things got dangerous, because guys, I think it was one night a week, they'd open up this little shed and they'd serve liquor and guys'd get all gassed up. They'd start shooting guns up in the air. There were two or three times we had to wrestle guns out of guys' hands that were half drunk, but that was not the norm. … I think it was later on and, come around March, we were told that the Army's taking over, yes. They're going to turn it over to the Vietnamese Navy, close down the operations. It was probably, and I might have the wrong date, somewhere March of 1970. That was it. I was done with Tan My, brought back to Camp Tien Sha, back at Camp Tien Sha again, [laughter] and that was nothing compared to Tan My. By the time I got back there, yes, we had incoming, it was still a joke. There was nothing--I'm not in any way diminishing the danger there--but it was nothing like out there in Tan My, up on the Perfume River, and that was not as bad as the guys before us, when all the Navy guys were killed. In fact, they were telling us that it got so bad, they had to take all the boats and bring them out to sea. They thought they were going to lose them all, so much activity going on. So, we were lucky in the sense that we were there a little bit after a lot of that. A lot of the Navy guys before us, and military guys, had it, I think, worse, but, still, a dangerous spot, Perfume River, dangerous. … Sometimes, by the way, doing the mine sweeps, if you thought, if you suspected there was a mine, you'd just start dropping concussion grenades in the water, try to blow it up. A funny side thing was, I guess today would be called "redneck fishing," [laughter] … you stick these concussion grenades in the water, "Bah-boom," the fish'd fly up in the air. All of a sudden, all the Vietnamese fishermen would [swarm]. They actually liked us doing that, I think. They got a good day's fish out of that. They'd go right in, start picking up all the dead fish and take them back. So, back at Camp Tien Sha, I still had about two months left on my second tour of duty. I had no clue what they were going to give me. In the meantime, they said to me, "We'd like you to run a boat from," right about near Camp Tien Sha, there was some docks down there, "and we're going to run, like, a shuttle boat to pick up people, all day long, going over," it's called the White Elephant, "Da Nang." … I can't remember, it might've been a half-hour trip,

each way, might've been an hour, I don't know. I had a seaman with me and we ended up rotating. He was Tommy; I can't think of his last name. … I do remember where he was from. He was from Greenville, South Carolina, very nice Southern boy. A lot of Southern guys served back then, by the way. … There weren't a lot of New Jersey guys and stuff that were in there at that time, and so, all day, twelve hours a day, ran a boat, picked up people. It kind of got creepy, too, after a while, because there were a lot of Vietnamese civilians and you're picking them up and you're looking at them, you're thinking to yourself, "I don't know about who's going to pop up and shoot me," but, then, you just say, "You know what? I'm just ignoring all that stuff. … Navy gave me a job to do, I'm going to do it." Then, I was informed that I was going to be reassigned to another ship, the USS *Newport News* [(CA-148)], and it was in Norfolk, Virginia. I said, "What?" I said, "What's going to happen with the ship?" They said, "Ship's going to come back to Vietnam." I said, "This is insane." I said, "Why do I want to leave and to come back on a ship? I don't want to be on a ship anymore. I had my fill of that," and so, they said, "Well, the only other option is to extend your tour of duty." So, I did. So, then, they … made me a military advisor, as part of MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Animal Husbandry Division, N-9 Unit, it was called. I looked up N-9 Unit online--I can't find out what it is to this day. I'll tell you about that in a few minutes, but, so, this was probably the end of May. I did that boat detail for about a month-and-a-half, or something like that, and it was, like, twelve on, twelve off, took a [Lockheed] C-130 [Hercules], was never on a C-130 in my life. So, I took a C-130 from Da Nang to Saigon, landed at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, met up with the crew I was supposed to be with. They were all, basically, new guys.

[TAPE PAUSED]

TS: You're getting tired and you want to get moving.

NM: No.

TS: Ready?

NM: Please, go ahead.

TS: Well, so, ride down to Saigon and did not know the guys very well. The idea behind the animal husbandry program--by the way, I got that because I worked on the farms as a kid in Deptford, and so, I was familiar with a lot of this stuff. So, we would go to small villages in remote areas and try to set up farming programs as part of the Military Assistance, Vietnam program and it was actually, on one level, kind of very interesting. I was with a bunch of new guys I did not know very well and, on the other hand, it would be very scary, too, because you'd come in there and, sometimes, you'd see old men, old women, a couple small kids. … There'd be a tree line and you'd look up there, you think, "I'm toast. I know they're going to open up on me," you know. You got to kind of be very paranoid about that kind of stuff. Other times, it was kind of fun. One particular time, we went up to Vung Tau, beautiful resort area. The Australian Army was up in and around that area and they were crazy people, Australians. I mean, they were wonderful guys, I mean, don't misunderstand, but, I mean, they were [wild]. We went into one place and … it was a building. We saw some military personnel in and around there. It was kind

of dark and we didn't know what it was and we're thinking, "You know what? What's going on in here?" So, we kind of opened the door real slow and walked into one area in Vung Tau and turns out it was a little cathouse. [laughter] The Australians were in there. It was, like, "All right, I'm out of here." So, that was kind of a comical thing, but, so, I'd been down in there probably about only two or three weeks and, during the day, sometimes, we would even actually eat in Saigon. Saigon was just a normal, regular city. It was so different from Tan My, I mean, so different. It was such a contrast to what life was [in the field]. It was regular city life, a lot of well-dressed young women and men and professional people, modernized, music, nice restaurants. Of course, they had the French influence down there, and so, we would go in some of these restaurants and eat and the four men that I was with mostly was Jim Poland--he was a good friend of mine. He's been my memory over the years and he died a couple years ago. It was kind of a hardship for me, because I'll tell you why and you'll see why it was hard on me, and then, there was a fellow by the name of Ken Haynes. He was from Bangs, Texas, and then, Ralph Walls, he was from Montgomery, Alabama. So, three Southern boys with a New Jersey guy, [laughter] really worked out kind of well. I mean, they were kind of funny. I mean, … we were all military guys. I was the lowest-ranking petty officer amongst the group, and so, I was just kind of laying back. I didn't know where this was all going to go. I had just extended and this was really the start of my third tour in Vietnam, and so, this was in June, and then, on June 27th, we were staying at a place called the (Le Lai?) Hotel and it was a Saturday. … I was starting to buy some stuff I was going to send home, because this was, like, a regular city and things were really cheap. … I was going to buy a nice TV and radio and stereo and I thought I'd send it all back. I mean, I was so long out in the boondocks and on the ship and this was, like, in a way, like, almost like a regular job. We were staying in a motel. I mean, I was living like an animal [before]. Maybe I didn't tell you, if you had to use the bathrooms on these small boats, you had to throw a bucket in the water and, I mean, there was no bathroom facilities, there was no food. You ate C rations and stuff, ham and eggs in a can--try to eat that. They stunk. It was lousy. … I used to give many of those things away, but, any rate, so, this was, like, luxury to us. The only time we ate C rations was when we were out in the field during the day, if we had no food. Basically, it was like a gravy job, I mean, and the other thing was, I might add, the military people in Saigon were all dressed well, had shiny shoes. We were living like a bunch of dogs and they had brand-new weapons and it's like, "Where were all these weapons at when we needed them? We need them. You guys didn't need them here in Saigon. We needed them out there," but, I mean, we had enough, and so, it was a kind of an interesting time. So, on this particular time, it was a Saturday night and Jim Poland, he was the chief in charge. He was actually my good friend later in life. He invited me up to his room. I did not want to go. He wanted to go eat upstairs in a military restaurant or something like that. I said, "You know what, Jim? I don't really want to go tonight. I just …" "Come on, Tom, come on, come on up here. You're new to the outfit. We want to welcome you up here." I said, "Okay." So, I went kind of reluctantly. We had a meal, we came down to his room, guys had had a few drinks and stuff like that. All of a sudden, a fight broke out. A guy I never knew--didn't know the guys, I wasn't involved with starting the fight or anything like that--we saw two of the guys, Ralph Walls and Kenny Haynes, fighting with two other military guys, which we didn't know who they were with or what outfit they were in, and it was nasty. I mean, these guys were going at it pretty good. … We ran over there to break the fight up, Jim Poland and I, and we tried to pull the guys off. … One guy was a really big guy and I'm not a big guy and he just tried to pull him off of there and

we broke it up and we threw them out of the room … where they were fighting and that's all we knew. … So, we went back to the room and, next thing I knew, somebody hollered, "Grenade," I thought, and Jim Poland, I later found out, … there was a little half wall where the head was, he said he bent down and the other two guys tried to get out the front door and you-know-who was stuck in the room. … I had nowhere to go and the grenade went off. I was dead. It's as simple as that. I had a near-death experience, and I know people are going to laugh at that. I told my wife about this when I first met her. I swore her to secrecy, because I didn't want people to think I was crazy and I know how people can feel about it and I know it might be an in vogue thing, but I'm just telling you, I was dead and I had an out-of-body experience. It just scared the crap out of me. I mean, there was a large, pulling light. There was. Like, I could see certain [sights], and what was interesting, it was sights that were black and white, they weren't in color and it was certain parts of my life that were just flashing, flashing and flashing. I could feel this pulling with this strong, white light. I didn't know anything about it. Next thing I know, I was just completely knocked unconscious for twenty-four hours. I awoke the next day. Years later, Jim Poland told me, and, I mean, like, ten years after the fact, because I didn't have any communication with any of them for a while, because I didn't know what happened. I had no clue what happened at the time. … He said to me, when he walked up to me, after the blast, and it was very loud, I can't describe how loud this thing was in this room, it's a small room, and this grenade was just--the shrapnel was bouncing all over the place--and he said to me, … "I thought you were dead. You were laying there. Your clothes were practically shredded off you. Your two combat boots were shredded off you." They couldn't even find my dog tags that were on my [boots]. I told you, I put them on my boots and I told you that for a reason, and so, I didn't know anything. I didn't see anybody after that, but, after twenty-four hours, when I awoke, various investigative groups were coming up to me. So, when I woke up, I said to the corpsman--it was an Army [medic], I was in Third Field Hospital, by the way, in Saigon, an Army hospital--I said to the corpsman, I said, "Medic," they call them in the Army, I said, "What happened?" He said, "A VC threw a grenade into your room." I said, "How'd they get in there?" He said, "He just tossed it over." There was a metal railing on the outside, but there was wire to kind of stop stuff like that. I said, "Is that what happened?" He said, "Yes, I think that's what happened," but, then, I was being interviewed by various investigative people. I think one guy was from the CIA. I have no proof of that, but … I know Naval Investigative Services [was there] and they asked me what I remember. I said, "I don't remember anything." I said, "I remember two guys were in a fight over there and we broke a fight up, basically. That's the short version," and I said, "We went back to the room. I thought that was just done, big deal, two guys from another outfit got in a fight I didn't know," and they didn't say it, they didn't tell me what happened. I didn't know what happened and that was it. Next thing I know, I was in bad shape. I mean, I was in bad shape. My legs were almost blown off, my rear-end, my left arm, my back. I didn't know exactly what my injuries were, at the time. I was in bad shape and I guess it was a day or two afterwards, … I was in some staging area, where a lot of other guys that were injured [were brought], and they were getting ready to ship us out. I tell you what, I will tell you this, that what I remember is, besides being in so much pain, everybody was stacked next to each other on gurneys, serious injuries, serious injuries, I remember, and I will never forget, the smell of, like, gunpowder and dying flesh in my nose. I couldn't get it out of my nostrils. … The scent was so strong. … It was like a gunpowder. It was like gunpowder and dying flesh that was just stuck in my nose. I just laid there. I didn't care. I was in so much pain. They were giving us morphine,

everything else. Then, they started hooking up these IVs. They didn't tell us where we were going. All of a sudden, they started wheeling us out to on the tarmac and it was a [Lockheed] C-141 [Starlifter] jet; uninsulated, I may add. They stacked us in there, I mean, rows and rows, and I never realized how many guys were seriously injured in Vietnam. I think, all told, it was--I know over fifty-eight thousand guys, of course, were killed, but there were probably three or four hundred thousand guys that were seriously injured--and it seemed like every one of them was in that plane that day. [laughter] [Editor's Note: According to the Department of Defense's Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 153,303 American servicepersons were wounded in the Vietnam War.] They had them packed in there. These guys were so seriously injured. It was bad, and then, the plane took off and all the IVs and whatnot were rattling. That's what I remember and I still had that smell. When that plane got up in the air and I could feel the plane bank, I said to myself, "I do not know if I'm going to make it back to America alive," but I knew I wasn't going to die in Vietnam and I guess the medication kind of kicked in and I blacked out. I don't remember anything. We were flown to Japan. I don't know how long the flight was, I don't know anything about it. It was an Army base. I don't even know the name of it. I think it was, I later on read, there's a Camp Zama, or something like that, in Yokosuka, near Yokosuka, Japan. They took us there. Bad shape--again, I can't tell you how bad I was, me and the others, and a strange thing happened, though. I don't know if I stayed overnight there, but a lot of the Army guys that were ambulatory came out and talked to us. They were very nice in comforting us, "You guys are going to be all right. Welcome back to the world. You're out of 'Nam, man. You're out of that crap hole." I'm giving you the clean version, "Welcome back to the world. Man, we're out of there now. We're going to go back to the world now. You'll be all right," very encouraging. I'll never forget, one man, young guy, I mean, and, by the way, these were eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year-olds, I want you to know that. There weren't many old men. I mean, there was leadership that were older, but we were all young. At that time, I was almost near the end of my enlistment, I was twenty-two, but most guys were nineteen and twenty. They were young guys. We were all young kids, right out of high school. That's all I can tell you. We never got to enjoy our youth anymore. We were just so deprived of all that stuff and nobody really knew what it was really like, but I'm going to tell you what it was like, right now, in these hospitals. So, a young guy comes out, had a hole in his head the size of--I don't know if you know what an M-79 is. They're called bloops. We had them, looks like a large shotgun. You opened the breech up of a gun, a big one. He told me, I said, "What happened to your head?" He said, "We were pinned down by the NVA and we didn't know what else to do, just about ready to be overrun. So, we called in incoming on ourselves and the mini-guns from the helicopters came in and they shot an M-79. They were shooting round after round." I saw this, I told you, many times. They were shooting round after round. He got hit with friendly, in his head. It didn't detonate. He said, "Doctors had to choose who was going to take that shell out of my head." I said, "Did they take it out here or in Third Field Hospital?" He said, "Third Field Hospital." He said, "There, they took me out to a triage room and they'd made a special tent, in case it detonated, so [that] it wouldn't blow the whole hospital up." I thought, "Man, you talk about courage." I saw so much courage from these guys, I can't begin to tell you. It was just amazing, and then, so, the Navy and Marines, they started loading on helicopters. Now, I don't know if you know this, they were, these Army guys call them "dust off" helicopter pilots. They were guys bring them out of the hot zones that were wounded. They took the doors off. I can't remember whether there were four or six guys now, but I was on the outside and I

was on the top and they have you strapped in. You couldn't move. This helicopter takes off from this Army base. It's going to fly us to Yokosuka Naval Hospital in Japan. It was over a body of water. I think it was Yokosuka Bay, I do not know for sure. This thing started banking--I can't tell you what I was thinking. All I thought was, "This thing's going to go. I'm going right down with it. I'm going in the water. I'm going to be strapped into this gurney. I'm never going to make it home alive." That's what I kept on thinking. … That was my goal, I mean, "I just want to make it home." I was sick. I had my fill of Vietnam. … That was the start of my third tour; I had it. My curiosity got killed. [laughter] I mean, it was a nasty place, it was ugly and it was getting uglier by the minute, and the helicopter was banking, that was my thoughts. I guess the funny medicine they had me on--they had us all on very strong drugs--maybe I was hallucinating, but I'm just telling you, it was just crazy, and so, it landed at the Naval Hospital. They had, like, a helicopter pad and they wheeled us into a very large [room]. I saw so many guys in there. I just can't believe the guys I saw that were wounded and I can't believe the injuries that you could see. I never knew it. … There were a couple Navy SEALs, there were Navy corpsmen, myself, a lot of Marine Corps guys, and there was a young Marine, he couldn't have been more than eighteen years old, shot himself in the foot, in front of the whole area. … A doctor came out and, I mean, he chewed him to death. He cussed at him, he called him every name in the book. He said, "You son of a bitch," he said, "I'm sending you back." He said, "Take a look at this ward." He said, "You shot yourself. … You don't even deserve medical attention." He said, "I'm going to fix this toe," and he said, "I don't care," he said, "you're going back. I am ordering you back to your unit in Vietnam. You're not going to disgrace the Marine Corps." Oh, man, I tell you what, we were looking at each other, we were just thinking, "Oh, man, wow, that was pretty harsh treatment for a young kid," but that's the way it was. You joined the military, you went in, that's what you're going to get. … They will not cut you any mercy. … They own you, lock, stock and both barrels, and it was pretty bad, and so, I was wheeled up to a ward. I was in bad shape. Everybody was. Everybody lays in beds almost right next to each other, along these long wards. Everybody's very, very badly injured. A Navy corpsman was across from me, kept on calling me, "River Rat." [laughter] He was teasing me, and I called him, "Doc." He had a gunshot wound, gut wound, got shot right in the stomach. He had a colostomy on nineteen-year-old kids. He was wearing a colostomy bag. His spirit was so strong. … Marines were all next to me. You know, all we ever did was joke around, but it was bad. Everybody was in pain. I still didn't know what my wounds looked like. I had no idea how bad I was injured. Next day, … I was laying on my stomach. All my wounds were on my back and my legs. I don't know if you can see it now, but my legs were almost blown off me, my butt, my left arm--that was my smallest one--my rear-end was almost shredded off. It was pretty bad. I had a piece of my shoulder where shrapnel landed in my right arm. I thought that was the only arm that wasn't scarred, and very bad. So, they laid me over on my stomach the next day and they had to clean my wounds. If they had had a gun sitting next to me, I'd have shot myself. I'm telling you straight up. It was so painful. … The corpsman was just pulling the gauze out of there. It was packed in there. It was so painful. It was raw meat, still couldn't look at myself. It took me about three or four days of that. I just blacked out from pain. They'd give you morphine and stuff like that. I never was a drug addict in my life, I never took them. I never smoked marijuana. I never did anything. I mean, I smoked cigarettes, but all guys did, but I never took an illegal drug. I was on so much morphine and God knows what, I was turning into an addict. Probably, most guys there were, where, actually, they had to withdraw you from it,

because, every four hours, you wanted that shot. You didn't care what they gave you to get rid of pain. There was pain so bad … in your body that you wouldn't believe and that was one of them. … So, probably after the third or fourth day, I looked down, I looked at my left thigh and I could see my tibia just shining, just the whole bone. I could look down. It looked like raw meat. I never saw anything like it in my life. I could see the gunpowder all stuck in my legs. It was just bad, very, very bad. I just thought, "Oh, my god, I don't know … what my life's going to be." I had no idea what my life is going to be, and probably a few days after that, they had a magazine, which I have and I want you to look at. It was about a VA [Veterans Administration] hospital in Brooklyn, New York, and so, guys got a hold of the magazine. They'd get reading stuff and they'd toss it from one bed to the next. The Marine next to me says, he called me River Rat, too, based upon the corpsman making my little nickname up over there, he said, "Hey, River Rat, you've got to look at this stuff, man. This is where they're going to send us." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Take a look at that." You could see, it was a VA hospital in New York, all paralyzed vets, living in a crap hole. They had rodents running up and down the catheters. They couldn't move, and a reporter was kind enough to do a story on it, put it in *Life* Magazine. That's how bad the VA was during those days. All of a sudden, we all got a panic attack, "This is where they're going to send us. Is this where they're going to send us, to a VA, to rot, to have rats running up and down us? What? Are they kidding me? That's the way you're going to treat us?" and the nurse saw the magazine. She took it from us. She wouldn't let us see it. Thirty-five years later, I found a copy of that magazine at an antique place in Palmyra, Pennsylvania, and that's it right there. You can look at it later. You'll see what I'm talking about. It was awful. … That was the first reality check I got as to what might happen, but I was in bad shape. I was in terrible shape. I had two or three weeks of just excruciating pain. … It was twice a day, they had to clean these things out. I wasn't the only one. It was everybody. You could hear guys groaning, "Give me a shot, Doc, give me a shot. I need another shot of morphine." It was pleading, almost negotiations at night, and, at night, you couldn't sleep, but, for the record, I want to say one thing, I've never had a chance to thank a nurse or a corpsman. They did a tremendous job. They were so kind to us, and the doctors, especially at the Navy hospital in Yokosuka, Japan, I don't know how they can live. I don't know how they could live their life and not have such horrible memories of what they saw. I do not know how, but I've never had a chance to thank them and, … if they're ever listening to this story, I hope they know that we were eternally grateful for what they did to help us out. They were just very kind to us. They'd stay up [until] two o'clock in the morning, rub our back. When we couldn't sleep and they couldn't give us another shot, they'd try to console us. It was just [that] they were wonderful to us and I hope they get the recognition they deserve for helping us and being kind to us, because they do. … They now have a memorial for the nurses down, for the women veterans, in Washington and I hope America can appreciate what these [servicepersons], especially the corpsman and nurses, did, and what they probably continue to do, to help the wounded veteran. They were very nice to us. So, there's my two cents for them and they deserve every bit of attention they get, but I was still [in rough shape]. They didn't know what was happening with me. They said, "We're going to try to save your left leg, but we may have to amputate it." They were pretty direct. Oh, I might add, they set up phones, so [that] we could call home. Very strange conversation with my mother--I guess there was a lot of angst. My father never bothered getting on the phone. I didn't know what was going on. I mean, I tried to relieve her. I guess she got a [telegram], where Western Union sent a message from the military that said I was

severely injured, and she threw that out, never had it. I could've had that to show you. … I also realized then, everything I had was stolen. I had sixty dollars--they had Military Payment Certificates--which was a lot of money back then. They took it out of my wallet. That wallet right there, with the hole in it, is the only thing I have from the military. I have no uniforms. … All the stuff I bought, the TVs and stuff, to send back were all stolen. I guess they figured I was dead, so, they just took everything I had, except for my wallet and two green shirts, which I have upstairs. I have no military uniforms, I have no medals and ribbons. Everything I was awarded was just taken and so, I was pretty much naked, but I was in bad shape. I was in terrible shape. I guess, three or four weeks, they kept on coming by, but I had pain in my heel and I had pain underneath my right knee. As bad as my left leg was, my right leg wasn't bad at all. I had two wound holes. One was in my right heel and one was about a two-inch hole underneath my right knee and they hurt and … they didn't know why they hurt and they later on found out. So, they suspected I had artery damage in my right heel. So, they gave me an arteriogram, very painful, couldn't move. Back then, they didn't have the technology they have today, as I already said. So, they came back and they said, "We're going to," after about a month, I guess, "we're going to do surgery on you. It's going to be a long surgery and you have some serious injuries and we're going to try to help you out." I said, "Well, whatever you [can]. You're the boss." You know, I had no choice. I was pretty much used to the pain. I think they had me backed off of the morphine for a while and I was on Demerol and codeine and whatever the secondary things were to that, but I stillv like I said, [was in] bad shape; took me in for surgery, very long surgery. It was from seven in the morning until about six or seven o'clock at night, they told me. I remember being in the recovery room and they gave me a spinal, and then, they also gave me a regular anesthesia. Well, I woke up and I couldn't feel from the chest, from the middle of my back, down to my toes. It was just numb, because of the spinal, but I had my head turned. I kept on feeling blood on the back of my head, that was shooting up in the air, landed on my shoulder. It turns out, I had what's called a false aneurysm to my artery in my heel. I used to think it was the femoral artery, but I think it was actually the peroneal artery, broke open. It was spewing blood up in the air, it was landing on the back of my head. While my face was turned, it was landing on the side of my face, it was landing on my upper body. I couldn't feel anything else, so, it was probably going on there, too. The nurse came in the recovery room and she just started screaming for the doctor, wheeled me back in the surgery room. They didn't have time to give me [anesthesia]--I was already numb--but they didn't knock me out and I had to wait and they had these large clamps. They're wire, I mean, thick wire, like, that's what they used to close the wounds up. I have scars from the wires to this day [laughter] and they had to cut them open while I was awake and they opened the skin up and I could see it in the reflection of the large light they had in the surgery room. I'll tell you what, I blacked out again. I woke up in the intensive care. I was the only one in this one unit, very dark, woke up to blood, was given several units of blood. Some guys count sheep, I was counting blood drops, [laughter] dripping down. That blood gave me hepatitis C, years later. I never knew I had it. They figured it out in 1990. They said, "You're testing positive for hepatitis C." There's a happy ending to that. It cleared my system, but I still test positive for it, because I lived a clean life, but I was just--Vietnam kept on being the gift that kept on giving--and hepatitis C was something I got as a secondary thing to that back then. … So, I was in ICU for probably at least a week. I was in bad shape, very, very weak, couldn't move, and I remember, one day, I looked outside and the sun was out and I said, "Looks like a nice day," to the nurse. She said, "Yes, it's a nice day, beautiful

day." She said, "Would you like to go outside?" I said, "I would like to go outside." So, they put me in one of these wheelchairs. … It was, like, made of wicker, large wicker, and it had these wooden type planks that you could lift your leg on, put my legs up there, took me outside. I felt--just, they couldn't get me back in--I felt the sun beating on me and I felt really good and it seems like, then, I recovered. I should backtrack also, tell you something very important, too. This was much later than July 4th, but this happened on June 27th, about eleven-thirty at night in Saigon, … but July 4th celebrations at the naval hospital in Yokosuka, they had a celebration and I'll never forget that night, because they started shooting up fireworks. Guys on the whole [ward]--they didn't understand what that meant to combat guys. It meant, you started hearing those noises, because that's what they were, really, they were flares with little parachutes on them, and they dropped, illuminate the sky. It sounded like that. I was just sitting in that bed, shaking like a leaf, sweating like crazy, just getting flashbacks of Vietnam. I thought, "My God, the place is never going to go away. I just can't get it out of my system. I just hear these things going off, these flares going up at night," … just you, like, get a panic attack. "Are they going to overrun the base?" I mean, it was like--again, that's why I can't stand Fourth of July, hearing those things go off. That just did it. To the day I die, it's always going to remind me of Tan My and all the flares going up and all that kind of shooting going on and stuff like that. … Any rate, getting back to the recovery room, after getting outside with that sun, it just did something to me. I felt invigorated, came back in the ward, all the guys were cheering, "Hey, where you been? Where the hell you been, River Rat? Where the hell you been?" I said, "Man, I'm sick." I said, "I was getting blood and all that kind of stuff," and so, they were kind of busting my chops a little bit. … It was a slow recovery after that, but there was a young guy, and I hope I don't get his name wrong, he was a young Marine, (Gallino?). He was from Philadelphia. He was so badly injured. His whole thighs were ripped off and they had to do skin graft after skin graft and, when they did these skin grafts, they would do it on his behind or one side of his leg, and then, they'd have to peel it off. It was like raw meat and they'd pull these things up and he would cry and he would cry. We felt so bad for him. It was just awful, just awful and so, he went through hell and there's a story I'll tell you in a couple minutes about him and how his life turned out. … I just saw tremendous courage there, but, after about a week after that, I started feeling a little bit better. By then, it was close to the end of July, early August, and, on a lighter note, there was two famous, three famous, people that actually came, visited the troops. One is Joni Mitchell. I didn't know who she was. She was a rock star, singer, and she came, very nice. She was a Canadian, brilliant artist, and she came on the ward, started singing songs for the guys with her little guitar. She was, like, two feet from me, closer to me than you. I didn't know who she was until after the fact, but my wife was a big fan of hers and she said, "What, you got to see Joni Mitchell?" I said, "Well, yes, she was, like, two feet from me, singing," and also, Jim Plunkett. He was a quarterback. At the time, he was a quarterback for Stanford University. He came, very nice man. He came with another All-American quarterback, who never really made it in the pros, the name's Bill Montgomery. He was the quarterback with the University of Arkansas, very nice to the guys, came by, spent a lot of time talking with the guys and never forgot that, and I'd want them to know, if they could hear this, that it's not going to go unnoticed. We appreciated it and they were nice to us and I probably had a signed signature somewhere, but I don't know what I did with it, but I wasn't worried about that. I'm not big on that stuff, but I just thought it was nice of him to do it and, as I started to get better, I was still pretty sick and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. … I needed physical therapy. They didn't have

physical therapy then like they have now. It was just kind of basic stuff, but I know one thing, the corpsman and a couple of the Marines decided they were going to take us out, sneak us off the base, weren't allowed to go off the base. I don't know how they did it. They [said], "Come on, you're going anyway." I said, "I don't want to go." "Shut up. You're going to go. We're going to take you out of here." Me and the corpsman, they took off, a couple other guys. They decided they were going to take us to a steam bathhouse in Japan. Well, it wasn't going to happen. [laughter] I mean, we were appreciative. We couldn't drink or anything like that. They just wanted to get us off base. They were very nice and they got half loaded and came back and slept the whole next day. Nobody knew what happened, but that's what they did. They snuck off the base. … I guess one of the Navy corpsmen had a van. They took us off and got us off base somehow. I don't even remember how they did it, but they did it. I thought that was kind of nice. So, I went to physical therapy and had to learn how to walk all over again and stuff like that, but I still couldn't lift my foot up. My foot was just permanently like this and doctors didn't know at the time that it was nerve damage. They thought that if you lay in bed for a long time, … you forget how to walk, so-to-speak. … They thought I had a foot drop from being in bed so long, because I was in bed a long time and it was a rough road in bed. So, finally, I could walk good enough, and then, they said, "The ticket out of the Naval Hospital in Japan was to be able to stand up and be ambulatory." So, I could walk. I could walk very slow and I walked with a bad limp and I had a temporary brace they put on my leg, but I could walk, and so, they flew us back to America and our greeting was--it was a C-141 jet again, except, this time, we weren't laying down, we were sitting up and the seats weren't that hot, but we were leaving. We were leaving Japan, we were heading back to America. We got back to, it was Anchorage, Alaska, and we landed there and my welcome back from Vietnam was probably better than a lot of guys, actually, in retrospect, after speaking to them, Vietnam vets, was two ladies from the Red Cross. They were about eighty-five years old. [laughter] Actually, they were probably as old as I am now, but I was young, so, I thought they were a lot older, and they greeted us with some coffee and doughnuts, "Welcome back," and that was our welcome back. From there, they flew to--oh, jeez, what's the Air Force base in Washington, DC? Why is it escaping me? Andrews, Andrews Air Force Base. We stopped there to get refueled. Then, they flew to McGuire [Air Force Base in New Jersey, adjacent to Fort Dix]. We stayed at Fort Dix Army Hospital, overnight, and the Army was very nice to us. It was all Navy and Marine guys and they were busting on us a little bit, because we weren't in their branch. … Military guys have their own thing with different branches and so, I called my parents up, from Fort Dix Hospital, … which was probably a half-hour from my home. They lived in Woodbury, New Jersey, then. They moved and they didn't come to see me. I thought, "What? I was almost killed. You didn't come and see me, you very rarely wrote me?" It was like I had the plague or something like that, very, very [confusing], didn't understand it. So, next day, they took us into the Philadelphia Navy Hospital. We came in a military bus, went in through the emergency room, just kind of walked in as a group. We had our orders in our hand. "Sit down here, somebody will get to you," and entirely different treatment. I mean, it was like, "Oh, we're back in the States now and this is our [routine]." They didn't understand … how hard of an adjustment it was to go from a combat zone to a military hospital and, now, back into the world, so-to-speak, and it was very, very hard, emotionally, to try to digest all this stuff, and it was harder for me, because I did find out what happened to me. Ken Haynes and Ralph Walls were sent to the Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan, and, after my surgeries, it's probably a month-and-a-half later, they told me what happened. They said that the

(Gerald Rice?) guy, which I didn't know, like I said, got ticked off that night, because they'd beat him up pretty bad and we broke the fight up, evidently, went back to the room and was going to shoot us with a forty-five [caliber pistol] and decided on throwing a grenade. His friend talked him out of it, the buddy who was with him, and, after his friend left, he walked in there with the grenade and tossed it in our room. That was kind of hard to digest, that an American did it. It was [that] I didn't understand, didn't know him. It wasn't like a typical fragging, where the officers were treating the men pretty lousy and they wanted to kill them, but this was just an act of violence from a violent man who just happened to be in the military, and just really hard to digest all that and figure it all out, … but I was back. I was back home. I was assigned to the Ninth Ward of the Philadelphia Navy Hospital. My parents did come with my one sister, saw me for not much, didn't say too much, left and I think they came back one more time and that was it. My other sister, who lives in Michigan, she's a nurse, nice person, kind--when she found out I had hepatitis C, she wanted to give me part of her liver, if I needed it--but didn't visit me in the hospital, never mentioned Vietnam, didn't want to hear it, didn't want to hear anything about it; tried to tell her one time and just kind of turned her back and didn't want to hear it. That's when I learned what we were up against, as being a Vietnam veteran, by the way. … Nobody wanted to hear it, nobody wanted to know about the experience of a nineteen-year-old kid who was in Vietnam and what the adjustments were coming back. All they knew was, "You were part of what we hate. We hate war, we hate you people who fought in it and we don't want to have anything to do with you," and it was kind of, like, all these strange emotions you're trying to digest in that Navy hospital. … I did find out that I needed more surgery, that my peroneal nerve was severed, which caused me to have foot drop. One thing I forgot to mention, by the way, when I was in Japan, for two weeks, they were just walking by, the corpsmen, plucking shrapnel out of my feet, little, like, pellets, and they were embedded in my feet and they were pulling them out of there. To this day, I have so much shrapnel all over my body. They'd probably taken off, I would say, no less than forty pieces, different sized shrapnel. I used to keep them on my dresser upstairs in my bedroom. [laughter] I got mad one day and disgusted and I said, "I'm putting this behind me," and I threw it all out. … So, now, when they take them out, they send them to some lab and they keep them in the VA, but … it was not a good time. … I had a lot of emotions to go through, to try to digest, and then, I saw the amputee wards. What a perspective--any self-pity you [have], which I didn't really give myself, but anyone who would give themselves self-pity ought to visit an amputee ward, terrible, just terrible, terrible, and, yet, the spirit of those guys was amazing to me. There was a lot of long ramps at the Philadelphia Navy Hospital to go to these outbuildings and Marines that were amputated, single, double, triple amputees--one guy was a triple amputee, was blind, cried to die. I could almost understand why he'd want to, because, if he saw his face, his face was just impaled with pellet marks and burn marks and, oh, it was just awful. I felt so bad for him. I thought, "I'm glad he's blind." I didn't mean that in a bad way, I just [thought], "If he saw what we could see, he'd probably be terrible." I don't know how somebody's supposed to get through their life, but I found out there could be a lot worse. These guys were paralyzed. I was on the neurosurgery ward and a couple of the guys were paralyzed. A couple guys who were paralyzed, … actually, they weren't in Vietnam. They were [in] accidents, car accidents and stuff like that, and so, the Navy hospital did have a co-mingled … bunch of guys. Some were just veterans who were injured in the military and some, probably the good majority, were coming from Vietnam, and, by the way, the Army sent their guys to a hospital called Valley Forge Army Hospital, which is now closed, also. They had a lot

of amputees, too, believe me, a lot of amputees in Vietnam, I mean a lot, but seeing the amputees and the spirit they had at that Philadelphia Navy Hospital, to me, will always have a fond memory, just totally remarkable, the resiliency. I mean, how do you … tell a guy who lost his legs to be happy? You know, how do you say that? and they were. They'd wheel down there in the wheelchair and have races and stuff like that and some of the stuff they used to say was, "Make a hole, you MF-er, Marine coming through." I mean, they never lost that Marine spirit. [laughter] We used to laugh. We'd just get the hell out of the way--we knew a Marine was coming through--and they were kind of funny. There's an amputee that was in around our area [of Pennsylvania], Marty Hartranft, that served in Vietnam and we were chatting about that scene. He laughs about it now. He's going through his own personal hell, too, but amputees have a lifetime of hell to deal with. I know, now, that I see the younger guys and I could write their life for them and they're so energetic and enthused and I get that and I'm very happy that they have this feeling and that they have so much quest for life, which you do when you first come back. You know, you don't look at life like you're going to die. You just say, "Okay, I'm going to overcome this injury and move on and get out of here." … But I know that, long-term, they have a lot of secondary problems of being amputees and my hat goes off to these guys. Vietnam vets, they have such a strong place in my heart that I'll [never forget], I just [cannot]. We're a brotherhood, that we know … we've been there, we've been to that hellhole and back. We know how we were treated and how miserable people treated us and how we were discriminated against in jobs and everything else, and you know what? We overcame it and, now, we're going to be there for the younger veterans and never turn our back on them. So, that's going to be the tale of the Vietnam vet, I know, but that Navy hospital was a place to remember. It was a lot of serious injuries there, too, and so, there was a young kid next to me, his name was Bailey. He was injured in … a motorcycle accident. He was unconscious. He was in a coma, had a catheter in him and he kept on grabbing at himself and I said to the corpsman, I said, "He can hear you. Bailey can hear you." He said, "He can't hear me. He's in a coma." I said, "Oh, no, he can hear." I said, "I'm telling you, he can hear." So, I said, "He's grabbing at himself because he wants you to change his catheter. You guys aren't changing his catheter," kept on grabbing at himself. So, rather than change his catheter, they put boxing gloves on the poor guy, so [that] he couldn't grab at it, and I used to talk to him all the time. They used to laugh at me, the corpsman and nurse, "He can't hear you, Siani. You're wasting your time." I said, "He can hear me." I said, "I'm telling you." I could just tell by his eyes that this guy could hear. He could understand. He was rolling his eyes in a strange way, but it wasn't like [he was nonresponsive]. I could just tell. I had this deep feeling, this guy was [able to hear], he could hear, and if I may tell a funny story about what happened to him. He came out of his coma and the one nurse who was very mean to him when he was in this coma, he kept on calling to her. He couldn't speak very well and he spoke with a distinct stammer and stutter. Oh, I can't tell you her name, because I don't want to get sued, but I'll just say "Nurse Smith." That wasn't her name. He was calling out to her, "N-n-nurse Smith, n-n-nurse, c-c-come here," and she came over to him and she was nasty to that poor guy. She said, "What do you want, Bailey?" He said, "F-U," and he punched her. [laughter] I tell you, I knew he could hear. We couldn't say anything, because she was an officer, but I tell you what, everybody on the ward, … we turned our head, we laughed. We just put a pillow over our head and started laughing. I mean, it was priceless. He just kept on telling her, "F-U," and he hit her. It was just [funny]. Corpsman ran over, "Corpsman, get that man. Restrain that man, I said," and so, she called one of the neurosurgeons

over there. She wanted him to be court-martialed for hitting an officer. Well, he said, "Nurse, this man is permanently incapacitated. There'll be no court-martial." He walked away. We just laughed so hard. [laughter] … I mean, if there was anybody deserved that, she did, because she was not nice to this poor guy, and he always--he was eventually up in a wheelchair--he would smile at us and laugh and we'd give him the thumbs-up, "Go get 'em, Bailey, go get 'em." It was just priceless. We loved old Bailey, and all part of that Marine thing I guess, but, then, eventually, I got better. I didn't know what the military was going to do with me. I started going out and the Marine guys were determined to get me out and get me drunk. I went home on leave eventually. My good friend, Bill Magann, who's retired from the New Jersey State Police, took me out and we had too much to drink one night and my mother kept on hitting me, because I came back to the house. I was home for a couple weeks and I was still in the military and went back to the hospital, needed more surgery, and then, the girls from Huntingdon Valley, high school girls, would visit, as I told you before, visit the veterans. … I got to meet my lovely wife, Nancy, there, when she was seventeen years old, and we got married when she was eighteen and we've been together and have two kids and seven grandkids. … She was just--all of them, all the young girls, I thought--during a time when we were just isolated and treated terribly, they found it in their hearts, every Wednesday night, to visit the disabled veterans in the hospital and they just sat and listened. They just let us talk and they talked about anything. I thought it was such a nice thing to do, that I hope they always have fond memories of good feelings that they gave us because they really did. … Then, I needed another surgery on my leg, and then, I got that and the military sent me home. They said, "You're going to get discharged. … We're going to retire you from the military." So, I sat home and, for two months, I couldn't do anything and I was still in the military. My father sat there and cursed at me to, "Go get a bleeping job. Don't be a lazy bum." He's pretty harsh on me. My dad, he wrote me letters all the time. I don't know if he couldn't deal with what happened to me, if he felt bad because he brought the recruiter over, but it was just [a stark contrast]. They threw away all my military stuff, didn't treat me very well. I wasn't treated very well, and then, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was discharged. I was injured, I was still recuperating. I know that I used to go to the Philadelphia Navy Hospital, the Navy base--it was a shipyard. They had a pool, because the doctors recommended I do a lot of swimming, and I was a good swimmer. So, I would go there and I remember telling you about that fellow, (Gallino?), and how bad he was. I was leaving the pool and I was dressed, I was leaving the base, and I think we had to park our car near the front of the base or something like that, and I see (Gallino?). He was all in his dress green uniform, Marine Corps uniform. I said, "(Gallino?), oh, my God, you made it back alive." I said, "Man, you were in bad shape." He said, "No, I'm going to go back to Vietnam." I said, "What?" He said, "Well, that's what Marines do." I said, "(Gallino?), you're nuts. Why do you want to go back to that place?" He said, "Because I'm a Marine," and he was so proud. I just never saw somebody want to give so much and there's so many people [that] take so much in life and there's so many people that do not understand the cost of freedom and that it's being borne by a lot of young men and women today. It just breaks your heart to know that there was someone like that, who felt such honorability and decency that he was going to do that. So, that's pretty much my military career. I don't know if you have any questions and … where you want to go with this.

NM: No, I still have many questions.

TS: Sure, keep on asking.

NM: To go into your transition from military life to civilian life, you talked about your family's reaction, but can you tell me more about what happened after you were discharged from the military?

TS: Well, my friends deserted me, from high school, basically. … I actually did see one fellow, Tom Hamilton, was a classmate. I did see him in the hospital. He was a nice [guy]. He was in the Air Force. I don't know if he was in Vietnam. Bill Magann, he's really been a lifetime friend. We haven't seen each other in a long time. We were supposed to get together. He retired from the State Police, always been a nice man. He turned out to be exactly as I thought he would, just a good, decent guy, has a nice family. I had another friend I'm not going to mention. He took me down the Shore one time. He thought that--he didn't understand. I couldn't relate to anybody when I came back, having a very hard time dealing, trying to digest what had all happened. It happened so abruptly at the end. I mean, when you're in a combat zone, you think you're going to get killed, but you never think you're going to get maimed. I just don't know why, maybe it's stupid and naïve, but … I never thought this was going to happen. I mean, I had a great career, I was a very patriotic person, still am a very patriotic person. I have no regrets about serving, never will, made a better person out of me. I know I look at life a lot differently than a lot of other people. I'm very grateful for the life I've been given. I have a lot more spirituality than I ever had [laughter] and I don't impose it on anyone, but, as far as the transition from getting back, tough, tough, couldn't find a job, bad economy. People didn't want to hire veterans, especially Vietnam. They thought we were all a bunch of lunatics. They thought we were guys that were just a bunch of drug-using dope heads and miscreants and the opposite was true. There were a couple guys that probably turned into these hermits and off-the-wall kind of guys. Most were just like me, good, decent people, did their thing, came back, were shocked by the reaction, were shocked by the isolation, the mistreatment. It wasn't always overt; so, stop telling people I served, didn't mention it to anybody, didn't even say I was in the military, ask about my leg brace or something like that, I'd just simply say, "Oh, I was injured." I knew what it meant. I knew that if I mentioned it to people, there was a different reaction. My aunt and uncle lived in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, was probably twenty minutes from the hospital, never visited me. Friends never visited me. Bill Magann was the only one, never forgot it. I had a chance to thank him. He did--had too much of a good time, we went out--but he still never thought [twice] about it. He probably was having his own adjustment problems, coming back from a combat theater of operation, too. So, I didn't really know of any. … I didn't really reconnect with any classmates. I mean, I was captain of the football team and baseball teams in high school and stuff. Nobody wanted to hear it. Nobody really wanted to know the truth about Vietnam. Nobody wanted to know what really happened in the military hospitals and what it was like. It wasn't a story they wanted to listen to, so, therefore, it was dropped. All my feelings were internalized. I had, probably, anger issues when I came back. My wife, Nancy, is the savior of my life. I mean, her and her family were absolutely wonderful to me. I mean, her uncle was a POW, survivor of the Bataan Death March. I had a chance to honor him last year, as part of our 250th anniversary in town. I was pleased to. He died, as my father-in-law did, but they were absolutely wonderful to me. Every time I'd see my wife, they'd make me sit down and eat. She'd want to leave the house. [laughter] She wanted to go out and have a date with her

boyfriend and she'd get mad, "Oh, why do you want to sit down with them?" but her mom and dad were nice to me, always wanted to feed me, were always nice to me. That's why my mother-in-law, right now, is living in her house with severe Alzheimer's and my wife and I take care of her and other family members don't, but I just say to her, "How could I turn my back on your mom? She was always nice to me," never forgot that. … As far as friends go, I had one friend, he eventually went to Rutgers, too, a very respected man, I'm not going to mention his name, took me down the Shore. He didn't understand that, being on the beach, I was on the beach in Tan My. I didn't want to go down the Shore, but I couldn't really tell him that. I was getting the shakes. I was just getting the shakes from seeing that sand. The feel of that sand on my feet was like the feel of being in a combat zone, but I didn't really quite understand all that and I didn't know how to quite verbalize it to people, because of the reaction we got. So, it was not a good reaction. So, I kept quiet about it. She knew, of course, my wife knew. We were married and I worked, did roofing and siding and stuff like that and tried to work for a door manufacturer. The guy hired me because he was … an Air Force pilot and he hired me because I was a veteran. I thought that was nice of him. He had a door manufacturing company. I liked the job, and he couldn't get enough work and he just had to lay everybody off, but he always treated me nice. He was a nice man, military guy, understood, "This is what I want you to do." "We'll do it, yes, sir, we'll do it," and so, I couldn't find a job, having a tough time. So, I started night school at Rutgers in Camden. I took a speech class. I can't remember the professor's name, but that was my first class and I think I took a mental health class or something with it, I don't really recall, and I couldn't get accepted in the day program. I didn't have the right courses in high school, and so, kind of didn't really know if I was the right person to go to college. So, I took a day school program at Rutgers-Camden for biology and I did pretty good. I think I got two "Bs" on it or something like that, and it was kind of an accelerated course, because it was eight credits for eight weeks and it was a lab course, which is a lot harder. So, then, they let me in the day program and I started college full-time at Rutgers and I majored in medical technology for my first three years, and I had a lot of tough courses. You know, my first semester at Rutgers had me take a remedial algebra course, because I didn't have it in high school, … but I also had chemistry, inorganic chemistry, and I had Russian and I had a math course. … The chemistry's on "PV = NRT" and the remedial math course is on "X + X = 2X." [laughter] It's like, "Man, you've got to speed this thing up. I'm, like, on a different level over here." … When I did pretty good in chemistry and biology and histology courses and stuff, I realized maybe I'm not as stupid as I thought and I could certainly compete with the other ones. The only problem I had, I would say, at Rutgers-Camden was, … we formed kind of a veterans' group there and I don't know if it was a formal club, but it was certainly informal, and I want to give kudos to a man who I hope you guys recognize. His name is Paul Gutman. He was a captain in the Army, a Vietnam veteran. He was a law [student], went to the Rutgers Law School. Oh, if you were a veteran on campus, you knew Paul Gutman. … When he found out that I was paying my own tuition at Rutgers under the regular GI Bill, he said, "You're a disabled veteran, what are you doing?" I said, "They turned me down, the VA. They said that I turned them down, they're not going to give me any money." Oh, boy, he lost it. He said, … "They're not going to turn you down." He said, "That's a bunch of BS," and he said, "You're supposed to be under Chapter 31 [of the GI Bill of Rights]." He helped so many veterans and he was tragically killed in a car accident and I don't think the Rutgers veterans who now go to Rutgers will ever recognize what Paul Gutman did for veterans and how much he cared as a law student and how much he promulgated the

veterans and … Rutgers student veterans and how much he helped us, a good guy, I mean, a terrific man. … Now, I know why he was an Army captain, because he was a born leader, but he died tragically, in a car accident, and never got to--I mean, … the future was just there for him. He was just such a type of person who was a nice guy and he truly cared about veterans and veterans, he understood them. He was a combat vet. He knew what it was like to be in a combat zone, and so, but, any rate, he and my wife, who wrote to the head of the VA, got me on the right program at Rutgers, where they paid for my tuition and books and stuff like that. So, I basically palled around with mostly other veterans. We kind of had our own little clique, but we pretty much avoided it. I mean, I won't say we were mistreated, but, if they found out we were veterans, they kind of stayed away from us on campus. … They really had this image that we were a bunch of loons … but, on the other hand, I was older, and as were most of the veterans, and most of us were in combat zones and these were kids right out of high school. When we were their age, we were in a combat zone and, now, they're worrying about us wanting to join a fraternity. … I mean, I remember one kid approached me about joining some fraternity. I says, "I don't think I want to join a fraternity." He said, "Why don't you want to join the fraternity?" I said, "Well, what do you do in a fraternity?" He said, "Well, your first year, you do our laundry and stuff like that." I said, "Do your laundry?" I said, "You can do your own laundry." [laughter] I said, "I've got a wife and two kids. I'm not doing your laundry, too," so, that was my [response], but most of the students, I would say if they didn't know I was a veteran, treated me pretty good. You know, we had study groups and stuff like that, because we were all kind of science majors, but I did not like these fraternities, where they had a lot of these old tests and stuff like that and I didn't like it a lot. I viewed that as cheating. You know, I wasn't going to cheat. … That's pretty much what I did. I did work when I went there. I'd substitute teach, after I had sixty credits. In New Jersey, you could substitute teach if you had, at that time, sixty college credits. So, I would do that to earn money and I worked in a paper mill at (McAndrews and Forbes?) for the summers. … I don't know if it's still there. It's in Camden and it was tough, because it was rotating shifts. … So, she didn't work and we just really struggled and made our way. …

NM: While you were attending school full-time and working, where were you living?

TS: Oh, we had an apartment, first in Bellmawr, New Jersey, Browning Court Apartments. That was our first apartment. It was actually a nice apartment, and then, we had our first child and we needed more room. So, we moved to Collingswood and it was a short commute from Collingswood and it was a second-floor apartment and my poor wife had to walk [up]. You know, she had two kids, little ones, to try to keep quiet and not make too much noise and I had to study. … So, I lived in an apartment and I actually remember--she might correct me on this--I think my total income a month was, with the GI Bill and … my pension from the VA and the military was, my total income was, like, 360 dollars a month and my rent was 180 dollars. We were just about starving. [laughter] It was tough, but, you know what? I didn't mind. … I married the right person and she's just a good wife and she was a good mom and so, it helped us out.

NM: During your undergraduate years at Rutgers, what was your major?

TS: I got a degree in social work, and I'll tell you why. I was in medical technology for three years and … I was kind of PO-ed at Rutgers. Your senior year was supposed to be spent in a hospital and I was on the dean's list. I had every science course you were supposed to have, inorganic, organic chemistry, histology, physiology, genetics, the whole nine yards, math courses, very hard courses for me. … Now, they call it microbiology, but, back then, it was bacteriology, had all that, and your fourth year, you're supposed to go into a hospital program. Well, I not only was on the dean's list, but I also worked at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital as a phlebotomist. I used to run around with [a needle]; I was the person going around drawing blood and stuff like that for people. That's what I wanted to do. I didn't get accepted into the program. They had all women and one fellow and I was excluded and I was hopping mad. I thought, "What more did I have to do? I was on the dean's list, I'm a disabled veteran," and … I now know what it was. I was a veteran. They didn't like us. They didn't like veterans. We were discriminated [against] on every possible level and Rutgers was no exception to that, I might add. I'm not saying--maybe they didn't do it maliciously; maybe they thought they were making the (rest?). That's not how it looked to me and I was hopping mad. So, I had one year left to try to come up with another major to be able to get a degree and that's what I came up with. So, it was very, very frustrating for me, because I was a science major at heart and still have a lot of desire to work. I love science and it was just very, very heartbreaking that I didn't get in that program, but … it all ends up well.

NM: You discussed this, perhaps not overt, discrimination on the job market that you received. Were there other circumstances where you were applying for jobs and you thought it was clear?

TS: Oh, yes, oh, yes. When I was a senior at Rutgers, I applied all over the country. I even drove out to South Dakota for a job. No one would hire veterans, no one would hire disabled. I understand it now. As a disabled veteran, I understand. I didn't understand it then, because I thought, "I'll work. What are you talking about? I'm not going to spend the rest of my life with my hand out," not coming from my house, [laughter] as I already told you. You did not sit on your behind in my house. That was not going to happen. My father was not going to have me be a taker, shall we say. So, I would've worked anywhere if I had to. In fact, I even worked, accepted a job with Burger King. I also injured my back my senior year, because they switched leg braces and they switched to a plastic brace in my leg, injured my back. I've had a lifetime of back injuries because of that, but, at the end of the day, I applied all over. I couldn't get a job. I applied to industrial jobs, hospital jobs, anywhere. Finally, I took the Civil Service test. I scored pretty high, and then, I got ten points because I was a disabled veteran. So, overall, my score was over a hundred on two different types of ratings they do and I got an offer from the Food and Drug Administration to be an investigator. So, I accepted that job. The only problem was, it was for Seattle, Washington. I had no money. I was dead broke. [laughter] So, they said, … "We can start you in Seattle or we can start you in Green Bay, Wisconsin." I thought, "Well, what about Philadelphia?" I was sitting right there. They said, "There's not an opening in Philadelphia." I said, "Oh, okay." "You have so many days to decide." So, we talked it over and her dad said he would loan me the money to move to Seattle and he actually drove across the country with me. That's what I mean about her mom and dad were very nice to me, much better than my own parents. It was shameful how my parents just kind of turned their back, and my mother was a very loving person. I mean, I wasn't a person who got hit. She just was kind of

weird. All of them, I think, it was the whole Vietnam thing, the way it was going down through our lives, but, any rate, so, I did get a job and my father-in-law drove across the country. He paid for my wife's flight, with my two kids, to fly to Seattle. The only problem was, I didn't get paid for the first month and I was just so dead broke. I can't convey to you how broke I was. You probably know that yourself, but, so, it was tough. I started in Seattle, Washington, as an investigator with the US Food and Drug Administration. We had to cover four states, Oregon, Idaho and the State of Alaska, the State of Washington. So, I mean, I traveled around, doing the different investigations relating to the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act [of 1938]. I went to some more schooling, went to the University of Washington out there, got certifications in food technology. It was a very hard adjustment, because people on the East Coast are much different than the people in the Northwest--very nice, just different. We talk faster, we think faster. I don't know if we're smarter. I'd like to think, I think, living on the East Coast, you have to be pretty sharp on a lot of different levels. It was a problem for me living here, by the way, regarding that. I missed the intellectual stimulation. This is a more rural area, … but, out there, in Idaho and some parts, it was boondocks, I mean, Alaska same way. Alaska's two time zones away from Seattle. So, I did a lot of flying and traveling and it was very hard on our life. Especially, she was there, didn't know anybody, with two small kids. So, I took a transfer to Philadelphia, which I hated, and I ended up leaving the government because I hated it, took a transfer to Philadelphia. I lived in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, again. So, I was back in New Jersey and commuted from Mount Laurel, right near Cherry Hill, to Philadelphia and I worked there for about three years and absolutely hated it. I was having back problems and it was just becoming difficult to do sitting. … Back in Philadelphia, I did a lot of work with the blood banks and plasmapheresis centers. So, I inspected and investigated stuff like that. You know, [when] you have problems in that area, it's a lot about quality control management and stuff like that, … but, with the plasmapheresis centers, these are licensed places where people are paid money to donate their plasma, so-to-speak. So, the only problem is, they take their red blood cells. They take it to a centrifuge machine. They spin it down. They remove the plasma and they give the blood back to the people where they got it from. The only problem is, sometimes, it didn't always go back to the right person--they'd have a hemolytic transfusion reaction--and this is where we'd get involved with investigations. … They had, like, plasma theft rings, where you used to have to investigate and a lot of interesting characters that you have to deal with when you're in an enforcement field. You see the underside of life and it's not always a pleasant thing. So, I did all that, anyway, and then, I left the government, took a job up here, working for a company, doing consulting work, and then, ran a lab and got injured on the job, lost my job, and I was thirty-eight years old. I was sick of … working for someone else and decided to start my own business. So, I started a pest-control business, which kind of grew, and pest-control and lawn and tree care business, and, now, I have a wildlife division. … Out here, in our area, there's a lot of wildlife, and so, the young Marine I told you I hired, he's very good at that. He does all that. … I'm basically retired now and I started raising honeybees a couple years [ago] and kind of got [into it]. I love that. I'll show you them when you're done.

NM: I would love to and I would also like to see the (post memorial?).

TS: Oh, I'll take you down. I'll take to down to our store. I'll give you some honey.

NM: I do have a few more questions.

TS: Yes, give me your questions.

NM: Do you need to take a break?

TS: No. I will in a couple minutes.

NM: How long were you with the FDA? Is that correct?

TS: Yes, five years.

NM: We cannot go into every investigation, but are there any that stand out in your memory?

TS: Well, I really can't. I mean, a lot of this stuff is classified, shall we say, but I can give you general ideas. I mean, when I first started out there, it's a large fish industry, of course, and so, an interesting man that worked out there, his name was Dick Throm. He was an Air Force [veteran], I think he was a pilot, I'm not sure, … but he was a chemist by trade and he was a rather unique man, that, probably, there's only one or two of in the world. He was an organoleptic expert. I don't know if you know what that is. He is a person who could smell food and determine the levels of decomposition, and it was substantiated by a lab, laboratory backing and acknowledgment, very unusual man. He had this ability to smell and be able to determine what constitutes decomposition. So, if we would go out to some of these places where the large halibut and frozen halibut were, because this is a big, low-acid canned food thing--I don't know if you know what that means with low-acid canned food. That's the canning operations.

NM: Okay.

TS: … There's risk of bacteriological infection and stuff like that. So, you have to evaluate processing equipment, recording charts, initial temperatures, and such and such and such, and so, seizures, government seizures, were made a lot of times … based upon our investigations of certain things. … In his case, he was unusual because we would drill into a fish, with, like, a regular hand drill, he would smell it and … he would seize it on the spot, I mean, a warehouse full of fish, based upon his evaluation. … This was all corroborated in federal courts. … I was amazed at this guy's talent and, of course, then, there's the pharmaceutical industry. That's bigger back East than it is out West, but, out West, it was the large fishing industry; also, farming. I mean, I would go out to potato processing plants. These things are gigantic. I mean, some of these farms are sixty, ninety thousand acres and, I mean, they have these large grain elevators, which are unbelievable. … When you first get started in the investigations, you start out by pulling samples and evidence collection and stuff like that. So, you did pesticide screening and stuff like that on grain, and so, we used to have to drive out to these farms and I got to know Oregon pretty well, I'll tell you. I used to drive out there to Pendleton, Oregon, John Day, Oregon, Bend, Oregon, all along the Columbia River out there. … I did extensive travel. It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it then. I did not enjoy Philadelphia. Philadelphia was a lot more politics. The closer you got to Washington, DC, the more politics prevailed and the only thing I would

say is, a lot of investigations were dropped, I think, for political reasons and I did not like that. So, there's a frustration there. With any person who works in any type of enforcement, there's the frustration of the politics, shall I say, and that's something. …

NM: After you left the government, you took a job at a lab.

TS: Well, it was a candy plant that had a lab. I did consulting work for a while, too. … I wouldn't want to say I failed at business, but it was a tough, business because, when you worked, you did well. I did a lot of work for Hershey Foods. Just to give you an example, they have a lot--you probably don't know this--but they have warehousing facilities along the East Coast, in New York, Virginia, Texas, Florida, and, when they buy cocoa beans, just to give you an idea, they buy it on the open market, through brokers. When the price is right, they buy. They'll divert a ship and they'll send it to a facility. They want to make sure that facility is up to their standards and that's where I would come in. So, I would be their mouthpiece for determining whether or not this was going to be a facility that they want to divert the ship into, "Was it worthy of their [business]?" and they really had strict [standards]. Their standards were stricter than the government's, I should say. I mean, they were a good company in that regard. This way, I won't get sued by them. [laughter] I'm only kidding you.

NM: You said you were injured on the job.

TS: Yes. I had my hand caught in a machine, amputated my thumb and crushed my finger. So, the guy laid me off, after my injury was healed. That was my reward. … It was a family-owned business and they were--I'd better not comment about it, but they were not nice people.

NM: As a result of your injury in Vietnam, it sounds like you have back problems as well. Are there other long-term effects?

TS: Oh, you want to know the injuries? Here are the official--I'm a hundred percent disabled veteran, by the way--I have multiple fragment wounds, feet, legs, knee, thighs, behind, left arm and three spots in my back. One was the right shoulder. I had that. As a result of that, I had a false aneurysm in my right heel. I had the peroneal nerve severed, which caused permanent foot damage. I have low back problems. I have severe hearing loss. My hearing aids are sitting over there, because I was just getting over my bronchitis. I have chronic ringing in the years or tinnitus, or some say "ten-a-tus." I had a traumatic brain injury, which caused the problem I've previously referenced with the retrograde amnesia. I've had the hepatitis C from the tainted blood. Two years ago--last year, actually, it was--they discovered I was having chronic sinus problems. They didn't know what it was. So, they did a CAT scan of my face. They discovered I had a fractured right sinus under my eye. My sinuses in my right side were ruined and it filled with fat cells. That's why I have a tendency to get pneumonia and bronchitis if I even get a simple head cold. I have no sinuses. It just runs right into my chest. So, that's a permanent injury there. I've now just had knee surgery on my left knee and I'm probably going to need a replacement. Years of my left leg bearing the weight from my right leg because of my foot injuries has created, now, knee problems in my left knee. So, I think that's [it]. I can't think of anything more. I think that's quite a bit. [laughter]

NM: You mentioned that you had to learn to walk again.

TS: Oh, yes.

NM: You actually got braces. How long was that?

TS: It took a couple weeks. I mean, the problem is, your brain tells you, "You can walk," but your body can't do it. When you're in bed for an extended period of time, you don't get out, you can't walk. You don't know that and you think you can. You think you're just going to roll out of bed and run to the bathroom. Well, that's not going to happen. So, what they did is, … like I said, they didn't have the physical therapy they have today, they had parallel bars and they had these large whirlpool baths and I had to soak in that. My scars were so tight, because, … like I said, they used these wires. … If you look close, you can probably see scars from the wire. See, they were, … like, large, wire clamps that were just all in my legs and on my butt. … I have scars on my behind and shrapnel in my back. Oh, I also have one more thing they discovered. I was having problems with my mid back and it turns out I had a piece of shrapnel that wrapped around the inside of my vertebrae and stuck and they can't get at it. … So, every once in a while, if I hit the right position--shrapnel doesn't move, by the way, usually, if it hasn't moved, because they were concerned about that when I've had MRIs and stuff like that, because of the magnetic field being displaced, that your shrapnel will move, but, if you've had them in your body for a certain period of time, the collagenous fiber, shall we say, encases it and it won't move. So, all the testing they've done, I've had MRIs from head to toe. … Actually, I have right knee problems, too. It's just that I haven't had surgery on that one, yet. They just had surgery on this one. I went through--it's been six months--and I just had to go through all this rehab. The VA has a large pool and they use that for my therapy. … Even while you're on crutches, you actually walk in the pool. You can't walk out of the pool, but it kind of teaches you how to get back on your feet a little bit, but, originally, my injuries were so severe, I did not know how to walk and I was in bed for so long. … So, they used to use the parallel bars and these large whirlpool baths and stuff like that. I'd sit in that and, little by little, I could [move]. I was pretty determined I was going to get up and I think you'll find most disabled veterans that have spent time [in these facilities], even the guys today, I'm sure, the resiliency and tenacity of a lot of disabled veterans is so strong. They can't get them down. I mean, these guys today truly amaze me. They don't know what's coming. They're going to have a lot of secondary problems, all disabled veterans do, but, nonetheless, the spirit of who they are has not been diminished, not been diminished on any level.

NM: After you were discharged from the Navy and you were looking for a job, were you still suffering any physical effects? Could you walk fully?

TS: Oh, no, I had problems. I had to limp a little bit, but I wore a leg brace and I went up on roofs and I did roofing and siding and I stripped them off. I almost fell off a ladder jack one time. I was pretty athletic and I'd been active my whole life. I try to stay that way, which I kind of feel sad for people, in a way, … that don't want to work and stuff like that, because they say, "I've got this problem and I've got that problem," but not understanding, it's not about the

physical thing, it's about the mental thing. You're going to feel better if you contribute. … If I may make a political comment, I would say that liberalism's a well-intended science and I understand how people feel and they want to be compassionate and stuff like that, but liberalism leads to Socialist reforms, which will eventually lead to Socialism, which forces an economic collapse on society. It fails and it leads to despair. I serviced the public housing for many years in our business. It's almost heartbreaking. I just feel … so bad, "Get up." … You know, in the military thing, we always learned, "Any action is better than no action," and you should prescribe that for your life. "Don't look at the ten reasons why you can't do something. Stay focused on why you think you can succeed, whether it's going to be a PhD or whether it's going to be working a construction sites. Don't stay focused on, 'You can't, you can't, you can't.' That's a lousy word. Be an action person and still retain some decency in your life that way." That's Tom's view.

NM: I think you might have a career as an inspirational speaker.

TS: I don't charge too much. [laughter]

NM: I think we are coming to the end of the interview, but I would like you to talk a little bit about your decision, at thirty-eight, to start your own business. Can you tell me, for example, why you chose to start it in this area? Why did you go into the pest control business?

TS: Well …

NM: Also, please tell me a little bit about the business.

TS: Sure. … When I was in charge of the quality control at a food plant, I also had a pesticide license. I knew nothing about that other than from a regulatory standpoint. So, I took a couple tests and I didn't have a problem with them and the more I delved into the world of bugs, shall we say, the more intriguing it was. Like, wood destroying insects is a science in itself, very fascinating field, how these creatures can destroy a structure. … My science interest and my tenacity for wanting to be independent and, again, I don't say it facetiously when I thank my dad for that, because I think it helped on many different levels, because there was no false illusion, but, as far as why I chose this area, this is where I was living at the time. I was sick of moving. I've lived in Seattle, I've been all over the country. I've been in almost every state, for one reason or another, and I love New Jersey, don't misunderstand me. My heart belongs in New Jersey, but I had a quest to leave and see the world and I did and I love this area here. It helps me deal with all the military issues, because of the peace and quiet. I've had the opportunity to not have any money to start a business. I didn't borrow any money. I just worked extra jobs to get it started. I used to substitute teach up here, I'd sell water conditioners. My wife got a job and we're a good team. Her family has been in business for many years themselves, so, she came from a business background. … She was very supportive, always been supportive. I've been so blessed with her in that regard, and so, after about, I think it was two years, I didn't have anybody to answer the phones, so, she quit her job. It was a financial sacrifice … but we together, from that point on, customer by customer, started to grow. I probably made more money when I worked by myself, because the expenses were a lot less and you didn't have to involve yourself with workmen's

comp and unemployment and all the things that are associated with all that kind of stuff, vacations and whatnot, but, little by little, I started to grow and I got a lot of new customers. … You get customers by doing a good service and resolving problems and, sometimes, it's frustrating. I went through three or four years where I had lousy employees, but … the bad economy, in that regard, has actually created an environment where you can get good employees. So, I've had them and I've held on to them. They're all good, good people. I'm very blessed right now. I have really decent people who work for me and us, now my wife, mostly and my son works for us. He's been with me since he's been fifteen. I used to take him out and do termite work and this fifteen-year-old kid's drilling through concrete pads and stuff like that, pumping in chemical, but it's still a science. It's a science of bugs and understanding the biology of the bugs and how they operate and how to use the least amount of pesticides to be able to do a job, and then, what you learned is, … rather than go in there and pollute the Earth, shall we say, with an overabundance of insecticides, you can actually learn other methods, integrative pest management techniques, sanitation controls, physical changing of your structure and learning how to just treat the insects where they are, rather than just blow chemical all over the place. … The science of trees is also interesting, which we do, trees just have diseases and they have insects, and keeping the tree healthy. So, we do tree trimming. … We've learned to keep trees healthy and fertilize them and stuff like that, to prevent them from getting disease, so [that] you don't have to. We're getting away from pesticides and I actually think it's a good thing because I have honeybees and pesticides are the killer of honeybees. … I know people kind of laugh and say, "Jeez, this guy has honeybees and he's out spraying bugs? He's killing bugs all over the place." Well, it was because I had to kill honeybees for people that were in a structure that I tried to find a way to save them. … I think schools like Rutgers are real good science schools and they have real good ag programs and stuff like that and, actually, Rutgers University is a big supporter of pesticides and pesticide research and stuff like that … and green pesticides. The problem with some of the green industry is, it's not the attitude of it, it's … [that] some of it doesn't work and it's still a chemical. Just because it's green … you're still putting chemical out there. So, it's more important to understand the biology of insects, I think, and knowing where they are and to minimize a chemical treatment that's really more benefit to society. The average homeowner, like yourself or someone else, they can go to Home Depot and get the same stuff, but they don't have the knowledge or the skills, so, therefore, they're spewing stuff all over the place. So, I think, in that regard, they ought to make the chemicals more restrictive to people and just keep it in the hands of the professionals, and there aren't always good professionals, either, by the way, but, for the most part, yes.

NM: When did you start the business?

TS: 1985.

NM: We are in 2013 and it is still going strong.

TS: Oh, yes. … Our last three years, in the bad economy, was our best years. I think it's because of good employees and because we care about our employees and we care about our customers. It's all about that. It's real simple and I also think that in life, one thing I learned from the military, well, I think … it's good to learn to give and to be a giving person. I think it

helps you. The rewards are so good. I also think, one thing I learned from my wife's uncle, which I always commended him, he was brutalized by the Japanese. I mean, I can't--I mean, they would dig holes and throw these prisoners in it and put fuel oil [in] and burn them, and just to see them run out, so [that] they could machine-gun them down. He described some horrendous things, and he was a successful man. This is what I learned from him. He had the ability to forgive. He'd learned the art of forgiveness. It's such a key to a young person. I see a lot of younger people with so much anger about whatever, driving, road rage, and everything else. It's like, "No, learn how to forgive, learn how to give of yourself and never forget the decency of who we are as humans," and I think we can all get through this life a little bit better. If you learn those things, I think that it's very, very helpful in life, makes you a happier person. You can do a better job. … I mean, some people, you can never please, and some people are just the most. When I was younger, just as an interesting side note, I would have some older people that were nasty, mean, miserable people and I wondered to myself, "What happened in their lives to make them so jaded and so miserable?" and then, I realized, "I don't think anything happened to them. They were just a young person that was miserable that got old," and so, you know what I'm saying? I mean, … that's what separates us from the rest of the world. I think we have the ability to be decent.

NM: I would like to give you the opportunity to add anything you wish, either about your early years, your time in the service or your career afterwards, for the record.

TS: Well, I would just say, simply, this--I've been very blessed. I do not regret, on any level, going into the military. I learned a lot from the military. I had a lot of emotions about the military. War is not a pleasant thing, but freedom is not free. It is never going to be free. Sometimes, the people who take advantage of the freedom do so on the backs of others and … that's frustrating. I think we're divided as a country, politically, and I think that's a terrible thing. I just … think we have to just be Americans first and put our politics aside. I saw Chris Christie when we had the Sandy on the New Jersey coast. Of course, it devastated the people in that area, also in New York and other areas, and I thought to myself, when Barack Obama visited New Jersey that day and Chris Christie greeted him, I thought he had a chance to be a rotten guy. Instead, he was a decent man. He put politics aside. I thought, "What a wonderful thing that he didn't lose his decency and he just spoke from his heart," and I thought that was a nice thing and I think that's how we all should be. [Editor's Note: Days before the 2012 Presidential Election, President Barack Obama and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, an ardent supporter of Republican candidate Mitt Romney, toured areas of the Jersey Shore devastated by Hurricane Sandy and exhibited unity despite their opposing political views.] When you have an opportunity to be lousy, if you can just be decent, it'll be a much better place, but, in my experience, I had a wonderful experience in Deptford. I had a very innocent life. We were all just young kids, going out to play. We didn't think of terrorism, we didn't think of all the nasty things in the world, we didn't think of molestation or the violent crimes that are committed today. We just grew up in a time where either we were just the most naïve people on the planet or the stuff didn't exist, and I think it didn't exist as much. Military, I was awoken to the good and the bad and the ugly of the world and people, but I think good will prevail and I'm very happy I served. I'm very happy with my wife and my family. I'm very blessed. I just love my grandkids to death. I have such a good time with them. They taught me how to text and use computers.

[laughter] So, I have to. I'm very happy, I'm very blessed. I'm thankful for Rutgers, too, I mean, honestly, … a very good school. I will say this, whenever I put down on an application that I went to Rutgers, they'd know it was a good school. They knew it wasn't just some fly-by-night institution. It's not perfect. I mean, nothing's perfect in life, but, overall, I think it's a good school. You can be proud you went there. I'm proud I went there. So, … it was a good learning experience.

NM: This will conclude the interview for today. Thank you for sharing your life experiences with me.

TS: No problem.

NM: Thank you for participating in the program.

TS: Thank you, thank you for coming.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 2/21/14
Reviewed by Thomas Siani 3/10/2014