Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DAVID E. STREMER

Army, Vietnam War

1997

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Stremer, David E. (1944-). Oral History Interview, 1997.
User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 99 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 99 minutes); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Transcript: 0.l linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract

David Stremer, a native of Athens, Wisconsin, analyzes his Army service in the Vietnam War, his subsequent PTSD, and his interest in photography as a coping mechanism. While attending the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Stremer relates that he received his draft notice and signed up for the Army's Officer Candidate Program (OCP) in order to complete college before being drafted. In 1967, he first graduated from UW-Stevens Point and then went into the Army. He comments that although there were campus protests in Madison, people at UW-Stevens Point either accepted the war or were not aware of it. Stremer relates that basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky) was a "very humbling experience" in which his ego was broken down and he was treated "like an idiot." Advanced Infantry Training was at Fort McClellan (Alabama) and Stremer signed up for Armor Officer Candidate School (OCS) thinking that he would go to Germany and "be able to play on the big planes of NATO." With Armor OCS at Fort Knox (Kentucky), Stremer reveals that in the summer of 1967 he began having problems with the war in Vietnam, how the Army was transforming him, increased military time commitment due to OCP participation, and growing distrust of the military and the country. Stremer discusses various assignments after dropping out of OCS, eventually resulting in his final assignment to the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and relocation to Fort Carson (Colorado) in March 1968. He recalls receiving his orders from a first sergeant at Fort Knox who said that "the 5th Mech was going to Vietnam and then he kind of grinned." With the Tet Offensive underway, Stremer recalls discussing issues concerning the war with other military personnel, his increasing awareness of the opposition to the war, his own problems with the war, and the credibility that Dr. Benjamin Spock's anti-war stance created. Expecting to be a clerk at Fort Carson, Stremer tells how he was assigned to a reconnaissance platoon, trained in the foothills of the Rockies for three months, and then the entire 1st Battalion of the 5th Infantry was sent over to Vietnam as a unit. Stremer states that the unit was in Da Nang for three weeks to become acclimated and pick up their tracks and tanks and other gear before being sent to Con-Thien in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). He describes the area as an open-fire zone: an open kill zone regularly encountering North Vietnamese regulars. Although civilians were not supposed to be in the area, Stremer tells a story of one hundred villagers who entered the DMZ to gather wood only to be loaded onto his unit's armored personnel carriers and returned to their village. He explains that because his two-year commitment would be over in six months, his service went from August 1968 to January 1969. Stremer relates that the 5th Mech was in Con Thien for three months and faced daily bombardment either from mortar, rocket or machine gun. He states that everyday life was a twenty-four hour job with guard duty split between the four members of their track and tells of going twelve days without taking off his boots. Stremer identifies three traumatic things that happened in Con Thien: contracting dysentery and being holed up in a bunker alone for a

week, walking though a thousand North Vietnamese corpses after a big battle, and that battle being where his friend was killed. He analyzes his hardening feelings toward the Vietnamese people, his inability to distinguish the enemy, and the conflicting emotions this brought him in terms of his actions and self-concept. He feels that the ruthlessness and brutality between the South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, and Viet Cong was something he was not prepared for and believes that Americans were caught in the middle with their "European model of gallantry." He analyzes and questions several premises concerning American involvement in Vietnam. Stremer discusses personal conflict that the election of Nixon brought with his feeling that the division between the military and people brought about a conservative backlash that put an end to things he valued such as the War on Poverty and the civil rights movement. He says that he came to view the war as destroying the movement towards Johnson's Great Society. "So the Vietnam War, I think, in addition to costing me friends and my innocence, also in a way cost me my dreams." He explains that his discharge took him from a situation in Vietnam where they were being mortared to being back in the United States for out processing at Fort Lewis (Washington) in a forty-eight hour time period. He caught a plane to Wisconsin where it was about twenty below zero. He characterizes his return to Wausau as one where his college degree and his veteran status was a benefit for him, although perceptions of Vietnam veterans as stupid, mercenaries, or pro-war made speaking of his involvement difficult and sharing experiences with other Vietnam veterans depressing. He reflects that by 1982, he had career and family problems, ended up at the VA hospital in Chicago, filed a PTSD claim, and started counseling and medications. He joined the organization Viet Now in 1985 and came to identify his daily rage as related to the Vietnam War. Stremer details the increased difficulties and internal conflicts the Persian Gulf War caused him, his increased need for VA counseling, lack of work support, VA support for disability claim, photography and communication classes at UW-Stevens Point, eventual placement on 100% disability, and his path to peace through his photography. The interview concludes with a lengthy discussion of a 1997 exhibit of Stremer's photographs that was apparently held at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

Biographical Sketch

David E. Stremer served with the Recon, HHC, 1/61st, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Division in Vietnam. He was discharged in January of 1969. Stremer has lived for some time in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, but also has considered Wausau (Wisconsin) and Lombard (Illinois) home following his Vietnam War service.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997
Transcribed by Mike Chusid, 2005.
Transcription edited and abstract written by Gayle J. Martinson, 2009.

Transcribed Interview

Mark: Okay. Today's date is October the ninth, 1997. This is Mark Van Ell, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. David Stremer, a veteran of the Vietnam War, from Central Wisconsin – Portage County. Good afternoon, thanks for driving down.

David: It's very good to be here.

Mark: Must have been a nice drive down.

David: Yes, it was, except for the wind. Pretty windy, but –

Mark: Um, why don't we start by just having you tell me where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to entry into the military?

David: I was born and raised in the village of Athens – A – T – H - E – N – S – which is in Marathon County, about 30 miles west of Wausau. My father had a small farm implement business. And I grew up there – I lived there until I was eighteen. At the age of eighteen, I went to the University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point, and I stayed there until I graduated in 1967.

Mark: What did you study?

David: I studied history and geography.

Mark: Very practical topics.

David: Hm. I think my major interest was in map-making, and history has always been a very strong interest area for me.

Mark: So you graduated about '66 or something like that?

David: I graduated after the first semester in 1967, so in January 1967 I graduated.

Mark: Now where did – Where did your military career come into play at this point?

David: I had received a draft notice in the summer of 1966, and in order to complete college without being drafted, I signed up for the Army's officer candidate program.

Mark: Now weren't there exemptions for college students at the time?

David: There were, but it was up to the discretion of the draft board, and the draft board in Wausau had taken a position that any time you went beyond four years you may have been malingering.

Mark: So you didn't have your degree yet, but you were still in school?

David: Right, I think I needed fifteen credits in the last – so it would be four-and-a-half years.

Mark: Was that, you know, among your college student peers, was that unusual? That you had these draft pressures even though you were a college student?

David: No, it was not common in Marathon County, and the only thing uncommon that I think about it was that they had put a limit of four years on it. I think that was based on the availability of men, because some of the people I encountered in the Army, when I went in the Army, had been drafted. Out of college.

Mark: Now you were in school just as the American involvement in the Vietnam war was just starting to get geared up, and the, sort of, scene on campus, you know, about '68, '69, '70, has been sort of legendary. In a small school like Steven's Point in the very early part of the war -- I'm sort of interested to know the social climate of the student body in relation to the Vietnam war. Was it something that people discussed much? Is it something that people weren't aware of?

David: I think in January of 1967 it was something that most people were not aware of. The only thing I remember was reading a "Reader's Digest" article which was pro-war. On the other hand, in the national media "Playboy" had interviewed a British historian – I forget what his name is, name was – but he had come out very strongly against the war, so I think the answer to your question is most people in Steven's Point seemed to either accept the war and our reason for being involved or did not think about it.

Mark: So there were no protests or anything going on, like in a place like, say, Madison or something like that?

David: No. In fact; um, even with Dow Chemical protests, which must have received a lot of publicity in Madison at the time that they occurred, which I think was 1967 – yeah – '67. Okay, so then I would have been in the Army already at that point.

Mark: So you ended up in the OCS, but yet when you eventually ended up in the military, you were in the enlisted ranks. Why don't you just walk me through how you got into the military and inducted into the military, from the OCS up until your actual induction?

David: I think I had always considered being a career military officer. The history and geography seemed to relate very well to that. I had interest areas in both of those things, and [laughs] when I did finally join the Army in January 1967, I think it was still with the idea of being a career military officer. I went to basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and that was a very humbling experience for me.

Mark: In what sense?

David: I guess I had a pretty strong ego, and I felt quite strongly about my abilities to do things and I did not like being ordered around or being treated like an idiot.

Mark: Which of course is the point – break you down, and then build you back up in the Army's mode. Were there -- You survived the experience: I mean, you didn't get booted out or anything like that.

David: Right, right. I survived on the original time frame that was scheduled for me.

Mark: You weren't recycled – that was the term when I was in. They had the same term probably.

David: No, no. No, I was not. I did not find it too difficult, other than for the regimentation. I think while I was in college I was kind of used to being a free spirit or doing what I wanted to do. I'd been fairly self-sufficient in terms of part-time jobs and loans, so I think at that point I was still at a position that I considered most enlisted people not very intelligent – I guess my stereotype of them was poor.

Mark: Did that change as a result of, um, well, I suppose generally speaking your military experience and basic training in particular? You said you had the perception of the grunt or whatever the case may be -- Did this change when you actually got into the service?

David: No, not in basic training or even in AIT. I think where it changed tremendously was when I was in Vietnam.

Mark: Overseas. Well, we'll come back to that. We're there others, to your recollection, who had trouble adjusting to military life and the regimentation and that sort of thing? Were there some who got booted out of basic training, just couldn't adapt or something like that?

David: Oh, yeah, there were quite a few of those. My platoon, as I remember, was probably above average intelligence level, the education level. We had --about half the people in our unit or in basic training – were with the Minnesota National Guard. The other half were OCS candidates. So there were people who could not take it, but in general they were not the people from either of those groups. I remember one person from West Virginia who for whatever reason just would not give in and –

Mark: So you had a lot of National Guard people in OCS? So there were too many draftees?

David: In basic training. No, there were very few. There were very few other than – there were some draftees who had selected OCS upon being drafted, had waited until they were drafted, and then selected OCS.

Mark: And basic training lasted how long? Like twelve weeks or something?

David: Eight weeks.

Mark: And then advanced infantry training?

David: Right.

Mark: Or advanced training. You know, I wasn't in the Army, so some of the nomenclature sort of confuses me. You went to advanced training and then you got into, oh, infantry. So you were –

David: Right. After basic training we had a week of leave, and then we went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for advanced infantry training. I had signed up for armor OCS, and my hope was that I would get to Germany and be able to play on the big planes of NATO, you know. And that's what I originally thought we were being trained for. At the time, any OCS candidate in the Army had to take infantry AIT. Any officer. For many branches. Even the quartermasters, I think, took infantry AIT.

Mark: Which was in Maryland you said?

David: No, it was at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Mark: And what happened after your AIT then?

David: After AIT we had a week of leave again, and then we went back to Fort Knox for armor OCS training. The way it worked out was that I, for some reason, ended up a week behind my basic training unit. I think it was just full, and I was one of the people who was out of the basic training, because we had gone through basic training and AIT together, and we had a lot of friendships and camaraderie. So at that point when I did start OCS, it was kind of like starting all alone. Instead of having my friends, I was with a new class – a different class.

Mark: I guess what I'm getting at is when you went over to Vietnam, you were a specialist 4, right? Enlisted. And you were in the OCS. I guess I'm just sort of interested in how from OCS to being an enlisted man overseas?

David: I think I was having problems with the war in the summer of 1967 – the Seven-Day War or the Six-Day war with Israel had just been completed. A lot of things seemed to be coming to light. I was not particularly happy with the things that the Army was doing to me personally. I did not really feel that I wanted to do it to

other people. And in addition to that, it was becoming more and more clear that we were going to be infantry officers or possibly going to Vietnam as platoon leaders. I guess I had never really thought about the basic grunt job [laughs] until all of a sudden it looked like we were going. But we would run through formations, shouting, "I want to kill a Viet-Cong!' – things like that. One of my friends, who also quit, had gone to Columbia, and he was pretty smart and he ended up being paneled, which basically meant you went before the board of directors of the OCS school, and they would decide if you could continue or not. But one of the officers made the comment to him that the only reason he joined the Army was because he wanted to play polo. And he was from Montana. But I think probably a lot of us were mesmerized by the uniform and the tradition and – oh, just the status that a military officer had in the mid-'60s. And I think a lot of us ran into problems. I also found it very difficult – OCS was a very difficult program, and we'd start at like four in the morning and end at ten or eleven at night. And then there'd be studying to catch up on. So it was very difficult. But I think the major reason I requested to be relieved of OCS was that I had come to distrust the military and the country, a bit.

Mark: That's before you went overseas?

David: Yeah. Yeah, that was in like fall of 1967. Um, so we had been E-5 status while we were going to OCS. Upon dropping out of OCS, I went down to E-1 status and I was assigned to a unit at Fort Knox – an infantry unit at Fort Knox. The primary job of this company was, believe it or not, to truck gold around. [Laughs.] So I went into a clerk's position in S-3, which was operations on a battalion level. So I was working with truck dispatching and things like that. And then at the same time I was making an effort to get my MOS changed from infantry to clerical, and I managed to get it changed to – oh, I think in college parlance it would be a major and a minor – I got a minor in clerical. And I was working on getting even, equal status with it. But I did not succeed and my MOS continued to be 11-Bravo, which is light infantry.

Mark: Now when you go into the service in OCS, how long is your military obligation? Because a standard draftee enlistment is two years. Was yours two years, too, and did you have a longer service obligation? I would imagine it would be more like four.

David: Um, that was one of the reasons I quit OCS, because at the completion of OCS and commissioning, then you incurred a two-year obligation. So basically, it would have been a two-year-ten-month obligation, whereas with the OCS program that was being offered at the time, if you for any reason decided that you did not want to be OCS, you just reverted back to standard two-year draftee status.

Mark: [Unintelligible] two-year enlistment.

David: Yeah, the two-year enlistment. So had I stayed, it would have been an additional ten months. And that was also one of the things that, that made me quit. I guess I, um, to be quite truthful with you, I think one of the reasons I selected OCS was so I could buy an Italian sports car, you know. It had been a long time through college and I was -- I didn't relish the idea of putting in another two years at minimum wage, you know.

Mark: So when did you finally get orders for Vietnam?

David: I stayed at Fort Knox from October to about February – October 1967 to February 1968, and at that time, the orders came down. They were called "levies." And my name was on one of the levies, and the orders were to join the Fifth Infantry at Fort Carson, Colorado. So I went to Fort Carson I believe in March of 1968.

Mark: Now they weren't in Vietnam yet?

David: No they weren't. One battalion of the Fifth Infantry Division was slated to go to Vietnam.

Mark: So when you got to the Fifth Infantry, you knew that that meant Vietnam? Or you didn't know that yet?

David: I had a First Sergeant at Fort Knox who, for whatever reason, disliked me. [Laughs.] I really don't know why, but he just disliked me. So he told me at the time he handed me the orders that the Fifth Mech was going to Vietnam. And then he kind of grinned. But I was still a Pfc after five or six months in – working at the battalion at Fort Knox. I still had not been promoted. And it was primarily because of the First Sergeant, I think. Ironically, I went home on leave for a bit, and then when I went to Fort Knox, one of the other guys caught up with me, and I had orders to be a Spec-4. [Laughs.] It was just too –

Mark: That's what – three grades up?

David: Mm – no.

Mark: E-4 – you were E-1 or E-2.

David: E-2, E-3 –

Mark: You were two grades up.

David: Yeah, but anyway, I have no idea what that -- That was all the underlying politics that seemed to be involved. When I was at Fort Knox, I was involved with the headquarters unit – it pretty well maintained its own areas. We were not in the big common base, we were more in the smaller squad rooms with ten or twelve people, and a lot of the people were together – the mail people, the supply people,

the clerical people, administrative people. And I think that that is probably a part of where the animosity was coming from. There were a lot of people who were in the bay areas who had returned from Vietnam. We had no personal knowledge, really, of what they had good through and, I guess, not very much respect for what they had endured.

Mark: Now, as all this was going on, if I'm following time correctly, the Tet offensive is going on at this time – in February '68.

David: Right. The Tet offensive had occurred, 'cause I remember walking into headquarters one morning and all of the NCO's were really concerned because they heard that all hell had broken loose in Vietnam, you know, the night before. And then, I think, we started getting the news reports on it. The other thing we would watch a lot, we would receive the "Stars and Stripes" and all of the casualties for the week would be listed, so we were kind of monitoring that. I think at that time I was becoming increasingly aware of the opposition to the war by some groups, Dr. Spock being one of them. I was also having problems – I remember discussing it very -- We'd discuss it in the administrative offices among ourselves, and they could pretty well tear the credibility of some of the people objecting to the war, but when you got somebody like Dr. Spock involved, who really had nothing to gain or lose, it made us all think -- I think it made us all think.

Mark: Well, at this time you hadn't had too much contact with guys who had actually been there?

David: No. No, I did not, and the only contact I had with them, really, was, oh, men are squaring off in the corridors maybe, where they'd try to push their weight around. That was mainly it. We were just kind of competing. They evidently thought they had some special knowledge, and I did not yet have the knowledge. A lot of the people were wounded – guys who had been wounded in Vietnam.

Mark: But your turn eventually came. You went over sometime – it must have been the spring of '68 or something?

David: When I went to Fort Carson, Colorado, we -- This is the funniest side, or. When I went to Fort Carson, Colorado, I was expecting to be a clerk. I really expected that to happen, because I had the MOS and I thought that that's where I would end up. Instead I was assigned to a reconnaissance platoon, and I was sitting in the barracks one day with all the other guys, and our commander, a lieutenant, comes in, and he walks down the barracks – goes down, comes back and he comes down in front of me, and he says, "Stremer, how are you?" And it was one of the guys I had been in basic and AIT with. His name was David Merrill, and I think he did me a terrible disservice, but he was assigned to recon platoon, and I think he was given all the personnel records and he was picking category 1 guys: high intelligence, physical fitness, those kind of things. So I ended up in the

reconnaissance platoon. And we trained in Fort Carson almost three months. At one point we had spent a whole month out in the foothills of the Rockies. We were just gone all month. We were playing war games with other units. We'd be ambushing, we'd be out reconning for the rest of the team. And then we went on leave in July, and when we came back we went to Vietnam – the unit was sent to Vietnam.

Mark: As a unit you went over?

David: Yes. Um, there were about five thousand men in the First Battalion of the Fifth Infantry. So we went over as a unit. Very few of the us had ever been in Vietnam before. Some of the NCO's, some of the guys who had volunteered for another tour, went with us, but, no, we went as a unit in C-101, C-141 Starlifters – I remember it being about a 29-hour flight.

Mark: You had to stop in Hawaii or the Philippines or something like that.

David: Yeah, we went through Alaska, Japan, and to Vietnam, I think – or Washington State, Alaska. But then we went into Da Nang and picked up our tracks and tanks and all of the other gear that had been shipped ahead. And then we went up Highway 1, up to the north. I think they gave us three weeks at first in Da Nang – we were on the beach, just getting acclimated. So I think we were very well trained, had a very strong unit, strong feeling of camaraderie.

Mark: So you were near the DMZ then? '68, '69?

David: We went in to Con-Thien in the DMZ about August 1. Con-Thien was about 15 miles from the South China Sea. About 15 miles east Dong Ha, which was on the coast. And Con-Thien was a little outpost in the middle of the DMZ – it was about a quarter mile in diameter with bunkers. It had been overrun the year before by North Vietnamese – they had overrun the marine contingent there.

Mark: North Vietnamese regulars?

David: North Vietnamese regulars, yes. That's all we really encountered. It was an open-fire zone – open kill zone. We were -- It was three miles -- The DMZ was three-miles wide, and we were at a position one-and-a-half miles into the DMZ.

Mark: So there were no civilians around? Or were there?

David: No, there were not. There were not supposed to be. There were not supposed to be. [Laughs]

Mark: But did some end up there? I mean, it's not a very hospitable place, but, you know, if that's where your ancestors were from, perhaps you'd stick around. I don't know – it doesn't sound like a very friendly environment for civilians. You

know, in the DMZ itself. I guess what I'm saying is, I guess it's different than the Mekong Delta – **[End of Side A, Tape 1]** where there are compact villages and lots of civilians living, as opposed to the DMZ, where the two large forces are opposing each other.

David: It was entirely that way. The only time we became involved with civilians was when we would do – kind of vaguely remember doing this: we would occasionally have to allow them in to harvest rice and things like that. But my biggest memory of civilians in that area is one day about one hundred people from one of the villages came into the DMZ, allegedly to gather wood. They came in during the day and the tracks from my platoon went out, and the decision was that they would just be returned to their village. So we loaded them on our armored personnel carriers and took them back to their village. That was the only time we really encountered any civilians in the DMZ, and ironically that night we were just heavily rocketed.

Mark: Well, the thing I was going to ask next was: you were there for, what? a twelve-month tour, I imagine?

David: No, because my [unintelligible: derose hart?] expiration date was January 1969. That was when my two-year commitment was over. There were people in our unit who--the demarcation point was 90 days. If you had more than 90 days left in your tour, you went. So some of the guys started coming back after three months. I had six months left. So my time in Vietnam was from August '68 to January '69.

Mark: So in those six months, or whatever, that you were there, why don't you just describe to me the daily routine, if there is such a thing. You were involved in combat – was it an everyday occurrence? Or did it occur occasionally? Just sort of set the scene for me in terms of everyday life in Vietnam for you.

David: Everyday life in Vietnam, within the perimeter of Con-Thien, for the average grunt was a twenty-four hour job. We would be on guard twenty-four hours a day – we would split it up between the four members of our track, the fifth member being the sergeant, who was the track commander. But we would split it up into two hours of perimeter guard. The rest of the time -- The rest of the time was generally spent cleaning equipment, straightening up bunkers, things like that.

Mark: Pretty routine stuff.

David: Yeah, it was very routine, in fact even the bombardment that we took was routine. We would be mortared one night, and then we would be rocketed the next night. And this would go on for seven days a week. It went during the entire period that the Fifth Mech was in Con-Thien. And then occasionally we would go out into the DMZ to pursue the enemy, if we had reason to believe they were out there. In my case, I probably went through three of those assaults. In one case, we just

came up over this hill and we took some RPT [Rugged Portable Terminal] and machine gun fire and we came up over this hill and were looking down into this valley, and it really appeared to me that there was nobody there. [Laughs.] But we called in artillery and air strikes, and after it was all over we went down and picked up, like, 42 NVA soldiers. They had been hiding in little coffin-shaped bunkers in the ground. They were about a foot deep, and they would lay with their face up and then cover their little bunkers with just saplings and things like that. So they never really showed themselves, but by the time the air strikes were over, they were dead, too – I think primarily maybe of concussion, I'm not sure. But the air strikes were close enough that we were – shrapnel from the bombs were ending up on our tracks. I remember a big softball-sized chunk of shrapnel hitting our track, and [laughs] it just kind of bounced, and it was sitting there smoking.

Mark: Pretty close.

David: Yeah, it was just like sitting there and looking up: "Wow!" You know?

Mark: So you were attacked in some way – mortared, machine-gunned, whatever – at least every day, it sounds like, in the six months you were there?

David: Yeah, during the three months we were in Con-Thien.

Mark: Oh, the three months you were in Con-Thien?

David: Yeah, the Fifth Mech was in Con-Thien for three months. We pulled back in November, and a marine unit and a South Vietnamese unit came in to relieve us. I think the reason the Fifth Mech was in the DMZ was because of our fire-power and mobility. I think the military was just probably trying to provide a stronger defense, and then later in 1968 the bombing halt was declared, and at that point we pulled back to Quang-Tri, which was on the coast and probably about ten miles below the DMZ. So at that point, our job became more road convoy. We would do a lot of road convoys. We would just patrol a road every night. We'd maybe pick out a ten-mile area and then the tracks would be spread out one mile apart, so that there was always a track going down the road.

Mark: And you were protecting conveys going back and forth?

David: Yeah, we were doing that and we were also doing, oh, securing the road, I guess, against mines, against people slipping across the road – things like that.

Mark: Did these duties involve much combat?

David: No. The major thing I encountered after November of 1968 was more of a garrison lifestyle. We would still get mortared, but it was not anywhere near the regularity that it had been in Con-Thien.

Mark: As you mentioned before, even before you went to Vietnam you had started to become sort of suspicious or cynical of the government in the military and that sort of thing. Did Vietnam change any of that for you? Did it accelerate that process or change your opinion in any way?

David: Well, it did. It did. It --there were two traumatic things that happened to me, three traumatic things that happened to me while I was in Con-Thien. One is I caught dysentery, and I was holed up in a bunker all by myself for about a week, kind of hovering between consciousness and unconsciousness. The second thing was, we had been involved in a big battle where we had pushed the North Vietnamese troops up against a river – probably three or four thousand of them altogether. And we had done that early in the afternoon, and instead of really fighting them or engaging them that night, we did not – we just laid back. And by the time the morning came, maybe three-quarters of them had slipped across the river into North Vietnam. At that time, though, we called in the air strikes and artillery and the remaining ones that were there were just annihilated. It was, oh, the place of the battlefield – we were walking through corpses. Just, you know, they were just annihilated, but my friend, a lieutenant, was killed in that battle. And I think that had a big personal impact on me in terms of his death, because I knew him fairly well, he was from Marion, Illinois. He graduated from the University of Illinois – he wanted to come back to the United States and go to law school. So that was kind of a very personal loss to me – very personal. And I took it very personally. In the same battle, one of my friends won a Bronze Star, and I was very proud of what he had done. He had taken out a machine-gun position, he and a friend. So I think that kind of sets the tone for the way I was looking at the war in November of 1968. I had seen some great bravery, some big sacrifices. I knew we were all making sacrifices. There had been one period where we had gone for twelve days without even having our boots off. We would take our boots off and change socks and be back on. To this day, if someone kids me about sleeping on the floor for a night, I just [laughs] – no big deal, you know. You know, we were sleeping in tracks with condensation coming down off the ceiling, and it just -- But I think that was the position I was in in November 1968. In addition, the election had taken place in 1968. We did not hear very much at all about the Chicago situation when we were in Vietnam – the Democratic convention. I believe in 1968 Humphrey and Nixon were running, right? My friend, the lieutenant, believed in the Republicans. I thought the Democrats with Humphrey would triumph. So I was pretty surprised when Nixon won the election. I personally saw it as kind of a step backward from the Great Society and the anti-poverty war. When we were in Colorado, we were on riot duty. Martin Luther King, probably Kennedy were killed in that period. We ended up on riot duty, scheduled to go to Detroit. But I thought the country was making some progress [laughs], and I considered myself a left-winger.

Mark: Well, see, I was going to ask if the election of Nixon made any difference the average G.I. in Vietnam at the time?

David: I don't think it made any difference – I don't know if I was the average G.I., I was probably pretty close to it. My feeling was that, if anything, it solidified the feeling of the country in terms of the protests that were going on back in the United States, I think, became more violent. And I think the division between the military and the people became much more dramatic. I think the election of Nixon, for however it was taken, was taken as a conservative backlash by the people of the country against some of the more radical things that were going on. And yet I was allying with many of the radical things that were going on: the War on Poverty, the civil rights movement –

Mark: You were sympathetic to them?

David: Yes, I was sympathetic, and I very much believed that was the right way to take the country. So the Vietnam war, I think, in addition to costing me friends and my innocence, also in a way cost me my dreams. My dreams had been with President Johnson and his Great Society. I think I came to view the war after that as destroying that entire movement. So I -- That, I think, was one of the biggest losses for me.

Mark: As you mentioned, you left Vietnam in January '69 or something?

David: Yes.

Mark: Is there anything in the Vietnam period – I want to get into the homecoming and post-war things, unless there's something about your experience in Vietnam that you want to add at this point? And we can always get back, too. I mean, I don't want to rush you too much.

David: Well, I just have two things which I want to add. After the battles, my feelings toward the Vietnamese people hardened up very much. We had one situation where we were on guard duty at Phongtree, and the people were supposed to be out of the fields by six o'clock. It was well-known, well-broadcast, and this one guy just hung around out in the field, and everybody else left, and he was still out there – an old farmer. And I just picked up an M-16 and rattled off a shot over his head. And I could tell it was close enough to – that he heard the zing of it going by before he heard the sound. You know, his shoulders flexed and then he heard the sound. But I think I had come to the point where I did not like the Vietnamese people. And that gave me a lot of guilt. It hit – It really effected my self-impression or my thoughts of who I was. I thought I was kind of impervious to blind hatred, and I found that after four or five months in Vietnam I just hated it. I just hated the children coming around and selling stuff that'd come up from South Vietnam, from Saigon. They'd be selling quarts of whiskey that you could buy in the PX in Saigon for two bucks, and up north it would cost fifteen. And I knew that some sergeant must have – you know, somehow this stuff must have

got waylaid and came into the hands of these people. But it was very difficult for me to all of a sudden find myself hating the whole bunch of people.

Mark: So North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, Communists, non-communists – it didn't make much difference to you? There's North Vietnam, South Vietnam -- there's no idea of South Vietnam protecting South Vietnam? That's –

David: It came to a point, I think, where I did not really distinguish – oh, we could not distinguish enemies. When we were in base camp at Quantree for two weeks, we had a barber coming in. And the guy every day at five o'clock, he would walk slowly out of the camp, and the day that he left, that night, our gasoline depot was heavily mortared. It just --and they just zeroed right in on it. And we had big storage tanks in a plastic big as a house. But, yeah, it was a feeling that, no, you couldn't really trust anybody. And the ruthlessness, I think, the ruthlessness of both South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, the ruthlessness of it was something that I was not prepared for, because I had grown up on the European model of gallantry and the knights and all of that, and that did not – that was just not what happened in Vietnam. It was just brutal. Brutality, from both sides, I think. And often, I think, the Americans were kind of caught right in the middle. And I think the bottom line is there were a lot of South Vietnamese who were confused too. [Laughs.] Plus a lot of South Vietnamese who had made up their mind before we came that, you know, Vietnam was one country. It was not going to be two countries divided by ideology. Because I remember coming in with our new tracks, spiffy and shiny, and going up to the DMZ, which is probably a fifty-mile ride from Da Nang, and we'd go through these villages and we'd give the old thumbs up, you know, expecting the people to cheer and say, the situation in Paris, you know, liberation. And we'd do that. The Vietnamese had learned enough about American ways to know what the finger meant. We were getting the finger. You know, we'd get the thumbs up occasionally, but mainly we'd be getting the finger. So then, you think to yourself: well, these people need reeducation, you know. [Laughs.] But the entire premise of our being there, when I went into the Army in 1967, was that we would stabilize the country so that a vote could be taken to determine whether the country would go communist or be capitalist. I think my major problem is – well, number one, the country was never stabilized. It went the other way. Number two, it appeared that at least the South Vietnamese government was intent on accepting stabilization only when it meant that the people would be forced to vote for the capitalist society. And, I guess, number three that that was the position the United States had taken also. So, that was my feeling when I left Vietnam. My feelings when I left Vietnam was better -- People were warning about a blood bath if the north took over the south, and my feeling was better a million Vietnamese than one more American.

Mark: Now you said there were two things that you wanted to add before we went on to the post-war period. You talked about your attitude toward the Vietnamese and something else.

David: Yeah. The second thing was that the situation with the farmer out in his field – it was such confusion, such a confusing situation, coming from a farming village myself, I understood that you had to make hay while the sun shone, and I could imagine this old farmer out there just maybe planting a few extra plants and getting carried away with that and just wanting to finish a row. But we could not take that chance as soldiers. He might have been out there laying down grass work, so they could lay down a mortar that night. And that created a lot of conflict and confusion in me, and the anger that I felt at the time when I, when I – when the word came down from on high to get that guy out of there, everybody was saying, well how do we do that? Well, you know, I just grabbed the gun, and – you know, I was just damn lucky that I didn't shoot him. That wasn't my intention, but to fire an M-16 a quarter mile and come close enough that he hears it zing by. That was one of the things. The other thing that I became involved in as I was on garbage detail occasionally: the South Vietnamese and the Americans had pushed 50,000 refugees from I Corps [International Common Operating Requirements?], from the western part of I Corps, up to the coast. And these people were not being taken care of. They -- We had our big garbage dumps and you would pull up to them with a five-ton truck, loaded with garbage, a trailer on it, and there'd be 500 or a 1000 people climbing on it, young children fighting with old ladies, old ladies kicking young children -- You know, it was really for me pathetic, but very eye-opening, and I remember thinking to myself, "My God, this country wants to rule these people, and it can't even take care of them." And that was the way I came home from Vietnam feeling, that if these kind of things did not happen when golden America was involved, you know, for Christ's sake, people were starving! You know, maybe as I've reflected on it in the years since, hunger certainly in Asia has always been a very potent weapon. Very potent there in Africa. Maybe the idea was to starve the people [laughs] into submission or whatever.

Mark: So you came back. Why don't you just describe the trip back? Now, you went over as a unit, and I imagine you went back as an individual.

David: I went back as an individual. I had been about 150 lbs when I went over there, and when I came back I weighed about 120. I had had that dysentery problem. I was tired, I was still a little bit sick. My heart was broken, I think. I had picked up a Purple Heart from a shrapnel wound, mortar wound. And I remember just being very tired. I left Quontree on a day after we were mortared – we had been mortared during the night. It was very dirty, muddy. It was an outpost: it was all mud and dust. And I think I got a ride to Dongha and then got on an airplane to Da Nang, and from Da Nang to Tansinut, and from Tansinut onto a commercial airliner that took me back to Fort Lewis, Washington. All this occurred, like, within twenty-four hours or certainly two days. We stayed in Fort Lewis, I think, for one day, and then we were all released. Bussed over to Seattle- Takoma Airport.

Mark: And then you got a commercial flight back home. Now were you discharged there at Fort Lewis?

David: Yes.

Mark: So you got back and were basically out processed from the service and discharged?

David: Right, within -- I'd say within 48 hours.

Mark: I'm sorry, did you say something? [inaudible]

David: Three days, at the very most, between leaving a situation in Vietnam, where we had been mortared, to being back in the United States in Takoma.

Mark: So when you got back to Fort Lewis, you were still in your fatigues which you were wearing in Vietnam? Slick, muddy boots and the whole thing when you got back to the U.S., or had you had a chance to shave and change and this sort of thing?

David: We had a chance to do that, and some of the people did it. I chose not to, I don't know why, I just did not want to. I didn't want to -- A lot of the guys at Tansinut were going to the PX – **[End of Tape B, Tape 1]** Class A's, so I went back to Fort Lewis just the way I was.

Mark: Then came back to Wisconsin.

David: Yeah, I got on a plane after being discharged at Fort Lewis and came back to Wisconsin, where it was about twenty below zero. [Laughs] And back to Wausau.

Mark: And so when it came to getting your life back on track then. After you're out of the service now, it's time to get on with things. Um, what did you do? What did you want to do? How did you about doing it?

David: My thoughts at the time I came back from Vietnam were that I was twenty-five years old, I didn't even own a car. I decided that I wanted to get as much as I could out of the world materially. So I started looking around for a job and found a job within the insurance industry.

Mark: How long did that take for you to find work?

David: It didn't take me that long. I do not think I was really discriminated against. In fact, if I had to be truthful about it, I think in a way my duty in Vietnam had enhanced my job possibilities. I think there may have been a lot of guys coming back kind of overwhelmed by it, coming back with drinking problems, drug

problems. So I think myself, as a college graduate, it was something a company could say, well, we've been trying to assimilate these guys. It was sort of like, if you need a token Vietnam vet, you know, one with a college degree was a good place to start, maybe. And I think the feeling in rural Wisconsin, including Wausau – even though it was a mid-size city, I don't think it reflected anything other than the basic rural philosophy.

Mark: So no spitting on veteran-baby killers or anything. You were accepted reasonably well back into society, I think.

David: No. No. No. And I think I had a lot of difficulty fitting into the insurance industry. A lot of the guys who were trainees were people who had joined the National Guard to avoid service in Vietnam. I think there was the feeling that among the general population, that only stupid people ended up in Vietnam. I do not think that the people at the time were willing to accept the fact that there were some very good people in Vietnam. The statistic that comes to my mind is that ten percent of the West Point class of 1966 died in Vietnam. Some of the pilots, many of the pilots who were killed were career military people, you know, engineers – good people. But the country at the time, I think, was tripping over to the position that for American force to have done the things that were occurring in Vietnam – they could not be our boys. [Laughs.] They had to belong to some other social strata or, you know, people who were looking for adventures, you know, mercenaries, those kind of things. So I encountered a lot of problems – I ended up in a lot of arguments at Wausau insurance companies. The only people I could really relate to, or who would relate to me, were World War II veterans who had been in the South Pacific. They were the only people, I think, who could relate to the heat and fighting Asians.

Mark: Now these are people within your workplace. You'd run across the World War II vets in your workplace. You didn't run across too many Vietnam vets, I take it?

David: There were, to my knowledge, three of us at Wausau insurance companies. One guy was David Schilling, and he was from Mosinee. He had lost both legs, part of a hand in Vietnam. He and I never talked to each other. If we passed in the hall, we would look the other way.

Mark: Why was that?

David: Um, I know him now through a support group in Wausau that I go to. At the time, he said he had grown tired of telling people what had happened to his body and he would tell them that he had been in a horrendous motorcycle accident. I did not want to get involved with the Vietnam situation, because if I said I had been in Vietnam it was almost always assumed that I was in support of the war, and there was some very strong feelings, even among employees of this insurance company. So certainly, opinions – everyone had an opinion, and some of them were very, very strong. So it just caused problems. The other vet that worked at

Wausau, I worked fairly close to for a while, but both of us found that our experiences were things that would be depressing, if we really got together to talk about them.

Mark: Now this is in the years just after the war. As time went on, did that change? I mean when did you start being able to begin to talk to other vets about it, or have you up to this point?

David: I worked for Wausau for ten years until 1979, and then I left to join a company in New England, in New Hampshire, called Curless Insurance Company. At that point I had not joined any veterans organizations and I was not aware that there were any Vietnam veterans organizations. The first time I encountered a chapter of the VVA was probably about 1980 in New Hampshire, and I did not join it. My company transferred me to Chicago at that point, and my family and I went to Chicago. I did not get involved with any Vietnam vet groups until about 1985, and that was a group called "Viet Now," which I think is primarily Northern Illinois, Chicago.

Mark: And what made you join that group at that time?

David: I almost bombed out in 1982. Things were not working out very well for me with my career – there were family problems. I ended up going to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Hinds – the big VA hospital in Chicago, Westside Clinic. I filed a claim for PTSD. It had been denied, but the VA did offer me counseling and medical help. So I started taking antidepressants at that time. And then through that, and as a result of the dedication of the wall, of the monument in D.C., I became aware of this Viet Now organization, so I started going to that in about 1984-85. And I guess that it was at about that point that I started reflecting much more strongly about what Vietnam had cost me in terms of the daily rage that I felt. I was operating on a lot of anger. My family and I left Chicago in 1987 – we moved back to Steven's Point. I moved to Steven's Point and I joined the Century Insurance Company. At the same time that I did that, I joined the VVA in Steven's Point and transferred from the VA hospital in Chicago to the VA hospital in Tomah. And then things just continued really to deteriorate. When I joined the company, it was very near bankruptcy, and underwriters were in demand. The president that came in did what needed to be done in terms of chopping people, I guess, but as a result of that the pressure just became really, really intense. And then the Gulf War occurred, which was a very traumatic thing for me. I --

Mark: Why was that, do you think?

David: I couldn't really take Iraq serious as an enemy. I think you know whatever else was said – the fifth largest Army in the world. And of those I really, I really had a problem, um, in that it was so blatantly oil targeted, or oil issue site. I had a lot of trouble with that. I thought we were really sending a lot of people into harm's

way. I was really happy that it worked out the way it did. On the other hand, I question whether we had to kill 150,000 Iraqis and civilians in order to accomplish basically the liberation of Kuwait. So that was giving me a great deal of problems. And the job was just intensifying – the pressure was becoming more and more. I was going to the VA more and more often. The company was not really very understanding at all. I think it was either -- It was the idea that you either do your job or you get out of here. And I remember I'd have to go to the VA. I'd have to leave my home to be in Tomah by eight o'clock, so that I could see my counselor and be back in Steven's Point by eleven, and then make up the three hours after four-thirty. You know, and, um -- After a while it just got to a point where I was arguing more and more often with my supervisors, family life was taking a real beating, and finally the VA stepped in just said: this guy's gonna -- You should put this guy on disability, that's basically what they said.

Mark: So you finally did get some recognition from the VA?

David: Yeah, ironically. I think by 1993 the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder had been radically altered. For one thing, the stand of the VA in 1983 was kind of an oxymoron, you know. If you say: post-traumatic stress, you know, and for the VA to say, no, the time elapsed between the event and the disorder is too long [laughs]. So I think the VA had to give in on that, and it got -- So I got to the point where I went out on disability then from Century, which was, like, eighty percent of my salary, I think. And I got 30% disability from the VA. And I started going back to the university at Steven's Point, and I was working on a communications degree. I thought, if nothing else, I'd had to find some other means of livelihood that would be much less stressful, that I could keep under my own control. That did not work out, I really found that college was too stressful for me. So I finally dropped out of college.

Mark: Now you were enrolled full time in a grad program? Or another undergraduate degree?

David: Full time, as an undergraduate. I was taking twelve credits – I was taking photography. Finally, I got to the position where the photography instructor did not want me in any more of his classes. I was taking a live television course, designed to make people who could produce television for municipalities, companies – things like that. And the keyboards, the coordination required for the keyboards and cameras and everything, in terms of directing it, would beyond me. And yet, I was getting good grades. I think the instructors were rewarding me for diligence and hard work, you know, and they'd often come up to me and say, you kids are up all night getting drunk, and look at this guy, you know, but -- When it finally came down to it, I was not doing the job, you know. I was not doing the job, and –

Mark: At least to your satisfaction? You said you were getting good grades – something was happening there.

David: No, and my photography instructor, he -- His main objection was that I was taking up 40% of his time, because he'd have to tell me over and over and over a procedure before I'd understand it, whereas the other students were picking it up real quickly. So that's basically what he said when he supported my request for 100% disability. He said that, yes, I was capable of learning, but the amount of effort required to teach me was way out of proportion. And that's basically what my television producer instructor said, you know, he said, this guy reads the books, he understands everything, but he's not capable of directing a television show.

Mark: I mean, organizing things –

David: Right. Yeah, there would be one person, one person controlling, one person giving the orders for which of three cameras would be on the subject, which shot the camera should be on, what kind of music would be playing in the background, whether you would blackout or you would fade or you would elliptically change –

Mark: A lot of stuff going on.

David: Yeah, a lot of stuff going on, and even though I'd write it out, and from an academic standpoint my directions were clear, I was not able really to follow the sequence of it without getting totally burned.

Mark: Well, that sort of brings us to the topic of your photography now, the exhibit we're going to do. Why don't you just tell me about how you got involved with the photography and how it relates to your war experiences, 'cause the photographs I saw, you know, they're not of the war per se, yet they're very closed related to your experiences in Vietnam. So why don't you just explain how they got involved in your philosophy behind your work as an artist?

David: I started -- I started back at the University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point as – working for a communications degree, and it was part of that. Photography came into play, because I had planned to do newsletters and desktop publishing and stuff like that. The photographs that I am going to be displaying in 1997 are really the outgrowth of the time after I went on 100% disability and the present. They were not taken while I was going to school – they were taken during that kind of bleak transition program, where I really was nobody [laughs]. You know, I had been a mid-level insurance technical person, I'd been a college student, I'd been a non-grad college student, but all of a sudden upon being fully disabled it was like I was no one, other than a Vietnam vet. And I found myself going out into the country a lot, looking for things that I could relate to, and in one segment of my photography it is an old farm, well-used buildings, buildings deteriorating, falling through, burned out a little bit, and I think the day that I was out there photographing, just feeling kind of like that myself, really under a lot of duress, feeling that there was only a part of me left. A lot of it was burned out, and so it

related -- That first shot series related to the way I was feeling, and then during college, um, during one of my photography classes, I was having a great deal of trouble sleeping at night. I was often up until four in the morning, and so I took a self-portrait of myself at two in the morning one time, um, just hanging onto my Vietnam war medals, and just looking really despondent. And then I was using black-and-white, so I superimposed a slide of a piece of – a negative that I had from the Vietnam war, my own negative, and then I also superimposed train lights from night, so it's really a shot of train lights going through my forehead and shots of Vietnam in the bottom, but it is as close as I can come to explaining what PTSD has really done to me. It's like a bunch of lights, noise, constant bother, chatter, buzz in my head. So that's part of it. Another part of it is a chapel up north at Camp American Legion, which has given me a lot of help, a lot of rest and recreation. But it's also the spiritual aspect of the way I have come to feel since Vietnam. I think when I went to Vietnam I was very close to an atheist. At least an agnostic. Came back believing that I was still an atheist, but in order to get through life, I think I need a spiritual basis, and right now I see life as the circle, the circle that most religions, I think, accept. We come, we go, we come, we go [laughs]. So this shot of the chapel at Camp American Legion I pulled out of the developer a bit early, and it has some spectral images on it that I've titled "Souls Rising." There was also a scene of a river that, I guess -- I feel a river in springtime is so close to the combat we were experiencing in Vietnam, and then the shore just being stationary, and kind of my representation of the American people, I think, is just – as they watched the war go by – I don't think a lot of people even stopped to think that, you know, there were people [laughs] caught up in this current, you know, that finally ended up on the wall in Washington, D.C. And I think it was as if this storming, raging, roiling river was right in the middle of this country, and so many people chose to sit on the bank and just watch it go by. Another important display is my display of the high ground at Neilsville. There's three or four photos regarding that and the chimes and, I think, the feelings that it gives me of coming home and of being proud that Wisconsin veterans built that. There's also a three-photo exhibit of railroad tracks – a train wheel, a railroad track, the end of the line, the horse-shoe type thing which stops a train – and I think for me that the idea with that series of photographs is that I did not really feel that I had a choice in going to Vietnam. The choice was more hard and solid – more like a metal rail than being on a footpath, where you could easily get off. It was either a choice of going to Canada, going to jail, or going into the military. So I think all of us who had to make that choice had to make it, and once it was made it was very definite: you either ended up in jail, Canada or in the military. But I think my objection with people who look back on the period of Vietnam – the Vietnam era – is that there seems to be a lot of feeling that the people who went to Vietnam chose to be there or at least had an option. And I think for a lot of us, it was not an option. It was growing up in small villages, having the old Protestant work ethic. A lot of us from Wisconsin were German – children of German immigrants. There were a lot of things, a lot of factors that entered into the decision, and the decision, I think, was very definite. It was not what some people often imply, that it was Robert

Frost's "Crook in the Road", and "I took the less traveled." [Laughs.] But it was not that whimsical. I think it was real, it was realistic. People had to make choices at the time. Um, I have a photograph of a water lily which has been severed and is dying, but in its dying is just beautiful. It has taken on colors as it's disintegrating, rotting, prior to sinking to the bottom and becoming part of the entire ecosystem, the universe, again. That's the photo that I end my exhibit with. But all of the photos try to follow my emotions as a veteran with PTSD. I think they will be understood by most of the war veterans, especially the war veterans who are were in combat modes. My hope is that there will be some Vietnam veterans who come in here and take a lot at it and say, "Wow! You know, this is me!" I'll go over to the VA and see what they have to say. And that's my hope with the exhibit right now. Following the exhibit here, I hope to take it to Chicago to the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum. So I'm -- I'm hoping to get more – more publicity, reaction out of it. And then in addition to that right now where I'm at in my life is I am also taking a lot of outdoor photographs. I'm trying to find a sense of peace in my photographs. I guess at this point I hope to market them.

Mark: You think you're successful in finding that peace through photography? So far?

David: Hmm. Yeah, yeah, I – **[End of Side 1, Tape 2]** [the comments] I've received from people – the PTSD exhibit by itself is not designed to make people feel peaceful. [Laughs.] You know, it designed for people to get done and say, "Wow!" You know? But the other things I do, yeah, I think they're symbolic of the simpler things in life. The brook, the hillside, the valley – I've been doing a lot of shooting over in the southwestern part of the state around Viola, LaFarge, Viroqua: they've got beautiful hills over there. And I've been doing a lot of shooting in the fog against backgrounds, you know. So I think yes, I'm capturing a sense of peace, and as far as I find peace myself, I'm not sure, I'm not sure – I'm not sure if I ever will. At this point, I think I am at the position of a lot of veterans with PTSD are at, where we do not expect to live a long time nor do we necessarily intend that that be a great accomplishment in life, I guess. There are things I want to accomplish yet, rather than live to a peaceful old age. And one of the things is being here today to leave this legacy to future scholars who will look at Vietnam. And I also want to try to help people understand what it was like to be a grunt in Vietnam. And that includes people from my father, who has been deceased for five years, and my mother, who is still alive, to the general public, to the young man who is going to college right now. I had a situation where I was going to college, and I have a Wisconsin veterans plate. It says, "Vietnam War Veteran." And under that it has, "To Be Free" – a number 2, and then B-F-R-E. And I was coming out to my car one day, and these two college students were walking by, and the one young man said, "A Vietnam veteran – that's something to be proud of?" You know, and I would like – I do not think that he was taught properly about the conduct and the caliber of the people who were in Vietnam. I don't think -- You know, he wasn't even born during the Vietnam war, and yet to be espousing this philosophy means that someone had to teach him that. So, I

guess my mission in life is maybe to even the odds a little bit against the very, very articulate and – very articulate, yet very overwhelming voice of the anti-war people.

Mark: Well, we'll see what we can do here.

David: Alright.

Mark: That's about all I have. Is there anything you'd like to add or anything?

David: No, I think that is what I would like to leave on this tape.

Mark: Well, the tape then is here, but the exhibit is coming up. Thanks for coming in today.

David: You're welcome, Mark.

[End of Interview]