

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID B. SMITH

FOR THE

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WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins our second session with Colonel David B. Smith on May 12th, 2011 in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Thank you again for making that trek up Route 95 to New Brunswick. To begin, I would like for you to recap some of the things that we spoke about in our first session, and then speak about the other anecdotes that you would like to bring into the story. Please continue.

DS: One thing I was thinking about, just on a personal anecdotal thing and just odd coincidences, was the role that Fort Dix, New Jersey--and I think that's quite appropriate since we're here at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey--played in my Army career and in my life and in my family's life. You may recall in the beginning of my session here, I think I talked about my family life and that my father was a military officer. He was a retired Colonel, but he started out his career soon after West Point. He was a graduate of the class of '35 at West Point, and probably one of his, if not his earliest assignment, was to Fort Dix, which I think was Camp Dix at the time, and that is where he met my mother who was teaching in Pemberton, New Jersey, in the high school. She was an English teacher, and that would have been subsequent to '35, and they were married then after they met at Fort Dix. They were married in 1937, alright, and from then, we covered that before how his career in the Pacific and so forth, and they had a joint tour in Hawaii and so forth and so on, but that starts with the Fort Dix saga, and then, as far as personally, in 1965, I went to Vietnam. I came back in 1966. I had met ... what was to be my bride prior to going to Vietnam, and so when it came time for me to ask for a new tour of duty coming back from Vietnam, I asked for Fort Dix, and since the Army was really big at the time, and you could pretty much, if you weren't in Vietnam, you could pretty well get your choice of assignment, and my intention was to actually to leave the Army at that time, and I had planned to marry my wife, Peggy Smith, and she was from Lavallette, New Jersey and was going to Montclair State. ... I asked for Fort Dix and got Fort Dix. So, I was the operations officer in the motor pool there, and we were married in 1967 in Lavallette, and then, getting back to how we ever got to Fort Dix again was I had a second tour in Vietnam in '68, '69. My mother passed away--actually, she was critically ill, and the death was imminent--and they called me back from Vietnam like a little better than a month early from my full tour, and I was notified by the Red Cross and I came back to the States. She passed away, and I was on assignment to go to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, but that didn't begin until September of '69, and so, what were they going to do with me in between July and September of '69? Well, she passed away in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and my wife was teaching in Wall Township, New Jersey. So, where of course am I going to ask to be sent for an interim assignment? ... I went back again to Fort Dix. ... One would think that my experience with Fort Dix, New Jersey is over with, right, because Fort Dix, New Jersey as we know essentially closed, but we all know that it really hasn't closed. ... It's quite active with returning people coming from overseas, from Iraq, especially. ... I don't know if they're coming there from Afghanistan now, but with Iraq, that's where the units came back to, the National Guard units, the Reserve units, and so forth, essentially. So, my son, Matthew, was in the Pennsylvania National Guard, and his unit was called up, and he went to Iraq. Well, in 2006, he came back from Iraq, and where did he go to? ... His unit was to be demobilized, in essence, from Iraq status; Fort Dix, New Jersey. So, my family, my wife and I, his wife and daughter, we all went up to Fort Dix to see him as he arrived. So, I don't know if there's going to be another chapter, but there could be. So, that's what I could put on that.

SH: How had Fort Dix changed over time?

DS: I'd been there in '69, and then ... in '66 for the first time for the assignment, ... but in '66, there were still a lot of these old wooden buildings with the bulging floors that I was told on good authority, and I think I even remember them. Let me back up. ... My father was assigned to Fort Dix and I lived there as a child. ... I was going to Pemberton High School and then went to Peddie School. You remember that, that was 1955, '56 period. ... That is really the second iteration of Fort Dix, is when I lived there as a child, in quarters, okay. So, I don't know how I missed that, but at any rate, I remember the time my father pointed out these older buildings that dated from World War I. ... I recall those when I was on active duty there. Now, those buildings seem to be almost all gone, even the later buildings seemed to have been demolished, the old wooden cantonment type buildings, they called them. They seemed to have pretty well gone, but still when I went to see my son come back in 2006 ... I recognized a number of the old, the brick buildings. ...

SH: Had the base expanded or shrunk?

DS: Oh, there was just so much more open space. ... What was the central post area seemed to be much more open space.

SH: Was it already considered a tri-base when your son came back?

DS: Yes, I think McGuire is in charge I think, yes. ... Lakehurst, McGuire, and the Army, Fort Dix. They've done the same thing down in the Washington-area now, they've consolidated the bases under one service. ... [Editor's Note: In 2009, three New Jersey area military installations were merged into Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.]

SH: I just wondered if you had seen any remarkable changes.

DS: Well, of course ... when I was there, especially living with my dad, and when I was assigned there, it was a hustling, bustling ... advanced training facility. I don't think, now that I think, I don't think it had basic, it was all advanced training, but very, very busy. ... I was, like I said, I was operations officer in the motor pool ... and we just had all these giant vans moving people out to the ranges all the time....

SH: On the telephone, we spoke about the anti-war movement. Please talk about it for the record.

DS: But first what I was going to talk about though is the, what I observed to be like a lot of the corruption and mismanagement over there, the top heaviness of Vietnam.

SH: Was it only there?

DS: No, this is the Army. [laughter] I mean, this is the government. ... They say with the Pentagon, ... ten percent of the people do ninety percent of the work, you know, and it's the same with I think all these federal departments. ... It goes with the territory it seems like, [laughter]

but I don't know. ... Vietnam I think was particularly blatant, especially when I compare talking to people that were in Korea, or they were in World War II, or they were in the Persian Gulf, or in Iraq, or now, in Afghanistan. My son, for example, there didn't seem to be any of this--I mean, any of it, sure there's some--but this real top heaviness. You know, I'm sure the Green Zone in Baghdad is really massive and all, and ... rightly so. You have to have a headquarters structure. ... Vietnam was incredible, absolutely incredible. I mean, you just felt a lot of the time that they had these vast headquarters, and this is me as a lieutenant and a captain over there, and living high off the hog with all kinds of facilities, and the troops were in many cases very miserable, ... including our own unit. I was with the first truck company that went over there and we didn't basically didn't have shower facilities. We had to build all this stuff ourselves. ... Consequently, I told you another thing about how ... in my other interview, about how, there was no bathing, and people went into the sea and got terrible infections, including myself. I lost my hearing for a while. ... The food, terrible, just terrible, inadequate sanitation, inadequate toilet facilities. ... It seemed to be haphazard the way things were done, and meanwhile, there was just this ever growing headquarters structure wherever you went, and even as, just as a second lieutenant, first lieutenant, captain, you could see this.

SH: Was this just in Saigon?

DS: No, all over the place. For example, we went first to Qui Nhon, Vietnam, with the terminal service company that I went over there with. Well, the way things grew in Vietnam, there were some special forces units there, there was a big Air Force contingent, and there was a big, big Navy contingent, and around Saigon, the Navy seemed to be in control. I experienced that later, but up there in Qui Nhon, the Air Force was quite established, and they were living high off the hog down there, and these units they were pouring in--now, that's understandable, because the Air Force was already there, alright, around the airbase--but all these units pouring in, what are they going to do? There was really not much they can do, but on the other hand, ... the Air Force saw these people coming in, and I remember us going over and trying to get a shower and so forth, and we were not welcome.

SH: Really?

DS: Yes, I mean, they knew they would be overwhelmed if they just opened up their facilities to all these Army people coming pouring in there.

SH: It did not matter that you were an officer? I could see them turning away enlisted men, but not an officer.

DS: ... No, you were Army. You were there, you were just intruding. ... I mean, it wasn't blatant, but it was, they just saw that, you know, what could happen if they would have just opened it up to everybody. ... Getting to that phase of it, very early on, like I say, ... this unit coming in there was, we were just thrust in, no real facilities. They just laid out an area of land where we put up our tents, and started building these so called hooches. ... Some of the people were looking for, I don't know if they had lost their toothpaste, or they'd done this or done that, and they wanted to get some. So, we heard, well, there's a PX facility. Well, the PX facility for us consisted of some Conex containers, that they would open up, and there would be some

people in there, and they would, right out the window, you know, they'd, out of the opening in the Conex containers.

SH: You would just step up and order?

DS: Yes, you would say, there would be a line of people, and, "I want toothpaste." "I want a towel." "I want this or that," and it was, "Oh sorry, we don't have that. We don't have that. We don't have that," and then, there was an infamous incident there. ... I have no doubt it was true, because it was repeated over and over. ... The First Cav, they were, I think, the was the first one that came in there that we off-loaded. The First Cav, I believe it was, went in out to the field, and they sent a contingent back, this is the story. I wasn't there, but I believe it. They sent a group of people back to get, with a list of PX [goods], ... including like cigarettes and so forth, and whoever the guys were in the Conex containers said, "We don't have that. Oh, you don't have the ration cards. Oh, we can only supply this for that. Oh, you can't get this for all these people," and it just went on and on like that, and from what I got, the guy took his M16 off his shoulder and pulled the cock back and said, "I want this stuff. I got people out there in the field. They need it, and we want it. You got it and we need it," essentially, and this went all over Qui Nhon, and everybody was saying, "If that happened, and I think it might have, bravo," you know, because it was not right, you know.

SH: How long did it take for you to have a well-equipped PX?

DS: Well, this is phase two of my story, ... because we were in Qui Nhon, and then, it was a long story before in my previous interview, we went down to Saigon, but they moved us out near Tan Son Nhut to what they called Tent Camp B. ... We had a lot of contingents down in the port, so all that experience is this really rough living. So, we went down to the port, and they said, "Well, you need to go to the PX, ... you need to see the Saigon PX, sir." I went out there because it was called the "Cholon PX." Cholon ... was the Chinese area of Saigon, and that's where the PX was. Well, imagine the shock of seeing this place. I mean, this was a Class-A PX, where they had everything, and it was in the papers here and everything. I think they even had fur coats. I'm pretty sure, I read that. Now, I don't remember seeing fur coats, but you name it, they had it there. ... Why, you know. Well, it fed an enormous, enormous black market, because in my duties there with the port, both as being a platoon leader with this stevedore company where I had these warehouses, and then as a platoon leader in a truck company, we serviced the port area, back out to the field, out to these bases and so forth, and so I knew Saigon like the palm of my hand, I really did. I mean, I think I could go to, unless they've it changed it radically, I could go to Saigon now and I think I could find my way around, you know, because you knew all the roads, because, you knew where your trucks were, you know, but at any rate, this huge PX, and I'm sure, everybody said, like the Koreans there, they really operated this PX thing. They could use the PX, of course. They're our allies there, and people said they, you know, they had people there with radios, you know, as soon as a shipment came in of stereos or whatever, they would report that, and then, they'd get huge piles of this stuff, you know, and so, you'd go down, you'd go into Saigon, and they have all these street vendors. ... Saigon was just a world of street vendors, and they all, every street vendor would have stacks of cigarettes and C-rations and uniform parts, and you name it, it was there, and it was right from the PX to the street vendor--candies, liquor, scotch. You know, just they loved scotch. Well, they had these ration

cards, ... everybody had a ration card. Well, the ration cards were quite liberal in themselves, but you get somebody that wasn't playing the thing, ... you could just fill up that ration card, and, you know, not one individual could possibly use the stuff that was on that ration, that you could get off the ration card.

SH: Who had ration cards?

DS: Everybody, all soldiers.

SH: Were there military contractors like they have in Iraq and Afghanistan now?

DS: Contractors, yes, I'm sure they had them.

SH: What about the press?

DS: I bet they all had them. I bet everybody had them.

SH: The Allies too?

DS: All of them, yes, sure, sure. I'm sure everybody had a ration card. ... Then they tried to help, as they did in occupied Germany and everywhere, you had a military scrip versus the dollar, the greenback. ... The Vietnamese took military scrip, you know, they love military scrip. ... Military scrip was everywhere.

SH: Were soldiers paid with military scrip or with American dollars?

DS: If you needed cash, you got military scrip, yes. ... As an officer you had to pay for your meals and all of that, you had to pay, you paid in military scrip, yes, and they had all these hotels there in Saigon, the Rex Hotel I remember, and there were so many of them and, you know, drinking, ... tremendous drinking over there, tremendous. I was surprised, I mean, you know, just unbelievable. I mean, they'd show movies in these hotels at night, you know. They'd show or they'd get films, and everybody would sit there, and everybody would be drinking away, and you went to bed, you know, drinking. So, it was really something.

SH: Did you see any evidence of a drug culture at that point?

DS: ... I was there '65, '66, early in the war, and then, '68, '69. I was not really that aware of it. ... When I would have been aware of it, was my '65, '66 tour, when I was strictly with the troops, because that's a lot of times where you'd see the problem. '68, '69, I was an adviser, so my experience was, you know, not seeing all this lack of discipline in the units that you read about and hear about, because we had our small advisory contingent. I saw elements of it, I saw problems. For example, when I was an adviser, we had a unit that was serving, it was an ammunition station down along the river, and somehow, the one tent filled with black soldiers and the other one, whites, and the one played what was soul music at the time, they didn't call it rap ... in those days, and the other would be maybe country or old time rock and roll, and there was a fracas, you know. So, that sort of thing, I saw that, and I was aware of that personally of

that incident, but as far as a general breakdown or the fragging that you read about later, just horrible, I never experienced anything like that at all, you know. I will say, you know, as with any unit, when I was there on that first tour, with the troops, we had some people in that unit that I sure wouldn't want to turn my back on. ... There were some bad apples, and I remember one particular incident. This guy was just so clear, he just seemed like a doggone sociopath if there ever was one and just couldn't be trusted, and he should have been taken off the road. ... He got in his "deuce and a half" [truck] one time, and I don't know if he was drinking or whether he was just downright hostile, but he tore, he went, ripped right through the wall of a Vietnamese house, villa area, you know, and just ripped the wall out, and just a clear violation. You couldn't see how he would have done it, and I remember they tried the guy, you know. A lot of these things, they'd try to give the guy an Article 15 or a summary court martial, but this guy, they decided to do a rather, you know, a special court martial, and we had this guy, this lieutenant, in our unit, who was a lawyer, who had had a law degree, and he was always bitching that he was there stuck as a transfer. "Now, I'm here in Saigon, so I can be a lawyer." ... I remember he was the lawyer in this case, and he lost it. This guy got away pretty much. I don't know how, but probably the other lawyer was better than he was, just unbelievable.

SH: Describe the advising unit that you came back with the second tour. Who made up the unit?

DS: We had a major and two captains and like three NCOs. ... The major was the overall guy for the Vietnamese transportation group that we advised, and then, each of us, as the captains, were given specific units, and I was an adviser to a terminal service company, a boat company, and a truck--it was actually a truck battalion--and so that's what we did. We helped the Vietnamese. I described this in our first interview quite a bit, about how I used to try to get material for the people and try to improve their defensive perimeter and so forth and so on, and that's what we did. ... I will take this to give a very anecdotal story about the corruption and so forth, alright, and the individual is in this advisory group, it's a "Sergeant Bilko" type story, okay, if any of you remember Sergeant Bilko. [Editor's Note: Sergeant Bilko is the main character in the 1950s sitcom, *The Phil Silvers Show*, about a soldier who regularly exploits his position in the military for personal gain.] ... This guy has probably passed away, but I don't think he'll ever hear this story that I'm telling, but the one thing about my second tour--now, here I was over there in '65, '66. I go over '68, '69. I go right into this transportation advisory command, and so, I start getting around, and I go down here to this unit that I'm going to be assigned to, and what do I see, but NCOs all around the port and in these contract units. They're no longer NCOs, but some of them are civilians, and they have never left Vietnam. ... They have never left. They were there in '65 when I was there. They came with us on the unit, and they were still there, and I doubt if some of them left until '75. Why would they leave? They're making, you know, they were basically uneducated guys that can operate a forklift ... or whatever, and they stayed over there worked for these contractors, RMK and some of these big contractors, and making more money than they could ever think of back in wherever it was, West Virginia or wherever, and just stayed there, and they had a nice apartment downtown with a Vietnamese, whatever, and you know, and lovely, lovely. So, this describes in some, I'm talking about the contractor people, but a lot of them were military. They would just, every time it would come the year would be up, they'd ask for another year, another year, and they would grant it, why not? I mean, the Army would grant it sure, and they'd find just a cushier and cushier and cushier spot, okay.

SH: They were NCOs?

DS: NCOs, officers would try it too. There were some officers that never wanted to go back. They loved it over there. ... This was excitement, this is a great life. They had, you know, a beautiful Vietnamese girl, they had a great place downtown. They had a great position. Why would you change? I mean, that was their philosophy, and who knows? They might be making a little money too on the side, so, and this happened, and I'll bet there were people there in '75, and they just, "I better get out of here now," you know, or, "How many can you get on the plane?" ...

SH: Did you go to Thailand or any of the surrounding Southeast Asian countries for R&R?

DS: No, my R&R was to Japan, you might remember, where I met my wife. I mean, she was there on an exchange program, and we linked up there, okay, in Japan. She was with a Japanese family, and so, that's where I went. ... The second tour, I never got an R&R. I came down with dengue fever when I was due for it, and then I was going to go to Hawaii, and then my mother was seriously ill. So, I get home early. ... Right at the end of my tour, we were going to meet up with my wife in Hawaii, and then that happened. So, second tour I never got one. ... The first tour, I went to Japan. ... Anyhow, one of these NCOs fits the description that I was giving. ... As an adviser there, I had a driver, we all had a driver, a Vietnamese driver and a jeep. That was part of our advisory unit, alright. Now, every morning, I would be picked up by my Vietnamese driver, and then I would be taken back. I don't know if ever I had driven back myself and kept the jeep outside the BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters], but for some reason this day, this NCO says, "Captain Smith, why don't you take the jeep tonight?" I said, "Well, why would I do that?" I said, "I'm going to get dropped off as usual." "No, just take it and park it outside the BOQ." I said, "No, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to it." "Well, why don't you take it, and you drop me off, and then, put it outside your BOQ." "I don't understand what we're talking about. I have no need to do that, and I'm not going to do it. There's no need for it."

SH: Was this NCO Vietnamese?

DS: No, American, "Sergeant Bilko." I said, "There's no need for that. I'm not going to do it, period. I'm going to go home like I always do. I don't want to drive through Saigon if I don't have to. I don't want to drive through Saigon traffic, drive it myself and park it and find a place to park outside the BOQ." ... "Okay." So, that was that. Next morning we come in, and he says, "Oh, the jeep is missing." I said, "What do you mean the jeep is missing?" He says, "Yes, I took it home like you wanted me to. I took it to my BOQ, and I came to get it this morning, and it was gone." Well, we all know what happened, but nobody did anything. What are you going to do? ... It just shows you, man, you got to be really alert, or somebody will try to. He was going to try to involve me, then, the jeep would be missing from my BOQ, because then, he has to fill out the forms that say, "I took it home, and it was gone." If I had taken it home, I'd have to fill out the forms. A line of duty investigation, or whatever, would have to be involved in that kind of thing, missing equipment.

SH: Your BOQ then, for you, was not on a secured base.

DS: No, no, they were all over Saigon. So, I mean, that just gives you an idea. ... I think I mentioned this in my first interview. It was just well-known that when you were on a convoy, and you were taking troops around, now, this wouldn't be anybody trying to get money or anything, they would try to take the jeep for their unit, but you had better not go over and get a Coke or something and leave that jeep out there, because the guy in the infantry unit or whatever, would just take it, put mud over the markings and drive it off, and they'd have another jeep. That was well-known, doing that, that kind of stuff, truck, anything, they'd do that, oh, yes.

SH: Did they use the equipment to barter for something else or did they just want an extra jeep?

DS: It was nice to have another jeep. "You transportation guys, you drive around everywhere, you know, why shouldn't we?" ... A little paint and fix it up, and before long, it's whatever unit that was. That was well-known, but this was a case, can't be proven, but boy, you talk about circumstantial evidence, that he got some big change on that. Bad, bad news, that kind of thing, it's really bad, and to think he was trying to involve somebody else. ...

SH: We were talking about the waste in the military.

DS: Yes, the waste and very, very top heavy, and occasionally, I'd go out there to, out by Tan Son Nhut, where there were a lot of nice dining facilities and so forth, and I remember being out there and just disgusted one time when this guy is a chaplain, he's in there, and he's eating in this dining facility, and it's really nice, and they got top of the line food in there. This is an American facility, and he's just bitching about it, "It doesn't have this, and why isn't this done this way? Why isn't this cooked this way? Don't you have this tonight?" and blah, blah, blah. I almost got up and said it, "Chaplain, have you been out in the field?" ... That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. [laughter] ... I saw that in Vietnam, and I saw it also in Greece, can you believe that. The same sort of things, all my years in Greece, that sort of thing involving the PX, involving that, even up there in (Thessaloniki?). ... The first tour I was up there, I was with the Greek War College, and we had this, the base exchange, at that time the American presence in Greece was really big, but it was down in Athens, and they had the fleet was based there and all of that, but they had a facility within the consulate there and boy, and these would be Greeks pretty much would take advantage of this, Greeks married to Americans or whatever that somehow got PX privileges. ... I remember a woman there that was married to, he was a NATO Officer of some force, and he was reassigned somewhere and so, for some reason, they stopped her privileges of going in there to the PX. It was in the basement of the ... American consulate. She got so excited, she laid down on the floor of the consulate. ... They had to get Greek police to drag her out because they took her privileges.

SH: She understood what she was going to lose.

DS: Yes, but again it was, they called them Peripteros, they're the kiosks in Greece. There was all sorts of products from Americans, especially pornographic magazines. I'm telling you, they had these Stars and Stripes stores in the PX there, and I mean, the American military presence per se of actually uniformed people, you know--they had an Air Force contingent there in Athens, more down in Crete, they had Souda Bay which is the Navy down at Crete, they had some more Navy around Athens, they had some up there in the North, but they weren't that great.

You went to that Stars and Stripes, they had a stack, you know, three feet high of, you know, in those days it was like soft porn type things. ... It wasn't the really nasty stuff they have now, really, compared, but it was there, and you'd go down to Syntagma Square, which is the main square there in Greece, and you'd see all these magazines. ... They came from the PX, you know. It just seems wherever you go, people are going to be corrupt, you know. If there's a way to make money, ... people are going to do it, right. It's just the way it is.

SH: Is there a solution to this?

DS: I don't know. Well, the solution, you know, of course, it used to be rampant in Germany and that sort of thing, but, and then, you know, they had rations. Well, now, I mean, the German's economy is as good as, you know, what do they care, but the Greeks, you know, it was half again or twice as much for a bottle of scotch in the Greek market as it was to get it in the booze store. So, you had a ration, you had ration cards in Greece too. You had them in Germany, you know, wherever you'd have these ration cards, but people would abuse the privilege, cigarettes, whatever, you know.

SH: You were not in Vietnam when the war was over. I have heard that there was a tremendous amount of waste and that people would just throw things overboard when the war was ending.

DS: Well, yes, of course, a lot of that has to be done, you know. ... They would just roll the helicopters off the sides of the ships. We all saw the news photos of that. ... When you think of the massive, massive armaments that fell into the communists' hands, it's just incredible, just in facilities, and of course, the Soviets were using the Cam Ranh Bay facility after we left Vietnam. ... It was one of their major ports in Southeast Asia. ... I'm sure a lot of those buildings still are, you know, great piers and great warehouses and everything that they just got, highways. My gosh, it would be interesting to see ... how all that has developed, where all that stuff is, you know, and how much they're using, and, you know, so many people are going back to Vietnam now.

SH: That is what I have understood, that there is a really booming tourism industry.

DS: Yes, and I'm a member of the Retired Officers Association there, and we have a local chapter in Washington. These tours are amazing that they offer, and a lot of time, it's a Marine general that's going to take you back to Khe Sanh and all this kind of business, and a friend of mine went on one of these and went back to where he got his Silver Star and all that kind of stuff. This guy that I'm talking about was a Marine, and he's the only guy I know personally that has never "left" Vietnam. ... He's not like one of these guys hangs around the monument and weird and all, but he just thinks about it and thinks about it and thinks about it until, ... just unbelievable. Like I just, I never hardly ever think about it. ... It's not that it bothers me or something like that, it's just that I moved on. There's too many other things to think about every day, without that, but some people just stay focused.

SH: Let us go back and talk about the anti-war movement.

DS: Okay, and talk about staying focused, ... because there are people that have stayed focused on that, and I'll get into that. The anti-war movement, well, let's, even though I talked about it a little bit, you know, my experience here at Rutgers. I mean, we're going back before we were really involved. I graduated in '63, but then '65 I got my master's, but anti-war, I mean, and hippies and drugs, I never knew, like I think I mentioned, I never knew of a single person here at Rutgers smoking marijuana, never knew of it, a lot of heavy drinking, but not the way it is now, it wasn't as bad. It was pretty much, it was confined a lot to the fraternities and so forth, and there wasn't the fighting and all that you hear about, that I observed with my son going to college, both of my sons, it seemed to be much more at a time. I mean, I never saw a person going to class get sick or something, never, you know. People were worried about getting through. ...

SH: Graduation.

DS: Yes, that's right, so, but at any rate, there was just this contingent (Safe Nuclear Environment?), I think it was (SANE?), they were there, a few of these people, ... but left-wing politics no, not here, almost at all, you know. So, by '65, you know, it was the buildup and like I pointed out people talk, "Oh, anti-Vietnam," that was the period that people were very enthusiastic, very patriotic. We were going to go over there and save Southeast Asia from the communist hordes and everything, and that was generally the attitude in the country, and it just grew, the anti-war contingent. So, went back there then in '68, '69, and I don't know, ... it was the Tet Offensive or whatever, that things just kind of changed, you know. That Tet thing surprised everybody, ... even though militarily we won that, but the press put it off as some sort of a great Vietnamese victory, you know, because they got inside the embassy and all of that business, but basically we, if we would have kept on the offensive then, I think we'd have really smashed them pretty good. Now, pretty good, I don't know, the whole strategic concept of the war, we're not getting into that. I mean, how do you win that one when you're surrounded by Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam, but that's a whole other thing, you know, but as far as within South Vietnam, I think military, we really, from all I've heard, we really put it on them. They tried, and they failed utterly, alright, but from the press standpoint, they won, okay, but that I think the concept, and that's when you started seeing the anti-war business. So, I come back then in '69, and I have this little stint in Fort Dix. Okay, the little stint in Fort Dix, you could really see this stuff. We had this thing where, you know, they had these riots up in Newark and all of that. Now, that's going back to my first tour, but you had contingency plans for if that got worse, you know. So, that was my first tour there when we would take people out, and they would have these bayonet drills, and I think it was called Garden Plot, that was the name of the exercise in case we had to go up there, you know, to Newark and all of that, and I had a friend of mine's brother that was in the National Guard that got called to Newark at the time, and the guy talked to me, and this was just the most frightening time of his life, to see them hand out live ammunition to these National Guard people and just unbelievable. So, then by the time I came back in '69, ... I go to Monterey, California, and then, really, I saw it, my gosh. I mean, this talk about the '60s now, you had to be there. You know, it's just you had to be there. This was the time, it really, really was. I don't think we could ever duplicate that. ... I know Lindsey, she's real interested in '60s, but she can't duplicate it. I mean, and like Monterey, Big Sur was headquarters for the hippie movement, you know, and Monterey Jazz Festival and all of that, and so here I am out there coming back from Vietnam, and we had quarters on Fort Ord, California,

and I have to go from Fort Ord to the Defense Language Institute, back and forth, and this anti-war movement keeps building and building, and meanwhile, these hippies are all over Monterey per se, and I get out, on the way to go to Monterey, and I'd have some hippie come up to me and go, "I'm anti. I'm anti." I remember a guy who came up to me like that, and all this kind of business, and it's just like you see in the documentaries ... with the long hair, unwashed. You'd see people walking on the road just, you know. You had to be careful driving like down to Big Sur because these people would be conked out on the side of the road, and it was something, it really was ... just the way they show it. ... Then, Frisco [San Francisco] right up the road, which, you know, and we're there in Monterey, so you can imagine they had problems. Here's where [I saw] marijuana with the troops for the first time, that I saw, ... because these guys were all talking. If you remember ... they didn't know what to do with me initially before the language school started, and I was the garden--I forget what they call it--garden officer or something like that I ran this thing, and these troops would be talking, "Well, why don't they legalize marijuana and all." I mean, the troops would be talking about this stuff. So, it had really gone from that point where I didn't see anything, to where I saw everything, you know, and that was all, it was all throughout there, and of course, they were there at the hotbed of it, so what do they do when they get off from their language studies in the evening? You know, they'd meet up with these hippies and all, and at the same time, you had these Hell's Angels people out there, yes, and Fort Ord is next to a place called Seaside, and I understand that's still terrible, but that Seaside got started with the Okies, with the Depression, and they built a community there, and it was a wild, unruly place, really. So, you didn't want to stop in Seaside on the way to Fort Ord, and I've talked to people and Seaside is still wild apparently. ...

SH: With your military haircut you are always going to stick out. You could not wear civilian clothes and not be identified as military.

DS: Oh, you're going to stick out, yes. ... No, even nowadays, ... you can always tell a person is military, you know. The clothes that they wear out off base, it looks like they just bought them at the PX to go off base, you know. It's like they've never been worn out, right. So, anyhow, that was a real experience, and then, the demonstrations got bigger and bigger, and then, they actually had large demonstrations outside Fort Ord. I mean, ... the thousands type, you know. It was just shouting and everything right outside the gate with big contingents of military police and all that kind of stuff, you know. I don't know if thousands, but certainly hundreds and hundreds.

SH: What about the press? Did they cover this?

DS: Oh, sure, sure they covered it. I mean, of course, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, I think, and one of those papers out there are pretty left-leaning, anyhow, and, yes, so, but it bothered me, but it just didn't make a lot of sense, and it was one thing if these guys are anti-war, but it's another thing when they're flying Viet Cong flags and shouting "Ho Chi Minh," and, you know, "LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" and all that, and I mean, that just was too much, and of course, this really came home to me and to many, many of my, all my colleagues, I think, came home to us with the Persian Gulf War and with Iraq, and the way we're treating veterans coming back now. Certainly, that's the way they should be treated, but the misery, the miserable way we were treated, ... there was no affinity to the military at all, you know.

SH: Which leads me to my question about morale among the troops and within the officer corps that you served with. Does morale among the men change over time because of the anti-war movement?

DS: ... Well, I think pretty much, the people, you know, that I dealt with were all, by the time I got to Monterey and the people that were taking the languages there, and then, from then on, almost everybody I dealt with in the military were all career people, and, of course, they, that is one of my problems with the military and with Vietnam, is the careerism that existed there, and I think one of our major problems from down at the unit level all the way up to the Joint Chiefs of Staff level, was people trying to build their own individual careers versus what was right, a lot of cases, not true, not universally true by any means, but it's been written about a lot about that, about how, you know, from the large, like the body counts and all of that stuff, you know, that things weren't going well militarily, and they always try to well, you know, we do this or we do that and always put a good light on something, you know, to try, and rather than just say what the situation really was, whether it was down at your unit or whether it was on a national level, you know. This is the way it really is. ...

SH: We talked about how you did not know how the Tet Offensive was portrayed in the media at the time. Did this affect morale in any way?

DS: I think among the career military, I think it was more that those are the great unwashed anti-war people out there, but we're career people, and we're going to continue to march, and they're just a culture within themselves on that, and I think that's still largely a lot the way it is except now there is so much more support for the military, per se, you know. They may be against [the war].

SH: Do you not think that is because your generation experienced negativity upon its return to the United States and wants to make sure that it does not happen to this generation of soldiers?

DS: I don't think they understand how bad it was, ... people don't understand how bad it was, you know. I still always get that reaction to Tet. I've mentioned this to my wife a number of times. It's so interesting. I still get that reaction from people when I'm saying, they'll start talking about Vietnam, or they'll talk about this or that, and I'll just mention, "I was in Vietnam." I get no questions, I just kind of get a stare. No comment, I don't really understand it. I really don't understand it.

SH: Do you think people are perhaps being cautious or afraid to trigger bad memories? Or do you think this is collective amnesia or disinterest in general?

DS: ... It's just that it's hard to understand, you know, like we recently left a church that we were a member of for like twenty-two years, because of the just increasing leftist, peacenik-type philosophy that took over that church. ... We were there for twenty-two years as very, very active members. ... The philosophy of those folks, anti-war folks, I mean, my son was National Guard and he went to Iraq. His unit was called up, and he was very active in the church, and when this happened and he was called up, he became like a poster child for the church, you know, and we didn't want that, he didn't want that, and because it wasn't done in a right way of

he's over there. "Oh, poor Mathew." ... "Oh, how your son doing?" ... He was a member of the National Guard, he was called up, he went over there to do his duty. ... Then, when he finally came back, you know, it was, "Oh, he's back, you must be so." "Well, yes, we're very happy." "He won't ever have to get called again, will he?" You know, do you understand what I'm saying? It's that mindset, and I think it's the same thing with the Vietnam vet, like, "Oh, you were one of those poor guys," or if, with me, a careerist, like, "Oh, you must have been one of those guys." ... That's the way I look at it, and they don't want to question you one way or the other, so better to just drop it. I mean, that's the way I see it.

SH: In other words, it is very polarized.

DS: Yes.

SH: It has nothing to do with patriotism or duty.

DS: No, this church of ours fell apart over this issue, big church. The pastor, one day, it was increasing and increasing. They were putting posters up for anti-war rallies and so forth around the church, and people were saying, "We want to go down to the anti-war rally," and stuff. We had a brunch after church one time, and somebody said that, and I'm going, "Oh my gosh." ... The crux came when, one day we went into church and the American flag was gone. So, they had a council meeting in the church, they said, "Where is the American flag?" ... The pastor said, "I took it out. American flag has no business in the church." So, then there was the explosion of the council of the military, like, a good friend of mine, he's a Democrat and tends to be a little bit toward the left, but he exploded. ... "We ought to be praying for Osama Bin Laden," the pastor said, and my friend just got up and just said, you know, "We need to be taking him out and killing him, point of a bayonet," or something. ... There was a Fourth of July coming up, and this friend of mine, he was on the council, and he put a table out front of the church with American flags and handed them out, and so, the guy was furious, the pastor, and "Sit up on the pulpit then," and later I think he said, "These people took their American flags, and then they put them in their back pocket on their butts." Well, the church fell apart. We were gone, we walked out of the church, and should have walked out much sooner and, but imagine, you know, but this was happening all over. I don't know what kind of church you go to, but the mainstream Protestant churches, a lot of them are really going this route.

SH: Do you think they are doing it because they did not do it during Vietnam and now they think they should have?

DS: I think these folks that are, I think the seminaries are full of people, ... this anti-war, leftist ilk, you know, and I think it's just rampant. I think if they don't watch it, the Catholics will get the same way. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

DS: Just going on with this anti-war sentiment, you know, which just continued and just eroded what was left of our experience in Vietnam, and, you know, as being there and working like with the Vietnamese, you know, little things would strike you, like how we were dealing with these

South Vietnamese. ... They basically, they had to--along with us--they had to save the country themselves. They had to do that, but to do that, they had to be adequately supported. Now, just over there as a second lieutenant, and then, back especially as an adviser and working with the Vietnamese, I mean, first of all, let's just start with their basic equipment. Here these guys are, they're smaller people than we are, they're tough, but they're carrying around a big M1 rifle. Now, the rifle looks bigger than they are when they're walking around, and yet a good proportion, some of their elite units know, they had M16s later in the war, but if they were going to do, if they were going to win this, they had to be adequately supported and equipped, and as we all know, I mean, I wasn't at the strategic level, but we all know what happened in the Congress, they basically cut the rug out from the South Vietnamese, and from what I observed of the South Vietnamese, I had a lot of respect for the people I dealt with. They seemed to basically be honest and trying to do a good job. Certainly there was a lot of corruption, and there was a lot of problems, and there were some units that were not very good, but I think they did a, they lost a lot more South Vietnamese than we lost over there, ... despite our enormous losses, the South Vietnamese really lost, and they had the rug pulled from under them. So, as the anti-war movement grew, as the political opposition grew here, personally, I became more and more depressed about the whole thing, and in 1975, when things went downhill, I was very depressed about the whole thing, personally, and I have never really gotten over it. Most of my colleagues, "Hey, that happened," but I just had a perspective when that was happening, that that is not the way to go for the United States, to go off the roof of the embassy in helicopters, those famous pictures, and have us to leave those people behind, and that's the thing that I think really bothered me is, long before the fall, people would say, "Oh, we got to get out of Vietnam." My view is always, "We committed ourselves there, and whatever, we just can't let those people just down, because it's going to haunt us forever," and I am just shocked that when that happened, that never see anything in the press about what happened in Vietnam in the aftermath or in Cambodia or in Laos. Thousands of people died, thousands of people died under horrible conditions. It is almost never pointed out what happened in Cambodia, genocide of the Nth degree. Where do you ever hear about it? ... Personally, you know, I'll go to my grave with this image of our country failing in this endeavor. ... Whether we could have succeeded the way we were doing it, I don't know, because we had an enormous geography problem there with Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam surrounding this Vietnam, all right, so how are you going to preserve that, but I do know this. We shouldn't have left the way we did, and when the big fall happened I kept saying to myself, "They've got to make a corridor at least for the people that were our allies there. They've got to get these people out or they're going to be killed. They're going to go to reeducation camps." All of this happened, the boat people, the reeducation camps, the actual just absolute killing of people, the torture, it all happened. We ignored it, because it was embarrassing to us, all right. I know that, but I'm never reminded of it, because it's never, never in the paper. It's never in the news. No, we failed in Vietnam, our expedition was a failure there, all right. That's all you hear, that we failed, we failed, all right, because we were militaristic or whatever or we overstepped our bounds. Well, we better watch it in the future when we get involved in this kind of thing, because the results can be catastrophic, and they were, they were catastrophic, but we're never told that.

SH: Is that what we would call an exit strategy?

DS: I guess that was the exit strategy, yes, and we better watch now what's going on around the world. I mean, that's what I always think about, is, you know, with Afghanistan now and Iraq, just pack up, what are you going to do? Pack up there? One thing I hope we've learned, we can never, never, never let them establish base camps like they did in Afghanistan, and again, ever again, or in any other part of the world. It can't happen. If we do, we're doomed, and I see what's going on in Yemen, and we're getting off the topic here about my own personal experiences, but getting back personally, this was all colored by my experiences in Vietnam, and what I saw happen there. ...

SH: Well, thank you very much for sharing, and we look forward to hearing from you again soon.

DS: All right, thank you.

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Reviewed by Alexandra McKinnon 3/12/13

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 3/18/13

Reviewed by David B. Smith 5/21/13