

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RONALD STOKES

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview session with Ronald Stokes on May 4, 2015, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for coming in again.

Ronald Stokes: No problem.

SI: Last time, we spoke a bit about your time in Vietnam. I wanted to ask about your initial impressions of Vietnam. What were you thinking when you first touched down in Bien Hoa?

RS: Yes, it was down near Bien Hoa. It was near Saigon, north of Saigon, at the large replacement depot they had for people coming in and out of the country, military people. Actually, it was the 90th Replacement Depot. So, I guess, while I don't know a lot of the veterans personally, anybody that's been in Vietnam, chances are we've all passed through 90th Replacement Depot.

SI: You got there in April of 1968.

RS: May of '68, 17th of May, '68, I believe it was, the actual date.

SI: Okay.

RS: Right.

SI: You were going through this massive, factory-like replacement system. Tell me about what that experience was like.

RS: Well, the replacement depot, when people arrived, they came primarily already with orders assigning them somewhere. So, the replacement depot process was to verify your orders and to either arrange for transportation to your unit or your unit would arrange transportation for you. They'd pick you up or whatever. I was supposed to be working basically with vessels, loading and unloading ships down in the Saigon area by the big port. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the 90th Replacement Depot, they could never verify my orders for that particular assignment. Now, normal process time is about eight hours at the replacement depot and you're processing out [in] at least a day. I was there for two days because of this SNAFU in the orders. On the second day, I saw my name on a roster saying I was going up country. I really didn't know what that meant, but, shortly afterwards, I was placed on an aircraft. We flew a little while, at least an hour or more, and we ended up in a place called An Khe, which was the initial rear base camp for the First Cavalry Division. Then, there's processing in when you go there. They take all your stateside uniforms, and so on, make sure you have your jungle fatigues and boots and issue you a weapon, give you some words of advice about different things, like taking malaria pills and things of that nature, signing some paperwork. One of the pieces of paper I remember distinctly would indicate, if you were wounded, lightly wounded or heavily wounded, whether you wanted next of kin notified or not notified. So, you had a choice on that. Of all the papers I signed, I don't know why that's the only one I remember, but anyway. So, shortly after a few days of being there, I was flown to base camp forward, which was up at Camp Evans. This is all in I Corps, the northern part of South Vietnam, where the First Cavalry Division was operating. I got

there and, as a Transportation officer, they didn't really have a transportation job particularly for me to do. So, for about a day-and-a-half, I was just on a helicopter, flying around with the division DISCOM, which is the division support command commander. Eventually, he talked to one of his subordinate commanders at the 27th Maintenance Battalion and they had just had an opening for what's called an S-2-3, which is the operations officer. In a normal battalion, the operations officer is kind of a key guy, because he really plans all the activities for the unit. He guides the unit, makes sure that the missions that they're assigned are identified and appropriately resourced and carried out. In this particular battalion structure, that job actually fell on the materiel officer, which was kind of a new structure for me to learn. So, as the S-2-3, my job pretty much fell on reading intel reports and giving intel briefings at the morning staff meetings. Then, I had a supplementary duty as an S-5, which was civil affairs outreach to the local communities, and so on. So, I spent time going out to local villages, interacting with the village elders, making sure that they're not unduly upset with the military for things like inadvertently ruining, maybe, some of their property or some other slight that they'd want redress for, to do outreach. On occasion, you would, if you had a medic, maybe take a medic along, help do some little [medical work], just little checking of the health of the kids in the village. We built some little things, like water movement systems, and so on, or assisted in repairing some of them. Basically, that's basically what my job was for the first six months. Just near the end of that first six months, I was assigned to a special duty and I left our base camp. Well, let me back up a little bit--when I was at base camp forward, when they finally decided to put me in the maintenance battalion, that location was a place called Phu Bai, which was about an hour ride south of the base camp forward. So, I left Phu Bai and it had an airstrip nearby and flew back to An Khe, which was base camp rear. When I arrived there, I reported where I was told to report and met up with another lieutenant. He and I were given a list of locations to go to and we were given something like ten or twenty thousand dollars in military payment script, which was the [currency]. We didn't use US dollars, we used a payment script. "Little funny money," we used to call it. So, it would be orange, and then, in three months, you had to turn all your orange money in and get green money, and then, you'd have to turn all your green in. So, they rotated it every so often, to keep [down] the black market activities that would always pop up, to control those to some extent. Once we got the money, we got our list. We're also assigned to have an armed guard with us. We were armed ourselves. We then went to these locations. Now, primarily, they were hospitals. There was a few other locations, such as a jail, a brig. Once we got to these facilities, we were to inquire whether there was any First Cavalry soldiers located in that hospital or in the jail or whatever and find out if the pay officer from their unit had seen them on payday or shortly thereafter. If not, we were empowered to give them a partial pay, so that they'd have some money in their pocket. I thought this was a pretty good outreach for the Cavalry to be doing this for their soldiers. I'm not so sure I wanted to be the guy that had this duty, [laughter] because it really involved--for example, I had a hospital unit that was located at Phu Bai. So, I flew back to Phu Bai the next day, visited the hospital. We were able to eat in our own mess hall and sleep in our own racks overnight. The next day, we're out on an airstrip. Without generalized movement orders, we were basically trying to catch rides, hitchhiking. If there was enough room on an aircraft and it happened to be going where we needed to go, we'd fly there or we'd fly somewhere where we thought it would be easier to get from there to where we had to go. I went to about five different locations, to include going to Da Nang. In Da Nang, there was a brig, a Marine Corps brig, but we had Cavalry soldiers locked up in it. So, I visited the brig--which is a jail, for those who don't know. The Navy calls it the brig, Army calls it the

stockade. So, anyway, we paid a few people there. Then, I went on to the hospital ship, the USS *Sanctuary*, which was quite an experience, being on a vessel of that type. The *Sanctuary* was tied up at port in Da Nang, so, that wasn't a great problem. We went up there and we did what we had to do and, fortunately, they let us eat on the ship. The Navy seems to have better chow than the Army, quite often. [laughter] Then, we had to go to the USS *Repose*. Now, the USS *Repose* was about thirteen miles off the coast of Vietnam. Apparently, the operation was that one hospital ship would be off the coast, cruising up and down, so that when they're running medevac ships out, it was closer to get to the hospital ship than having it stationary, but they would rotate between the *Sanctuary* and the USS *Repose*. So, it took a while to get out there, because, obviously, it's a hospital ship and they're flying wounded people out. So, we had to wait until one of the ship's aircraft was going out that didn't have a full berth of litters on it. My guard and I were actually able to catch a ride and get out to the hospital ship. One unique experience was that, once we landed, everybody went where they had to go except for the two of us. We were relegated to stand on the aft, back end of the ship. They hosed us down.

SI: Really?

RS: Yes, took firehoses, not too powerful, but they hosed us down from top to bottom while we were fully dressed. Then, we had to sit out there and dry off, because, obviously, we were not suitably clean enough to go into their nice, pristine hospital ship. One of the things that I had a habit of doing is, I never wore rank on my uniform. My guys knew who I was. When you're riding in a convoy or something, I just didn't want to be a target. So, once we dried off and I pinned my rank back on, we were able to get a little more respect than we had originally. We went in, we paid the guys in the hospital there. I'll tell you, if you've never been in a ward where they're treating all battle wounds, you'd never want to be there. It's something [where] certain images still are very vivid in my mind today, just seeing these guys, plus, the odors that attested to that kind of an environment with the wounds, and so on. Anyway, we took care of paying guys. They were quite nice. The military nurses and the doctors were quite nice. The Navy keeps a very regulated eating system, in that the enlisted guys eat one place, the officers eat in another place, unlike the Army. We eat in the same chow hall. Sometimes, maybe, there's a partition that segregates you a little bit, but, generally, we eat pretty much the same. Even though I was a lieutenant, they wouldn't let me go in the officers' mess. I was still not "cleansed enough," I guess, for their environment, with the white coats and all that. So, I had to eat in the enlisted mess, which didn't bother me at all. I mean, when you're hungry, you're hungry and the chow was good. So, anyway, I completed that duty and went back to An Khe and did the accounting we had to do--how many you paid, what locations?--account for the money you had signed out, payments for each guy.

SI: How long was that whole trip, going to these different posts?

RS: Trip took me about four-and-a-half days. Anyway, we got back to Phu Bai and landed at the airport, thumbed a ride back over to our unit. When we got there, the unit was gone. All the tents were knocked down, all the supplies are gone, all the vehicles were gone. In a four-day period, they were alerted and moved, all right, only we didn't know it. They left one guy sitting there, with two big C rations for us to eat, figured we'd be hungry. I was informed that the rest of the guys that I was going to be responsible for were back at the same airstrip I just came from,

which, funny, I didn't see them when I was there, but anyway. So, we go back over there with orders to fly back to Bien Hoa, which is where the unit was relocated to, down in III Corps. We got on the aircraft. It was about seven or eight of us total. The pilots took off. They were very nice, only that they were not out of the Bien Hoa airstrip, so, they decide, it's late in the day, they weren't going down to Bien Hoa. They flew--I believe the name of the place was Cam Ranh Bay. They landed there and they basically said, "Our duty day is over." They went off where they had to go and I'm sitting out there not knowing exactly where I was, how to contact anybody and arrange for this movement further from there to where we had to go. Fortunately, they had put up radio nets and I was able to get on the radio and find some of our guys and got some information to the powers-to-be. Next morning, there was arrangements to fly us to the final leg of the trip. So, we get into Bien Hoa and, there, guys setting up and that's when I reported to the commander and said, "Look, I think I had enough of this experience. I'd like to try something different." He thought about it and he said, "Okay, well, we're going to send you out to one of the detachments," and that's when I moved forward with one of the detachments, actually Bravo Detachment, of the battalion. They provided direct support maintenance to the Second Brigade of the First Air Cav. Initially, we were located in a place called Phuoc Vinh. In fact, we were there at Christmas 1968. This is the one day that most of the guys were all still gathered--nobody was off on missions, and so on. So, we took a group picture of the entire unit, except for one guy and that was me, because I was taking the picture. That's a picture that I've had posted in our Division Association newsletter that comes out. It's been published in there a couple times. We were able to get a couple of guys who saw it call in [who] I hadn't talked to in a long time. So, anyway, we were there for a short while, and then, we relocated from there to a place called Quan Loi, which was an old area of rubber plantations in Vietnam. It had about two-and-a-half inches of thick, red dust. So, every time an aircraft flew in, it's just a big cloud of red dust was moving over your area, plus, the wind that drove it. I suspect, if I go out to my shed and open up one of my old footlockers, I could still see some of that red dust embedded in some of the old helmets and stuff that I still hang on to. It just doesn't go away. [laughter] I ended up being basically what they called the shop officer. I was responsible for all the guys in the detachment, making sure that they were on duty every day on time and doing their particular missions. We were a direct support repair facility. We basically repaired small arms--machine-guns, pistols, rifles, shotguns. We also repaired artillery pieces, basically the 105s, which is what the division had. We repaired all the basic radios that the units used. Wheeled vehicles, of course, we did a lot of wheeled vehicle maintenance. So, those are the three primary ones, things that we repaired. We'd pick up other odds-and-ends, like starlight scopes and other things like that to repair. So, basically, we did repairs there. The units would send stuff to us that was beyond their capability to repair. We'd repair it and return it to them. We also provided parts. So, things that the units were responsible for that they didn't have the parts for, we would provide the parts, as kind of like an auto parts store. There's a lot of paperwork that goes with it, but, of course, we did that also, as well as bringing parts in for our own requirements, for repair. We also sent guys out on missions. If one of the infantry companies, let's say, instead of coming back to the brigade rear, maybe [would] go into a firebase somewhere in our area of operation, we would actually fly guys out there to do maintenance right on the spot for them. We kept Conex containers, which were like, if you've seen these ...

SI: Containers.

RS: Containers, would come in on the ships. A Conex was about, let's say, eight-by-eight. It was small enough, but we would pack it with repair parts and other things that we needed. Certainly, if the guy was going to be more than a day, we may stack some water and food and stuff in there. We'd put slings on it and a helicopter'd come in and we'd attach it to the bottom of the helicopter and fly it out, along with the guys. They would do their mission, and then, they'd come back with the Conex. If it was a small, quick stand down, sometime, we'd just have them take what they could carry on their bodies, realizing there's certain things that, routinely, we would be repairing. So, we'd provide parts just for those things. So, basically, that's kind of what we did and I did for my last, I guess, basically, six months in there. It was also a time where I spent more time with the--I guess we had about six or eight court-martials in the battalion the year I was there. At least four of them happened that last six months, because I remember flying back; seemed like I was in every court-martial there was. Half the time, it'd involve a black soldier and, being the only black officer in the battalion, I just thought they wanted a black face in the court-martial. I never said anything, but that always bothered me.

SI: You mentioned that last time, too. Did you think that the superior officers were making that call or did the soldiers want an African-American officer?

RS: I just think the people who generated the court-martial, the commander and his assistant, kind of decided that's what they would do.

SI: Okay.

RS: All right. Plus, it has a negative side to it. Of course, I've been threatened, not with court-martial, but one of the things they use frequently for officers, depending on the nature of the infraction, is a letter of reprimand. We used to see a lot of trucks travelling, different units, and so on, they had the Confederate flag in the back windshield of the truck. No one said anything, but, when you had black drivers, passengers, on the vehicle, when they rode by you, they would throw what we called the power sign, this little fist up sign. Guys ride by and they'd throw up the sign, I'd throw it back. One of the superior officers saw it one day. He didn't take kindly to an officer doing that. I said, "Well," I mentioned to him about the Confederate flags and, of course, he didn't like that, either. So, I wondered what was going to happen. Nothing ever came of it, so, that was the end of that, but just little examples like that, that go on, that just keep you alert to the fairness of the system. Don't get me wrong now, I liked the Army. The Army was good. I spent nine, a little over nine, years active and fifteen in the Reserves, so, it's kind of like a marriage. Wife's not perfect, but she's got a lot more pluses than she got negatives and I'm sure the same applies to me. So, that's the way you kind of gauge things. Nothing's a hundred percent, yes.

SI: Tell me about the living conditions, first, when you were at Phu Bai, and then, at these later bases, at Quan Loi--I can never pronounce these names.

RS: Quan Loi.

SI: Quan Loi and Phuoc Vinh?

RS: Yes. Well, at Phu Bai, we had GP mediums. These are the general Army tents--you see the big, long ones that they put up? They have smalls, which are round, and then, they have mediums, which are long. You could put, I guess, about twenty guys in there, cots, basic cots like you see in the barracks building. Then, they have GP larges, but, usually, they're reserved for, like, using them for storage or a mess tent, that type of thing. Anyway, we had GP mediums up, but, by the time I got there, they had scrounged up enough lumber that they actually built the frame on the two sides and they put up wood flooring and plywood on little blocks about that high. So, the tent was draped over that instead of using the normal tent poles. For the military, it was, as far as I was concerned, quite comfortable. We had folding cots and sleeping bags you'd roll out. If it was too hot, you'd just lay on the top, because it was more cushiony than just laying on the cot. Of course, you had poles on the end of your cot on two ends that you'd stretch a mosquito net over, to keep the [bugs out]. You kind of had a habit of going in and spraying bug spray, with the mosquito net down, well before you went to bed. So, if there's something flying around in there, they hopefully would be gone or be demised. Then, when you went to bed, you just got under that net as quickly as you can to keep any strangers from getting in there. I suspect it worked, but who knows how well it did? I mean, I remember getting bit. You could see the bites that you'd get from the insects. I got this idea one time about trying to improve my condition. I took some two-by-fours and built a platform with plywood on two-by-four poles, get it about two-and-a-half, three feet off the floor, laid my sleeping bag inside of it, built a big two-by-four or a plywood box around it and cut a half-moon shape on one side, which I would crawl in and I'd staple a mosquito net on the inside of it. I thought that would improve my condition, but, actually, it didn't. So, it was a good effort, but it didn't work out all that well. [laughter] We had much more area, being officers, than enlisted guys. All us officers that work at battalion, except for the Battalion Commander and the Executive Officer, had their own separate tents, little smalls, but, anyway, we were in there. So, it gave each one of us much more space than we would in a normal barracks configuration. So, that made it comfortable, to put little things in, spruce the area up. So, in Phu Bai, it turned out kind of nice. When we moved down to Bien Hoa, now, Bien Hoa was a more improved facility. It was right next to the airbase, and so, most of the guys ended up living in Quonset huts and they had running water, and so on. So, it was a much better place, but, as I said, when we got down there, I asked for a change of assignment. So, I was only there a few days before I went to Phuoc Vinh, to our encampment up there. We were still setting up when I got there. So, I spent I guess a good portion of a couple of days helping to sandbag tents and setting it up, dispersing them. So, particularly for mortar and rocket fire, you want to disperse a little bit. I slept in a GP small, me and one other lieutenant. It was comfortable enough. I mean, we had a cot in there with our sleeping bag and, that, I don't remember putting up a mosquito net. For whatever reason, I just never put one up. I basically just rubbed down with insect repellent. We were there, I guess, a month-and-a-half, roughly, and then, we moved into Quan Loi. Now, when we got to Quan Loi, the facility they gave us was at one end of the airstrip that was located there. It had two large, open buildings, like you kind of see on a farm, that we used as shops for our wheeled vehicle repair. We have these vans that were mounted on wheels that we would drag behind trucks, trailers. Those vans, then, we would lock down to the ground and they had regular doors on them. They were kind of--well, they were big enough for a guy to stand up in--and it had an improved facility inside. So, when you hooked up a generator to it, you had electricity inside that they could use for doing their jobs. They had lights in there, had fans, so [that] the guys could have fans, blow the hot air around. So, that's basically the way we were set up. The guys were all in GP mediums and we had about

four of those lined side-by-side where the troops, guys, slept. Me and the other officer, other lieutenant, and the Captain slept in this Quonset hut that was located at that facility. So, the front end was used as an orderly room, which is our administrative office, and the back half, we used as our quarters. It was a separate room with a door on it. So, obviously, the Captain had that and me and the other lieutenant, he was on one side of the shape of the Quonset and I was on the other side, and then, we didn't put up our mosquito netting. As soldiers will be, we found enough wood and shellac, and so on, we built a bar in there, nice (and proof?) bar, I'll tell you.

SI: Yes.

RS: You'd have been proud of it. Problem was, we weren't supposed to have any alcohol out there where we were. Somehow, some found its way out there--I'll leave it at that.

SI: I was going to ask if they had officers' clubs at these places.

RS: If you went to places like Bien Hoa, Da Nang, they had much more fixed facilities. They had a capability to have officers' clubs or clubs based on some identifiable division. I know, down in Da Nang, the Special Forces had a separate little club just for themselves. So, those things went on. Then, there was an area, if I remember the name correctly, it was Vung Tau. It was in the southeastern part of South Vietnam. It was kind of like a resort area, so, it was used for in-country rest-and-recreation. So, I never went there. So, I'm sure guys enjoyed that type of activity, too, right. Then, everywhere you go in war, I mean, even the Spartans in the *300* [a 2006 film about the Battle of Thermopylae] that held off whoever--I forget who they were holding off.

SI: The Persians?

RS: Yes; they had their camp followers with them. [laughter] There were people, local folks, who would avail themselves for the troops who were capable of finding some seclusion once in a while and availing themselves of their services, put it that way. That's about most of it. I mean, I remember, when we weren't sitting around in the evening, you're just talking, having a few drinks, writing letters. Today, guys get on the computer and they FaceTime with their kids from Iraq and Afghanistan. Everything with us was "snail mail." In particular, even though I wasn't a big fan of the hometown newspaper, a small rag, since my aunt was sending them to me, they were a source of pretty good enjoyment. There was a thing called a sundry pack, which is a huge box and the unit would get a sundry pack every so often. I forget how often it was, but inside of this would be cigarettes, usually the World War II style Lucky Strikes and Camels, nothing with filters on them. [laughter] There'd be writing paper and pens and chewing tobacco and a whole host of just stuff in there for the comfort, I guess, of the troops. So, we would get these sundry packs in once in a while and have to divvy them up. That was another source of enjoyment, because in there would be books. I got into looking forward to these books, because I started reading the Mike Shayne detective novels. I must've read every Mike Shayne detective novel that was out. I mean, I knew where he lived, what his girlfriend was, how tough he was, how much he drank. So, that was kind of the way I passed the time when I wasn't working. [Editor's Note: Mike Shayne was a fictional detective created by Davis Dresser who wrote under the pseudonym Brett Halliday.]

SI: One second, please.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Sorry about that.

RS: Yes. You were asking about parts.

SI: Yes, I was asking about the different things that you did for recreation. You were talking about the detective novels.

RS: So, like I said, reading those, reading the hometown newspaper and just chitchatting with the other guys was basically the way we kind of spent evenings; nothing spectacular, but it got us through.

SI: As part of this logistical supply line, did you face a lot of shortages of materials, spare parts, that sort of thing?

RS: Occasionally, you'd have an item or two that you may be out of when you needed it, but you could always get replacements pretty quick. If it was that dire of a matter, you'd go back to our battalion headquarters and they would go to the main maintenance unit; maybe they had one or two they could send to us, or maybe one of the other units, until they can replenish it. So, I don't remember parts being a big issue. One of the things we had was a starlight scope [early night vision scopes]. These are the big scopes you flip on and you could see at night; wasn't the greatest item in the world, but I think we were only authorized to have one, but, for a while, we had two of them. Then, somehow, we ended up with about three or four of them. I have no idea where they came from, but I used the spare ones, obviously. We didn't need but the one we were authorized, so, I used them for trading material. That was another way you got things down for your unit, once in a while. Soda and beer was always of a premium. So, when you can have a pallet of each flown into your unit, I think you're doing okay for the troops.

SI: I have also heard from other officers in similar jobs that you have to sometimes send your men out to do "midnight requisitions." Did that ever happen?

RS: No, not for me. We were able to cover everything we were responsible for. I can only guess that we kept our repair parts level at the level we were authorized to hold, and so, whenever we were down, we were able to get the replacements in pretty quick. The only thing is, occasionally, when we had something that we couldn't repair, beyond the starlight scopes, we had other spare things, like maybe a rifle or two here, that we would just give the unit a good one out of our stock, let them go. Then, the one that was left, once we got the part in, we'd fix it and keep that as a replenishment for a similar future situation, all right. So, I guess if they still had records for how many items we got in and how often we got in--they keep records, like, "How many days did you hold an item before you could repair it and what was the reason for it?" Parts would be one of the reasons, if you didn't have the part. So, all those kinds of stats are always kept by the Army. How well they use them and whether those things are still available to the

degree of going down to a particular unit in a particular year in Vietnam, I have no idea. My recollection is that that never popped up as an issue that we had to deal with, all right. The only repair issue, main issue, that comes to mind was an M60 machine-gun that we repaired, went back to the unit, I don't [know], one of the units in the Second Brigade. Apparently, during a firefight, the gun failed. It failed to fire or provide covering fire. The commander of the unit that owned that was quite disturbed. I could understand that. He, along with our commanders and others, flew into our unit at Quan Loi, brought the gun and were making a big to-do that this gun failed and that we had just recently repaired it. It was all our fault, and so, guys who got wounded or killed were being attributed to us. I remember the guy throwing the gun down on the ground by my feet. I just took it as a slight. Anyway, I took the gun and we had my best guy disassemble it, we looked it over, couldn't find, visually, anything wrong with the gun, found extreme amounts of dirt and carbon in it. That comes from putting too much oil on it. When you're firing it, it just holds on to that carbon from the burnt gunpowder and, of course, kicking up dust and dirt just clings into the oil. So, we had a fifty-five-gallon drum [that] was cut in half and we put it in a saddle. That's where we kept solvent. So, we just put the gun parts down in the solvent, washed it all off, dried it down, took a rag and just lightly wiped the operating parts, all right, put the gun back together, took about a fifty-round belt of ammunition, took it over to the test fire pit, ran them off without a problem. So, I went back and they say I threw the gun down--I say it slipped out of my hands--back at this commander's feet, [laughter] getting my slight back. I politely explained to him that there's nothing wrong with the gun. We repaired it. It fires correctly. I said, "The problem was the lack of care and cleaning and that's first echelon or the gun operator's responsibility. If your guys have a problem understanding how to clean the gun, I'll send one of my guys out to do it in the training class," which, really, I knew I was kind of disrespectful saying that to a commander, superior officer. I could see, when his face turned red and my battalion commander's face turned red, that I was probably going to be in trouble for that, but, once again, I escaped. I think the Battalion Commander really liked me. He was afraid of gun firing. One day, when he was visiting, I had him move to the bunker right away, because I could tell we were taking incoming. He was very appreciative of that, that he got in a good, safe position. So, I was always on his good side from there--well, in fact, the whole time I was there, I was always on his good side. So, that was the biggest maintenance *faux pas* that I can remember, besides losing one of my own guys, who was one of my top repairmen.

SI: How did that happen?

RS: We were getting ready to go out to one of the firebases on a mission. We had a Conex all set up and he was on top of it. You've got a little round donut where the slings all tie in, slap it on the hook on the bottom of the helicopter. Just as he put it in, we started taking mortar and rocket fire. He leaped off the Conex, trying to get out of the way, and fractured or broke his ankle in two places and his leg. So, they medevaced him out for that. I never saw the guy again, yes, and he qualified for a Purple Heart, because it happened during active fire. Something that always bugged me is, you're in a tent and you're taking incoming rounds and you run out of the tent and trip over the tent peg and scratch your leg, it's a Purple Heart.

SI: Really?

RS: Yes. I've seen some officers go down and make sure that they got on the list. They didn't really care about getting treated. They just wanted to get their name on the list, so [that] they'd get the Purple Heart. I mean, I didn't have that kind of experience, but I had scratches and other stuff. I mean, if you ever go down and see real wounded guys, there's no way in good conscience you can go and want to put your name on the list. That's bad news, in my opinion.

SI: How often would your unit take incoming rocket fire or mortar fire at these bases?

RS: At Phuoc Vinh and Quan Loi, once or twice a week, at least. We had one occasion at Quan Loi where the enemy--I couldn't tell you whether they were NVA or VC or whatever--but they attacked from two opposite sides of the base. On both sides, they were able to penetrate the wire. My unit was located at the end of where the airstrip ended. There was some space between the end of the airstrip and where we were actually located, but on that end of the compound. To our--I'll just say to the left of us. I can't remember whether it was east or west or north or south. Unless I have a map, I can tell you, but, otherwise, I couldn't. Anyway, just past us was a mess hall and that mess hall was run by the artillery unit. We didn't have our own mess hall. We were too small, so, we would eat with whatever unit we were near. We'd make arrangements with them. So, we were eating with the artillery guys and it was a self-propelled 175-[millimeter gun] battery. So, that was a huge, huge gun. That's one of the biggest guns we got to fire out shells and, instead of [being] on wheels and towed, this was on its own motorized track. The artillery guys, of course, they fire out in long distance. So, when the enemy was breaking through the wire, all these guys were already in their bunkers, until somebody started screaming and yelling and got them out of the bunkers. They cranked their guns down, the elevation, as low as they could go and they were just going to fire it point blank into the wire, which was pretty close to our own line. The NVA, VC, whoever was coming through, when they saw the tubes coming down, some of those guys just reached down and grabbed dirt and rocks off the ground and threw it down the opening of the tube. So, when that first guy on the first track put a shell in and fired it off, it hit all this debris inside the tube and the round detonated at that point, blew the whole tube off and blew big chunks of the tube, big hunks of metal, all over the place. It was raining down everywhere. We were right next door and, knock on wood, nobody got a scratch from that. Somewhere in my pictures of remembrance, I've got pictures of our area with all this debris of this gun tube, metal, laying all over the area. It smashed the hood on one of our vehicles and it put a hole in the Quonset hut, but that's the only damage I could see. I mean, there was a lot of gunfire, so, you could see our bulletin board had a bunch of bullet holes in it and a couple of jeeps had holes through the windshield, and so on, but, during that particular engagement, nobody got hurt. In a later engagement, one of our guys did get shrapnel from a mortar round. It wasn't like out there walking the rice paddies and boonies every day, like some of the guys did, even though the bravado in later years is coming out. I can understand that there was an extreme amount of apprehension being in that particular environment, day in and day out. I mean, there was enough apprehension just where we were, anyway.

SI: You always read about the First Air Cavalry's *esprit de corps*. Was that palpable at this level or was it more in the frontline units? Does it permeate the whole unit, essentially?

RS: It permeates the whole unit, but, in every branch of service, my experience, with the Marines, with the Navy, with the Air Force, the Army, you have certain elements whose job, such as being a fighter pilot, a naval gunner, a Marine infantry guy, an Army infantry guy, a Ranger, they look at themselves as the elite group and that they feel that they're a step or two above other guys that are in transportation, supply, signal, medics, administrative. It's amazing-- don't pay them, don't feed them, don't give them any repair parts, don't give them any bullets, all right, and don't transport them anywhere, let them walk, and maybe their lives will be, "Hey, you know what? We're all one group. We have to work together and everybody has their job." I like to tell people, I say, "When I went in the Army," I said, "actually, I was drafted, all right. I got a draft notice and I was to report on a given day," I said, "but I felt I'd be at the whims of whatever the Army wanted to do with me," and I already knew I did quite well on the preliminary tests. So, I went to a recruiter. He pulled up the exams I took down at the Armed Forces qualification station and he was going to arrange for me to go to school at Fort Monmouth. I was going to learn about commo [communications] equipment, repairs and that kind of stuff. Anyway, I signed up. So, now, I had three years instead of the actual two years, but I went to basic training, which is infantry basic training. From there, I went to infantry advanced training. So, basically, when I got done with my infantry advanced training, I was like a lot of these guys carrying rifles out in the rice paddy. They could've picked me up and sent me right over there and put me in one of those units. That's what I was basically trained to do, but, during the course of basic training, I was "encouraged" to apply for OCS, officers' school. The first couple times I was asked, I just didn't respond to it, because I was going to do my three years and get the heck out of here. An incident happened in basic that caused me to change my mind, only to the point that, "I'll go ahead and make the application," not thinking I would ever be selected, but, as history is written, I was selected. Obviously, my written exams, my physical exam, my review; one of the processes, you've got to go through two reviews. One, they do fingerprints and a background check, the FBI does that, and the other one is, you sit in a room, such as we're sitting here, only I'm sitting lower and four or five guys [are] up on the stage or a platform with a long table. There's about four or five of them, officers, and one enlisted guy. I think it was a sergeant major. They just shot questions at me and I just had to kind of answer them back, and so, that was part of the evaluation. Anyway, all that was done. Among the initial paperwork was a form where you could get your choice of where you would go. So, Vietnam's hot and heavy, already been trained, basically, as an infantryman, I put down infantry. My second choice was military police and my third choice was transportation. So, they sent me to Transportation School; [laughter] so, I guess, go figure that one out. Normally, you put all these sweet things, like admin, transportation, and so on, and then, they send you to infantry, because no matter what you select, they always reserve the right to assign you "for the good of the service." So, anyway, I went to Transportation School, which turned out to be, I guess, a blessing, in the sense that, one, I was the only black in my whole class. As I looked at some of the other classes that were in session, different groups come in at different times, two blacks was the most I'd ever seen in any given class. So, as far as African-Americans or blacks, it wasn't a lot of us going through this process of OCS to become officers. I think the majority came through, probably, ROTC, because there weren't too many prevalent at West Point at that time, which it's now changed. The world is much different than I'm describing it now. Anyway, I went through the training, got commissioned as a second lieutenant, as a Transportation officer, on 17 May, 1967. The US Department of Transportation came into existence in April of 1967, so, I'm almost in the business as long as the US Department of Transportation is, [laughter] which I always found

quite interesting. When I left there, I got assigned to a supply-and-service battalion at Fort Meade, Maryland. Then, I was a commander of a supply-and-service company. I was a detachment commander for a maintenance detachment up at Fort Drum; went to Vietnam, I was an S-2-3 in a maintenance battalion, a shop officer in a maintenance battalion. I came back, ended up as an advisor to Reserve units, which was headquartered out of Fort Indiantown Gap, but my duty station was the Reserve Center at Newark, New Jersey, with responsibility for the one in Lodi and the one in Woodbridge. So, that was a while doing that, a year or so. Then, I went to the advanced Transportation officers' course and found out that I'm in a class now with a bunch of guys that were looking at our futures in the Army and all these great, wonderful transportation experiences these guys had and I had zip until that time, because I kept going in maintenance, in this unit and that unit, but no transportation. So, I was hopeful that I would get into transportation. I really lobbied to try to; I knew I was going to get an overseas assignment and I assumed it was going to be Vietnam again. So, I was really lobbying to get in a transportation truck battalion and got a call one day and the guy said, he says, "You need command time." He said, "I saw you commanded a detachment, but that was only, like, for two months." He said, "You need more substantial command time for your record." So, I said, "Okay." I'm thinking, "Oh, great, I want to be a company commander in Vietnam." I was just really fantasizing this stuff. He says, "The only command job we got open is in Korea." So, I ended up going to Korea, but, instead of a transportation unit, I was a commander of a maintenance unit, maintenance and supply unit. So, I guess I never really had an assignment in a transportation unit until I became an executive officer in the Reserve battalion, which was a transportation battalion. Then, I ended up becoming the commander of that battalion. So, I spent the majority of my career doing all kinds of stuff but transportation, but, within those jobs, there was elements of transportation that became important. Like, when we moved from one location to another location, someone had to do the movement orders and movement plans for the unit. So, not the initial one, but the unit from Phu Bai to Quan Loi, I did the movement plans for that. So, I had my hands a little bit in it. The other point I want to make on the tail end of that--and I almost forgot--was that when I came back and got off active duty, I ended up working as a supervisor of transportation in a chemical plant, and then, eventually, as a hazardous material advisor for another chemical company. So, I was in the field of transportation in my civilian world all the way through. So, the transportation training, and I suspect the types of jobs I did, giving me a rounded out discipline, worked well for me in the civilian work world.

SI: You started your military career thinking you would just be in for your three-year tour.

RS: Two years.

SI: What changed? When did you decide that you wanted to make it more of a career and stay on active duty for longer?

RS: Well, after I came back from Vietnam and I went to this job as the advisor of the Reserve units, once they decided to just let me go to the advanced Transportation officers' career course, I figured, "Maybe this is not such a bad way to earn a living." I was still very dismayed. It was the 1970s, early 1970s. When I was a second lieutenant, my entire pay was 321 dollars a month. So, that's not a lot of money to live on, all right, especially when you get a stipend every couple years for uniforms, because officers have to buy their own uniforms. They're not given to us,

like the enlisted guys. You can't eat in the mess hall for free. As an officer, even though you go to the mess hall, you still have to pay for your meal. It's cheap--you only pay a dollar and a quarter, a dollar or something--but, when you're only making 321 dollars a month and you've got a family, it doesn't go very far. I think a private now makes about fifteen hundred dollars a month and, of course, everything's given to him; assuming he's not married, pretty great life. As you advance in rank and advance in years, of course, the monetary benefit gets better and better. So, that was a big thing. The money I was making, I wasn't very happy with that. It limits you on a lot of stuff. Guys buy new cars, I had to buy a used car, stuff like that, but you learn to [make] do. The career, at that time, wasn't a bad idea, but, anyway, so, I settled on that. That worked well for nine years, two months and twenty-six days, and then, I was off active duty. During wartime, you expand in the forces. You need more bodies, obviously, for all sorts of reasons and, with Vietnam, it was the same. There was a lot of expansion to the military forces. After war, apparently, statisticians, somewhere, figured this out, saying that there's a certain amount of attrition that takes place--guys get out. After World War II, all these guys came home. They were getting out of the service and going out looking for civilian jobs, which worked, I assume, well for them. After Vietnam, that wasn't happening. A lot of guys decided to stay, not only enlisted but officers. The size of the active military is controlled--bottom line, it's controlled by Congress. They set the budget. So, when they set the budget, that's all the money you have; it determines how many people you're going to have and how much trucks you're going to buy and how many ships, and so on. So, as Vietnam drew down, and then, a lot of these guys were staying and the money started getting tighter and tighter, they realized they couldn't keep all these guys. So, they had an involuntary reduction in force, RIF. They just picked a bunch of guys, however, whatever basis they use for that selection, and they got rid of them. About two years later, they were still facing the problem, so, they had a second reduction in force and they got rid of a bunch more of guys. In a few more years down the road, they were still having this problem, so, they had a third reduction in force and they got rid of a bunch more of guys. That was where I got picked up to be released from active duty. So, I got released from active duty and, as far as I was concerned, at that time, that was the end of my military career and association. There's a naval base--or there used to be a naval base, it became a joint transportation base--in Bayonne, New Jersey. In fact, that's where the Navy hard-hat school used to be. Well, there was a sergeant major there, he was a Reserve sergeant major, worked with my dad who worked on the base. He would always ask my dad how I'm doing when I was on active duty. When he found out I was not on active duty any longer, he called me up and asked me about joining his Reserve unit. I just was not interested in it. By this time in my life, I was a young guy, single--I had gotten divorced--and started working and starting to make a pretty good buck. A young guy, what do you do? You buy a new car, you start going out to the clubs, [laughter] all the things young guys do. This sergeant major would call me up and it was particularly bothersome on a Sunday morning, when he'd call me, because, usually, at that time in my life, I was coming in from a real late Saturday night. So, it got to a point one day, I said, "Sergeant Major, look, you have to stop calling me." I said, "I'm really not interested, but I'm going to do you a favor." I said, "I'll come visit the unit. If I like what I see, I may decide to join. If not, you've got to promise to stop calling me." So, reluctantly, he agreed to that little agreement. So, I went to visit the unit and they did everything but have Jennifer Lopez and Halle Berry standing out there with microphones to invite me in and a red carpet, and so on, but the coffee was there, the donuts were there. I didn't get to talk to any of the young guys. The Battalion Commander himself personally came in and sat down, chatted with me, and so on.

They really did it to the max and the Battalion Commander was honest to say how much of a problem they had, a lot of guys with good efforts, but without experience, some of them with some issues with training--just the unit was hurting in some spots. There were some things that were going to be coming up that he was uncomfortable with, like an IG inspection, and so on. So, reluctantly, I said, "Okay, I'll join the unit." So, now, I didn't see that going too far, but, anyway, I joined this unit. I took over one of the key documents they have in there, called the property book, and I straightened it all out. He had a lot of problems with that and hand receipts and such. Anyway, I fixed that all up, went through the IG with flying colors, and, from that point forward, this guy treated me like I was his personal son, whatever I wanted. He actually started me off with some assignments, with subordinate units, as commander, because he felt they needed some [leadership]. So, it became more of an enjoyment at that time. It kept me out of wild weekends, because I was going down to Reserve duty, and so on, and it helped a while, because I had to stay physically fit. I had gotten a little sloppy. So, you have to still pass your physical test. So, it was okay. Obviously, it worked well, because I stayed for fifteen years, until I retired finally.

SI: You got off active duty about 1976.

RS: '75, I think it was '75, yes.

SI: What rank were you at that time?

RS: Captain.

SI: When you joined the Reserve unit, were you able to keep that rank or did you have to take a different rank?

RS: No, I remained as a captain when I joined the Reserves. During wartime, you lose a lot of people, particularly at the lower ranks, lieutenants and captains, some majors, a lot of enlisted guys. People get killed, people get wounded; they go away. So, the advancement was quicker. They'd used two criteria primarily--how many years of service you have and how long have you been at the current rank? Let's just say you've got to have, hypothetically, three years of service and two years of rank to go from a second lieutenant to a first lieutenant, hypothetically. That's the way that kind of worked. Plus, I mean, obviously, you had to have good evaluations along the way. That goes as part of the process, too, but I point out the time because I got commissioned as a second lieutenant in May of '67. I went to Vietnam May of '68, which was one year, one year as an officer and one year in grade. When I got there, the battalion commander, within a month, promoted me to first lieutenant. So, now, I'm a first lieutenant most of the time I'm in Vietnam. My last day in the battalion, before I went back to the replacement depot to come home, which was, like, one more year, I got promoted to captain. So, I went away as a second lieutenant, came back home from war as a captain, but, now, Vietnam was drawing down, so, the time in grade and time in service started stretching out. I think, at one time, it was almost like fourteen years of service and seven years in grade to go from a captain to a major. So, I ended up being a captain for ten years, all right. Then, all of a sudden, I made major and, within a few short years, I made lieutenant colonel.

SI: I want to talk a little more about Vietnam before we get into the rest of your career. You were mostly interacting with your fellow officers. How did you all view your mission in Vietnam? How did you view the war? Was that something you ever talked about?

RS: The political aspect of why we were there, what we were doing, how well we're doing, that really didn't become part of our conversation, and that's with senior NCOs as well as officers. Now, that was my experience with it--that just didn't come up. What came up was that we thought whoever was designing the way we fought the war was totally wrong. I was a big part of that thought process, because we're in South Vietnam, we're fighting at these little firebases, almost kind of like the cowboys and the cavalry circling the wagons in the old West. The Indians ride up and shoot and go away and they can always ride back the next day. I just didn't think, from a tactical, strategic point of view, that was the way you fought a war. If we were at war with North Vietnam, then, we should be invading North Vietnam, just like you invaded Europe during World War II. The enemy was there. You didn't stay in a static position with these little firebases and have somebody shooting at you every day. I just thought the structure, the way they aligned it, to me, it didn't make sense. Now, who am I? I was just a first lieutenant. So, I'm sure the guys that wore stars on their shoulders who designed this, and the political people who helped influence it, because, at that time, LBJ and others had a heavy hand in what was going on--I mean, hell, when the President's sitting down with people deciding what are going to be the targets for an airstrike, there's something wrong with that. I understand where we bow to the Commander-in-Chief. He should set some overall guidance, but, beyond that overall guidance, he should let the military design and prosecute the war. That's my opinion. I just didn't think it was happening that way, that, if we'd have went to North Vietnam and invaded, shelled them, bombed them, took over, [the war would have ended]. Now, obviously, this could have a negative effect, too. In Korea, when MacArthur went too far, he found the Chinese came in. That wasn't a good thing. So, there may be issues there, from that perspective, that I just couldn't appreciate at the time. That was my opinion then and that's my opinion still. I haven't seen anything to change it a lot. Anyway, I felt bad, because, overall, I don't think, when you look at the win-loss column, I just don't look at Vietnam as a win for us. The military, in head-to-head battle, nobody could beat us, but there's other aspects of war that influenced our getting an "L" instead of a "W," the way the general population started to feel, antiwar sentiment, the lack of fortitude by the politicians who pushed us there and got us there to stay the course. They started wavering. So, all that ended up making the situation not too good and, certainly, the experience of some of my fellow soldiers when they came home, who ran into real negative responses from the public, right in the airport when you're coming home, people shunning you and yelling at you and stuff like that. So, the first thing you wanted to do is take your uniform off. Nowadays, people go shopping in their uniforms, and so, it's a whole different sentiment. That carries a lot of weight with how the soldier feels.

SI: How aware were you of the antiwar movement when you were in Vietnam? Would that come across in the news? Was it something that bothered you?

RS: Yes and no. I was probably somewhat disturbed that--there are going to always be [antiwar] people. I mean, we had people in World War II and World War I who thought we should mind our own business and stay out of it. At least it comes across with the news media, it was such a large segment of our society that was antiwar or had antiwar sentiments and it's kind

of hard to think, "I'm here, but everybody back there looks at the world differently." So, that's a little hard to take, but, on the other side, I said, "That's their right to have that opinion." From that perspective, it didn't bother me all that much, all right. I've known some soldiers and some civilians who had such negative things to say about Muhammad Ali, what a coward he was, and so on. [Editor's Note: On April 28, 1967, Muhammad Ali refused to be inducted into the Army after being drafted, citing his Islamic beliefs. He was fined ten thousand dollars and sentenced to five years in prison. The US Supreme Court later overturned his sentence.] I said, thinking about it, "You have the right to refuse active military service. That's everybody's right. There are consequences for it and he was willing to take the consequences." He lost a lot of money. Boxing put him out, and so on, but I had to respect his personal tenacity to say, "This is my core belief and this is what I'm going to do," unlike a lot of young whites who left this country and went to Canada and other areas to avoid the draft. Then, Jimmy Carter comes in and pardons them all, so [that] they could come back into this country. [Editor's Note: On January 21, 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed Executive Order 11967 pardoning all Vietnam era draft evaders, except those who committed desertion and/or violent forms of protests or who had received a discharge other than honorable.] These guys started getting good jobs. I mean, they were college educated, already involved in their life, some who had already completed college, guys started doing good jobs. To the soldiers who were coming back, who couldn't get adequate care through the VA, that really did--to this day, if I could find every draft dodger from Vietnam, I would box them all up somewhere and just send them the hell out of this country. "You didn't want to be here during the wartime and, if you didn't want to face it, stand up, say, 'I refuse to take the oath.' There's consequences to it, but do it like Muhammad Ali, take the consequences, if that's your belief. If your belief is so strong that you have to leave the country, then, don't come back," all right, but Carter pardoned them and I always hold that against "peanut man." It goes to show you, he's got a degree in nuclear physics and he professes to have a great heart, but, sometimes, the heart can't allow people to do all kinds of things that they do, especially when it's negative things. That was the base of it. Listen, I disagree with the American Nazis and the skinheads, Ku Klux Klan, some of the good, old boys down in Texas, and so forth, but they have their right to their opinion, just as I have a right to mine. So, I don't hold--I mean, personally, just we keep our distances. "I don't go in your area and you don't come in mine, we're happy campers," but that happens everywhere, all over this country. There are going to be people that you can tolerate their point of view and there's some you can't. The ones you can't, leave them alone--they're entitled to their point of view. So, from a patriotic point of view, that's where I stand, okay. I saw a news [report] the other day, they had the American flag with the blue field and the rest of the stripes, instead of red and white, they had the rainbow colors of the gay liberation. I have gay people in my family. I have no problem [with that issue]. I'm probably one of the guys who have the least amount of problem with it, but just the fact that they used the American flag in that manner just upset me, being a patriot. Anyway, so, that's the nature of my political thoughts.

SI: Before we talk about coming home from Vietnam, are there any other memories that we have not discussed that stand out about your year there from May of 1968 to May of 1969?

RS: No, for me, Vietnam was a good experience. I mean, I never worried about being wounded, even during mortar and rocket attacks, even when they broke the perimeter wire. I've taken or seen gunfire on convoys when we were convoying from one area to another. It wasn't an

everyday experience and, certainly, every time it happened was an unexpected experience, but, when you're twenty-two years old, I mean, the world is out there. You don't see the end of life. You don't worry about the end of life. You're not worried, like today, when I wake up and, now, my knee's hurting or my elbow's hurting and you say, "I never did anything. Why is it hurting?" It just lets you know you're getting older and you see the end of--I've lived more years than I'm going to live. It's more of a reality, not that I get paranoid about it, but it makes me, today, do things differently than I would have done, or did do, when I was twenty-two. So, I guess war is for young men, in that sense. Maybe that's why the old guys become generals and stay in the back and send the young guys out, [laughter] politicians even further back. No, it's nothing unique. It was an experience I went through, just like any other military assignment I had. There were things that surprised me, there were things that I anticipated. The surprises, I learned to walk easy and learn, so [that] I could manage them as well as I could. One of the things I learned from an old sergeant then, I hold it true today, I've reminded a couple of guys, young guys in the gym, I say, "You know what? You're going to get upset, you're going to raise your blood pressure, and so on, get hands up." I said, "Only worry about the stuff you absolutely can control. Things you can't control, you can't control, right. The things you can control, if they bound on the uncontrollable areas, do things that at least when you hit the things you can't control, you enter those in as best a position as you can."

SI: It sounds like it was a maturing process as well.

RS: Oh, yes. If you don't learn as you go through life--life is very complicated and there are so many more questions that you have at every stage than you're ever going to have answers for. For me, right now, see, I have to deal with a four or five-year-old, which have energy that I no longer have. [laughter]

SI: Tell me about coming home from Vietnam. What was the process like?

RS: Well, one of the things that I think about, too, is, in Vietnam, if there were captured weapons, you could make arrangements to keep some of those, but you had to apply for it, file certain paperwork. They'd give you permission to be able to bring a captured weapon back, not machine-guns and bigger things like that, but rifles and such. The maintenance unit was a collection point. So, when units out in the field got enemy equipment, especially rifles, they were all turned into the maintenance unit, and then, we were supposed to document them and turn them in. There was a bolt-action rifle, Chinese-made rifle, that I liked, so, I kept it. I never turned it in. I put it in the middle of my duffle bag, packed all my clothes and everything around it. I was going to bring that home. When I got to the replacement depot, the day before we're getting ready to get on the plane to come home, they started telling us about all the guys that got caught with contraband going back home and that, "Now, you're back in the US, under US laws, and you're going to face this and you're going to face that," and so on. So, I started thinking about this weapon that I had, that I didn't have clearance for. So, I took it out of my duffle bag and I sold it to a guy coming in-country and came home with a clear conscience. When we got to the West Coast, back through Travis Air Force Base up there, we landed and I could see them unloading all the duffle bags off of the aircraft. Where we were in this big room, you could still see the aircraft out there. So, they were putting them on these little trolleys, stacked up, and they pulled them up so many feet away from the door where we were, from the tarmac door. We

were coming in another door this way, walking across the terminal, or that part of the terminal. The customs people were there and we had to fill out all these papers for customs, as you normally do. So, I remember, the customs guy looked at me and he says, "You have anything to declare?" I said, "No." He said, "Welcome home." That was it. The bags obviously didn't go through X-ray machines and, I mean, 9/11 hadn't happened, so, there wasn't all these extra restrictions going through the airport. So, I was saying, "Damn, I could've kept that. Nobody would've known." [laughter] No, so, anyway, that lasted about thirty seconds, and then, I'm saying, "I'm just happy to be home," went out and arranged for a civilian flight back here to New Jersey, got to Newark Airport. It's not the airport we know today. It was the old Newark Airport, the big square building down the road from there. I landed there. I'm in uniform, obviously. I don't remember any hostile people, but I remember getting some really bad looks from people. It's almost like a Norman Rockwell picture--you could see all these people scowling at you when you walked through. I just kept on walking and I went to one of the lockers in the front part of the airport and locked my duffle bag in it, because, in those days, we had big lockers where you could lock up suitcases and stuff in the airport. I proceeded to the bar. About two hours later, I called my dad and he came and picked me up and went home. Mom had cooked a dinner. I was married when I went to Vietnam, so, my wife was there and my son was there and my brothers, and so on. We just kicked around and kibitzed a little bit about what happened. I was glad to be home. My grandfather, who was a World War I veteran, lived about four blocks from us. He was also the commander of the local VFW and "Mr. Busybody," knew everybody in town, from the mayor on down. He came by. I remember getting ready to change out of my uniform. He didn't want me to; I'd keep my uniform on, got in the car with him and we had to go around and meet all his friends and his buddies. I was like his new toy that he just got. [laughter] So, that was kind of it and I just took about two weeks, just relaxing, and so on, before I went and reported to my new duty assignment.

SI: You said that was in Newark.

RS: It was in Annville, Pennsylvania, out by Harrisburg. It was Fort Indiantown Gap. I was assigned to the Army Reserve advisor group. So, I went out there and, apparently, that's the headquarters for the advisor group. When guys come in, they assign them to be advisors to selected Reserve units stationed throughout their area of operation. I got reassigned back to Newark, Lodi and Woodbridge.

SI: Okay.

RS: The Reserve units really didn't want my advice. They were more concerned that I just be there and put my signature on their--they had a form called a 1380, which was their attendance form. They couldn't get paid unless the active duty advisor signed off on it. They had a habit of bringing it right away, soon as the commander showed up, and the guy would sign off on it, but I wouldn't do that. I'd wait until the end of the drill. [laughter] Just in case someone snuck out and wasn't accounted for at the end of the drill as well as in the beginning, he wouldn't get paid. So, initially, I wasn't, I would assume, well-liked, but I could care less. Right is right and wrong is wrong, as [in] *The World According to Garp*. Is that it?

SI: Yes. I forget who the author is, Updike, maybe. [Editor's Note: *The World According to Garp* is a 1978 novel by John Irving.]

RS: Yes.

SI: Were these Reserve units more in line with the old National Guard system, where it was a very cliquish unit?

RS: Well, it was cliquish to some extent. There was a lot of internal politics among people, for one reason or the other, vying for duty positions and who was going to be the next commander when the one guy left, and so on, who could get assigned a friend to this position versus your friend, that kind of stuff. One of the units that I had was the 300th General Hospital unit, a huge unit, but all the muckety-mucks were doctors. They were [from] Martland Medical Center [in Newark, New Jersey], and this hospital and that hospital. So, they were all having their thing at drills. Doctors, not all, but a lot of doctors, feel that, "We're kind of akin to Jesus. We walk on water." Lawyers do the same thing and a few others, but it was very pronounced in that group of water-walkers in there. In fact, I was wondering how one guy could be the commander. He was the most obese guy I've ever seen in a uniform. I didn't know they could have a uniform that big. He was a heart specialist. You would've thought he would do better for his own heartbeat. I always remember him, because they, of course, had meals at the Reserve center. He had a full set of false teeth. He would take them out after he got done eating and wash them out in a glass of milk right at the table. I thought that was one of the grossest things I'd ever seen. [laughter] Of course, everybody was lesser-ranking than him, so, nobody had the tenacity to bring it to his attention. The other side was that, because of Vietnam, as opposed to a guy like Muhammad Ali or others who refused military service and the guys who fled and went to Canada, you had a lot of guys join the Reserves and the National Guard. So, as long as they were a part of an active Reserve or Guard unit, they weren't being called up for the draft and sent away. So, they did their six years of total military service in the Reserves. So, at least when I got there, a lot of these guys were getting near the end of that six-year obligation. Guys were [holding] full-time jobs, accountants, a couple lawyers, businessmen of all ilk. So, these were guys that had some education, had some money. They found their way to not go to Vietnam by going in the Reserves. So, what you had is a lot of people of all ranks in there who were very intelligent people. You didn't want guys drafted off the street. So, you had capabilities among the people there that far exceeded what you would find in an active military unit, often times, because of the draft. So, the Reserve program, at least the ones I saw, were doing quite well. Paperwork was perfect--everything was dot the "Is" and cross the "Ts." The only thing was, there was a couple guys that had the habit of showing up, get [in] the initial count, and then, disappear and wouldn't be there for final count. After two pay periods and they didn't get paid, that stopped, but I let them know, "Don't go out in the parking lot and mess with my car, because I'll mess with your car," because a couple of them had a habit of doing that to a few people. Other than that, it was a reasonably good experience. I was just dismayed at some of the lack of, I don't know, motivation, patriotism among the people. For some, it was just a part-time job, getting extra pay. Some, it was a little prestige in their local community, but it's a necessary part of our military structure. People don't realize that the idea, initially, from my understanding, was that we had World War I, we had World War II, so, the next big war, when we get ready to go, we need a lot of people with a lot of different skills, but we can't afford to keep that many people full-time on

the payroll, so, the National Guard, Army Reserve. So, you're paying a part-time pay for guys who have training and some experience that you can immediately call up and use them. National Guard, at least here in New Jersey, you had a heavy amount of units that were artillery, some tank, and so on, whereas in the Army Reserve, in this particular Pennsylvania-New Jersey area, you had a lot of Signal, Quartermaster, Transportation. So, a lot of those types of units were in the Reserves and the idea is, when the, quote, "balloon goes up," we all get dressed up and go to war. Unfortunately, the world changed and those kinds of huge wars no longer seem to be on the horizon. Well, we started having all these other smaller wars. Well, you still need these guys. So, what happens is, National Guard and Army Reserve get called up as though the balloon went up and they go off to war. They come back, and then, a couple years later, they get called up again. So, all these frequent call-ups, it's very problematic. It's very problematic to the family and it certainly is problematic to the job, because, legally, they're supposed to keep your job or an equivalent job for you, by law. A lot of companies just don't do that. You lose out, basically. Now, technically, you could take them to court. The guy can't take them to court, but the government can take them to court, but, let's face it, the Justice Department's not going to spend their money and time going after some small company. So, the guy loses out. So, that's probably another big negative about what we're doing today with these young folks, the frequent call-ups, and so on.

SI: In your duties, did you have to deal with employers? Would any of these Reservists come to you with problems like, "My employer is not letting me go," or, "They did not give me credit?"

RS: Yes, the guys, employers, would let you go, but they're not obligated to pay you. When you're not there, they don't have to pay you. So, if a guy's military pay was much less than what he's making on his civilian job, that hits his family. So, that's an issue. Health benefits, some would temporarily release you from health benefits. That was maybe one, two cases, max. Most of them will let you retain your health benefits, realizing, if you got hurt on your annual training period, the military'd take care of you, but your kids would still be covered under your health plan, if the company had a health plan. Some of these guys worked [at] companies that didn't have health plans. I became more aware of it once I joined the Reserves and especially as a commander, because you're looking at a two-week training period for your unit to go somewhere to do something and a guy shows up and says, "Look, my employer told me, if I go, I'm out of a job." He said, "I can't afford that. Can I go later?" So, sometimes, you could find a unit. Let's say that unit's going next month, "We'll arrange for you to go with that unit to get your annual training in." Hopefully, it's the same type of unit. More than likely, it's not, but, hopefully, the skill that's in that unit is also the skill in this unit--sometimes, sometimes not. Occasionally, we would get a guy that'd be looking for an earlier deployment because his job was going to allow him now, but not later. You have a lot of small companies that shutdown. They actually take a month's shutdown every year. So, when they shutdown, that's when people went on vacation, that's when you went and did your Reserve duty. If that didn't match the time your unit had you scheduled, that was always an issue. So, there was quite a bit of that to have to contend with. So, I didn't see it as an advisor, but I saw it when I was a commander of a Reserve unit.

SI: Your position as a Reserve advisor was for one year.

RS: Yes.

SI: What was your next assignment?

RS: That's when I went to the Transportation Officers' Advanced Course and that was back at Fort Eustis. That was a little different than the basic course, OCS, because it was a lot of physical [training]. Every day was a lot of physical activity as well as classroom training. Advanced course was basically classroom. You went to school every day. When you're done class, you hung out at the "O" club or went downtown or did whatever you wanted to do.

SI: How long was that course?

RS: I think the course was, like, about three months, something like that, yes. When I got done with that, graduated from there, I went to Korea as a company commander over there.

SI: Where were you stationed in Korea?

RS: A town called Uijeongbu, which it was a significant town. It was about a forty-five-minute car ride north of Seoul. If you looked at any of the old *M\*A\*S\*H* TV shows, they were near Uijeongbu. In fact, the area in which they supposedly really took place, there was a helicopter hospital pad about three clicks from where we were, about three kilometers from where my unit was, just on the other side of the portion of town that my unit was located near. That was a huge assignment. So, I enjoyed that; worked the heck out of me, but I enjoyed it.

SI: This was about 1971 and 1972.

RS: Yes.

SI: What was your everyday activity like there, now as a battalion commander?

RS: No, a company commander.

SI: Company commander, sorry.

RS: Yes. I had a maintenance unit and I had a supply depot. Eighth Army was still there--the Seventh Army was not. The Seventh Army had been stood down and they left Korea. So, some of the activities (filling a void) that remained were larger than they would normally be, because of one transitioning out, but still needing to do certain activities. So, as the company commander, I had a full compound and we did all sorts of wheeled vehicle and track maintenance. We repaired radios, we repaired [vehicles] and did smaller things with radios or vehicles, particularly. For example, I had one small shop, all they did was take brake shoes off of vehicles that were worn out, when the brake shoes were worn out. They'd take the old pads off and mount new pads on them, clean them up, make sure they were in good shape, and they put them back in the supply. At that time, the Army had boots that were soles and heels just like the old shoes when you went to the shoemaker to get new soles or new heels. So, we had a shop that did that. We also had a forty-five-foot trailer that one whole side had been put on door swings, so that you could un-hatch it at the bottom, swing the whole side up, big poles would

hold the side up and inside was a complete shoe repair facility. Of course, you have to have a generator to run all the power for the machines in there, but we would send this boot repair van to different military compounds in the northern part of South Korea. They would go out and you'd make arrangements for them to be bedded down with a unit and be fed by them. If there was a PX there, they would set up next to the PX. If not, the people on the compound would give them a place that's kind of where a lot of traffic goes through. Guys could walk up and, just, they'd put their boots up there, fill out a form, go do whatever they've got to do, come back later. The boots would be repaired, because we have to have job orders for everything we do. So, the guys would sign off on them and we got a lot more done than waiting for them to send them in to us to repair in our facility. Plus, it was less accountability, because, then, you had to track whose boots they were and where they came from and all that. So, we did a lot of that. I had a cannibalization yard. This is where equipment that's no longer economically repairable would go into a "cam yard," which is basically an Army junkyard. You'd take tracked vehicles, wheeled vehicles, other large pieces of equipment in there. We, the maintenance unit, could use good parts off of them, if we were short that part. Let's say you needed a generator for a jeep and we ran out of the last generator out of the shop and out of our tech supply area. [If] we could find a good one on a jeep in the cam yard, we could use that, but that's all we were authorized to do. We could not take that item, that jeep or truck or whatever it was, and repair it to a point where it could now be put back into service somewhere. That was against Army rules. The Air Force would allow you to take major items out of their yards, but not the Army. We had a huge tech supply. We had, like, twenty-seven hundred different line items in this supply land, part of our fixed facility, and that's where the shops got their parts for a repair. It's also where units would come in and present us with a requisition and we would fill their requisition for certain parts that they were responsible for at the unit level. I remember, we had--I want to say it was, a nomenclature, an NCR-500 type of thing. It was a big machine in the shop in which we had these big pieces of what we call ledger forms, a page. You'd have the name of the part on there and you'd type in that you had ten, but you issued one. You'd dip this in the machine and the thing would come up, like an old Ben Franklin printing press, [laughter] it would print the information on this ledger form. You'd take it back out, put it in its drawer, wherever it was kept, like a file drawer, but that's where we kept our accountability for repair parts, and then, each one had a number on it. So, let's say we normally kept ten of the item; maybe four was our cutoff point. [If] we got to four, then, we would order enough to come back into our supply authorization. I was responsible--that was a big thing of accountability for me as the company commander, in that the monthly accountability on that had to match. I had to file a report to my senior headquarters for that. The thing is that the accountability was a dollar value, it wasn't a number of parts accountability. So, let's say I was over or I was short. Let's say I was over one generator that was fifty dollars, but I was short twenty carter pins, which were a dollar twenty-five each, all right. Well, the value of the one I was over far exceeded the value of the ones I was missing. So, monetarily, I was in good shape, even though I could be missing a lot of items.

SI: Yes.

RS: It was a crazy way to do inventory. Usually, I was really not out of balance much, but it was just a crazy way to do inventory, in my opinion, but the battalion had three maintenance units beyond the headquarters maintenance unit. Everybody that was, officer-wise, being assigned there, the jobs called for an Ordnance trained officer and everybody was an Ordnance

officer except for me. I was a Transportation officer. Yet, my monthly reports, my monthly accountability reports, far exceeded all the other units. The battalion commander I had at the time, I was his favorite guy, because, I mean, I was just exceeding all the standards of accountability, except for one. He didn't worry about that too much, so, I didn't worry about it, but the new commander--he was there for my first six months and, my last six months, I had a new commander, who came in with all kinds of new management type of programs that he learned in school and he was chomping at the bit to invoke them. So, I ended up with the last six months being quite a challenge.

SI: From what I recall from *M\*A\*S\*H*, but, also, what I have heard from other veterans who served in Korea, that area seemed pretty bleak, not a lot around there. Was that the case?

RS: Well, certainly was at the time *M\*A\*S\*H* was there, but that was back in 1953, when they got out of there. [Editor's Note: The Korean War occurred from 1950 to 1953.] So, beyond the junior officers I had, which were lieutenants, I also had two warrant officers. These are guys who had been senior sergeants who demonstrated a unique expert capability in certain areas. They had to pass some application for it, but they became warrants. So, the two that I had actually served in Korea during the war. So, they were super amazed at how things had changed. You had parts of, particularly, Seoul and Uijeongbu which were big, modern, nice buildings. Then, you had other areas that kind of reminded you of the old areas, like, there were certain streets that were not paved, wide streets and narrow streets, stores you would go in where there's no prices on anything. Everything was barter. You go in and you see a ring and you ask, "How much?" The guy would tell you how much, and so, you barter back and forth until you settle on a price. Nowadays, everything is more modern, like what we have here, where everything's got a tag on it with the price on it. More streets were paved, firefighting services were more improved. So, all that has improved over the years. It was pretty decent, as far as I recall, yet, maintaining enough of the old structure and customs, and so on, that you could get an appreciation for what the Korean culture and customs were like, but, that, I found very interesting.

SI: What stood out for you about it?

RS: The friendliness of the people, their willingness to tell you about, when they did something, what was the ancestral heritage for that particular activity, and so on. They would talk to you about their native foods and be willing to provide you with the food. I found local people would invite you into their homes. One of the things I learned very quickly is a few Korean words. They would advise me, because they knew, being an American, we didn't eat dogs, but you go in a restaurant and they served dog meat. So, you had to know "*Bulgogi*" was "beef" and "*gaegogi*" was "dog." So, people were friendly like that. I remember a weekend when I was off, climbing up a mountain trail, way on top of the mountain was a small hut with a huge Buddha up there. The priests would come out and chat with us about how this came to be up on the mountain and why it's there and that his austere lifestyle was because of his religion. So, it was those kinds of things you learned, so [that] you get to appreciate who these people were and what they were like. Contrary to that, kind of a flipside, I remember spending a day at the zoo in Seoul. I was amazed, because, unlike ours, where we had huge fences around everything, they still had fences, but they had these huge moats, so that when you went to see the elephants, you could look at them without these fences intruding on your viewpoint, because it was so far back that,

by the time you got up there, these elephants couldn't cross the moat. So, they got to a point and they had to stop. Not all animals were housed that way. Others that were more dangerous were, of course, in the more typical enclosures. They had a huge area kind of in the center of the zoo where you could eat, a restaurant where you could eat, and they had a big, huge car track in there, full of cars like this [RC cars]. You'd rent a car and you put it on the track and you'd get your little thing and you run it around a pretty sizable track. I remember being there one day and, "What the hell?" I had rented a car, put it on the track and I was running it. All these little kids were watching me. So, I went over, rented a car for all the kids. [laughter] Hell, we were out there having a great time, running cars, and they were smiling when they were beating me, and so on. I mean, little stuff like that, that just made that tour--that was the positives, as opposed to the negatives. You learned kids everywhere are the same. People are friendly, people are not so friendly. We had contracts with civilian Korean companies for different things, such as they would come on to the compound--and I didn't have the contract, the government had the contract with them--and they would come and pick up the trash. So, the garbage pickup took place twice a week and a guy would come in with his trucks and they'd pick up everything. Now, the owner of the business used to come and visit with us. We'd take him--we had a combined officer-senior NCO club--take him in there, we start drinking. They couldn't get a lot of the alcohol that we got and, if they did, it was extremely expensive. So, once in a while, I'd give the guy a bottle of Jim Beam, which he loved. He was very happy, so that when we knew we had a big inspection coming up, he'd send his guys in early in the morning. If it didn't look like it belonged on the ground, they picked it up. So, our area was totally neat. So, it was kind of tit-for-tat. He also supplied two pigs, because he had a huge pig business, on an open spit for our company picnic. By the time we showed up to the resort area, they were already cooked. He had tables out with all of the Korean dishes, and so on. He even bussed in a busload of Korean girls in their native costumes. They were doing dances in the woods for us, and so on. So, it may not have been totally kosher, but, tit-for-tat, we got, I think, as much as he got out of his association with us. Well, that was another one of the good aspects of being there. Plus, he, along with the Korean workers that worked for me, they were very helpful in telling you, "Look, don't go to that shop, go to this shop. They give you better prices." I had a Korean secretary, which came with the job, because, as I said, this was a division that now went down to a company, so, you had all this extra manpower and resources there. Like, we had a class three operation of POL, class three is POL [petroleum, oils and lubricants]--we had a complete storage facility for all kinds of fuels and lubes. We also provided the food to the mess halls. They would come in, the mess sergeant with his requisition, what he needed, "Two cases of carrots," so much of this, so much of that, and they'd haul it back to their mess hall. So, we provided all that for a good portion of the mess halls in that general area of South Korea. All the fuel, we provided fuel to all the military locations in our area of operations. All the fuel came into my depot and we stored it and provided it. There was a mortuary there, only had two refrigerators. Of course, a unit that size never was authorized a mortuary, but, because of the stand-down and the transition period, it was still there and I was assigned guys that were trained to operate it. We never had an American the whole time I was there, so, they didn't really have any work, but we took overflow from local Koreans that couldn't have a body stored for a couple days. It wasn't a hundred percent kosher, but we did it and it kept us in good stead with all the local villages around and the powers-to-be. A lot of the my maintenance shops all had Koreans as well as US military, as well as Korean military. A lot of our units at that time were assigned what's called KATUSAs, Korean Army Support to the American Army [Korean Augmentation to the US

Army]. So, I had fifty of these KATUSAs. They had their own separate building and their own separate first sergeant, but they fell out in formation with the rest of the American troops and went in the shops and did the same work that our guys did, along with the civilians. That was the continuity, so that when soldiers transferred, went out, you always had these civilians who were working there full-time. They were good, really great workers, all right. Being that that situation existed, I was looked upon as one of the key employers of Koreans in that area. So, the Mayor of Uijeongbu invited me to attend their monthly meetings with the council and all, which was interesting, especially 1972, I remember the year now, because Miss Korea came from Uijeongbu in 1972. She was at one of the council meetings. Me, her and the Mayor all took pictures together, I remember that. [laughter] I never did get a copy of that, but anyway. So, it was kind of a nice working relationship. Because of all of this extra responsibility for all of the supply point and this and that, it forced me to learn a lot and be responsible for a lot. So, that was, in retrospect, a much bigger assignment than had I gone back to Vietnam, especially since I couldn't have been a commander there.

SI: Aside from the KATUSAs, did you have other interactions with the Korean military?

RS: Yes, the different Korean military, even though we didn't support them, occasionally, I'd get an officer that would show up on my compound, usually a senior officer, a major, colonel. One time, a general showed up. They were in dire need of getting something repaired and they knew I didn't fix their stuff, but they begged for a little help. I'd talk to my senior Koreans in the shop and say, "We can't put this one on the books. You mind doing a little work extra, off to the side?" and maybe we'd fix something for them. So, the guy, the mechanic that did it, he [the Korean officer] said, "Look, tell him to take a half day off, on me," or something like that. So, you keep relationships like that going. The Korean Veterans' Association had to give tests to civilians in order to qualify them for jobs, like welders, mechanics of different sorts, and so on. So, I would let them use our shop to do their tests, the practical portion of the test, for the guys who wanted to qualify. So, that kept us in good stead with the Korean Veterans' Association. So, you have to learn to work, I guess, with the people around you, tit-for-tat. They took care of us in many respects and we took care of them.

SI: After your year in Korea, was it 1973 when you came back?

RS: Yes.

SI: What was your next assignment?

RS: I came back from there, I was assigned to Military Traffic Management Command, which the physical location was the facility at Bayonne, New Jersey. So, I thought that was kind of cool. I was going to do some transportation work, finally, but that didn't pan out, but anyway. Listen, let me take a break.

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You said your next assignment was up in Bayonne, but something happened.

RS: Well, yes, I really thought that, finally, in my military career, I was going to be assigned to a transportation job as a Transportation officer. When I got there, I was initially interviewed by the base commander and the slot he had for me was working in the base supply. I verbally, but respectfully, tried to wrangle my way out of it and get into one of the transportation directorates. Obviously, that wasn't going to be forthcoming, but the idea was, "Take this job and, as time goes on, we'll see what we can do to move you into it." So, I ended up being assigned to the base supply. All the directorates had either a civilian in charge of that directorate or a military guy. So, the directorate I was in had a military guy, whereas in-land traffic, for example, had a civilian that was in charge, so, whoever, whether it was a military guy as the [one] in charge of that directorate, with a civilian as the next in line, or it was the reverse, the reverse in another department. So, I ended up in this department with this lieutenant colonel, who was in charge of it, and he had a woman who was the deputy. It seemed to me that she had been there since the first brick was laid in the first building that went on that compound. She had been there a long time. One of the things a lot of the military finds is that, because of the continuity of having so many civilians in it, a lot of the power rests within their ranks, as opposed to the military, in how things got done. One of the things in the base supply area, they were responsible for all of the claims against truck carriers for lost or damaged cargo, which was kind of surprising to me that base supply would have [that obligation]. Among the things they had to be responsible for, that was one of them. So, when I got there, they assigned me to clean up the claims section. So, I spent about, I guess, ninety days just going through file drawers, reading files and keeping a ledger on all the different truck companies. I ended up finding that we had--let's say company X had ten claims, of which six were no longer viable, because, by law, you had so many months or a year, or whatever the time was by law, to complete the claim. If not, it became null and void. So, while someone initiated the claim for a loss or damage, no one followed up to make sure this company paid that claim or at least come back with enough justification to delete the claim. Then, of course, there were claims that were still viable. So, on my ledger, I had company X and we had ten claims, six were not viable and that amounted to 250,000 dollars that we should've gotten back that we can no longer get back. Here, on the other side of their ledger, there's seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of claims that were still viable. So, I went through this with all the companies, which was a pretty good exercise, because whoever filed them, we'd find X up here and you'd also find X down in this drawer later on. [laughter] I had no idea why they filed the way they filed. It couldn't be date, sequence, nothing--I couldn't find any reason, rhyme or reason to it. Anyway, when I got done with this ledger, and, like I said, it took a lot of time, and then, I did tallies on it, I went in and presented it to the Commander, with his deputy sitting there, and knew there was going to be bad news, because this woman, I remember, she lived on Staten Island, but there were times when she didn't go home. She had a couch in her office. She would sleep on the couch. She'd be there at night, looking at stuff and doing things. "Oh." Anyway, I went in there and what it boiled down to, and I don't remember the real hard numbers any longer, but we had X number of truck companies. Among them, we had these companies that had this amount of claims initially filed. We had this much that we could no longer collect because of the age, past the due, legal requirement date, and here's how much they still owe us, all right. So, when I got done, I said, "Now, by military rules, these companies, we have to send an immediate cease-and-desist letter to. They can no longer do business with the government until they settle these claims, because it was too much, too long. These, we send a warning

letter, that in X point in time, if you don't have this settled, you will get a cease-and-desist letter." The Commander looked at me. This woman's eyes went as big as pizza pies. [laughter] I guess they didn't expect this from my going through the files.

SI: Yes.

RS: So, I remembered the woman saying to the Commander, said, "We've got to take a look at that. Please give me all that. Give me all that stuff." "No, I've been making it--this is my baby. I've been working on this," but they're in charge, so, you give it to them, right. Two days later, I was reassigned from that office of this same directorate down to the actual supply office, where they issued the supplies and kept their property books and stuff like that. So, I never knew what happened on the other end. My fantasy said, "I wonder who's paying off who up there." [laughter] Anyway, so, that part of it was done and I went down in the base supply. They told me, "Review the property book, make sure we're up-to-date," and blah, blah, blah. I come to find out that we had guys that were hand receipt--something's in the property book, you give it to somebody, you get a hand receipt, so that it's still your property, but someone else was using it. Every so often, you're supposed to verify that they've still got it and everything's okay. Well, it wasn't being done, but the big *faux pas* was that guys left the Army. They got out of the Army. Their enlistment time was up or whatever--they're gone. They never brought the property back or brought the hand receipt back in. So, this stuff's showing, "Hand receipted out to Joe Blow." Joe Blow left the base eight months ago. That's just a big no-no in the supply world, but the civilians in there didn't seem to be very excited about it. While I was hashing these kinds of things out with them, we got a call in from the new base commander. On to the base, by the flagpole was there, there were these two seventy-five-millimeter pack howitzers sitting out there. These are little guns, little small howitzers that shoot seventy-five-millimeter shells that were small. Anyway, he didn't like them sitting there by the flagpole and wanted us to get rid of them. So, going through, it took a while to figure out what was going on. Those pack howitzers were not assigned; they weren't part of our unit property authorization.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RS: Okay, so, it took a while to figure out what was going on, because we were not authorized those pack howitzers. This is a transportation facility, not an armor-artillery facility. Someone who had my job, some couple years ahead of me, obtained those two pack howitzers from a unit that was located at Fort Hamilton, New York. That guy was a captain. He's no longer in the Army. Now, he should have taken those pack howitzers back or someone else should've got a new hand receipt since the Howitzers are still there. So, I went over to Fort Hamilton and found out that the unit had been disbanded. They no longer existed. So, the guy I was talking to there in the base supply said, "How can a unit clear their property book without clearing all their hand receipts?" "I said, they had not. Here's a hand receipt from the unit for two pack howitzers. I've got them over at my base." [laughter] He looks at me like, "No, you don't." I said, "Yes, I do." I said, "You had a unit, get out of here somehow, didn't properly clear their property book. We've got a guy that left the Army and didn't turn them in." I said, "So, we're stuck here. We've got to figure out what to do." So, the guy says, "What do you suggest?" I said, "Is there another unit here who can take these howitzers?" because there is a way you can make an entry on your property book saying, "Found on Post." You pick them up, and then, you turn them in. He said,

"No." He said, "We can't do that." He said, "You've got to find another way." So, I said, "Where can I take these howitzers and get rid of them?" So, somewhere further out on Long Island, there's an Army turn-in of old equipment, So-and-So Salvage Point. So, I contacted them, found that they would take the howitzers. Then, I had to come back to Bayonne and make a property book entry, "Found on Post," even though I knew there was a hand receipt, put in, "Found on Post." Then, I can actually take a document and turn them in. So, now, I had to get a couple vehicles where I could hook these pack howitzers up behind and tow them across Staten Island and the bridge. [laughter] That was interesting, watching the guys at the tollbooth watch me tow a couple big, to them, big guns through there and take them out to this cam yard out on Long Island and turn them in, got rid of them. So, sometimes, you get a little project to do, could turn into, I'll just say, an interesting adventure. [laughter] Anyway, I did that for a couple of months, and then, I got a call. The Military Traffic Management Command was headquartered out of Washington, DC. They had two sub-commanders under them. The commander in Washington was a two-star, the sub-commanders were each one-star. There was one in what they called Eastern Area and one in [what was] called Western Area. So, Eastern Area had all the transportation facilities east of the Mississippi River, to include overseas activities throughout Europe, and so on, whereas the Western commander had everything west of the Mississippi River and in Asia. So, they had quite a huge responsibility. This is all the things that fell under the Joint Traffic Management Command that the Army had restructured into. So, I get call up to the Eastern Area Headquarters, which was in the old Brooklyn Navy Yard. So, I go over there and I report to a general. He has a new assignment for me. He wants me to be the race relations/Equal Opportunity officer for the Eastern Area. I tried to politely not accept the job. I didn't want it. As important as it could be in one respect, it's a dead-end job. You go in that job, that's a dead-end. The General promised to take care of me, "Do this job for him and I'll get a good assignment after it," but you take that tongue-in-cheek, because who's to say he's going to be the commander that long? Anyhow, obviously, when you're a captain and a general is telling you that he wants you to do something--he was polite enough to listen to you, hear your plea, but he still wants you to do it--you take a step back, you salute smartly, you say, "Yes, sir," you go do it. [laughter] So, I ended up being assigned as the race relations/Equal Opportunity officer for the Eastern Area, Military Traffic Management Command. The senior person in the office was a civilian. So, I actually worked, reported to, this civilian guy, who was a good guy. He was an accounting major out of Rutgers.

SI: Okay.

RS: He runs his own side business doing taxes. He's been doing my taxes all these years. [laughter] Anyway, shortly after I was in there, I had to be trained, so, they sent me to the Department of Defense Race Relations Institute, which was located at Patrick Air Force Base in Melbourne, Florida. So, I got to spend three months down in Florida going through this training course and that was interesting, then, came back. He had an office about this size, and then, straight out the door was a long area, maybe twice this length, and then, another office the same size as this. So, I was on one end, he was on the other end and, basically, there were female clerks that did all the paperwork for us in-between us. So, basically, we listened to complaints that were made by civilians as well as military and investigated the complaints and wrote up reports as to what we found and what we recommend corrective action. The majority of the complaints really came from the civilian staff, not from the military. We were also responsible

to do Army-mandated race relations and Equal Opportunity training. So, I was responsible to do training classes for the military at different locations, and so on, including Bayonne. Once a year, we did a thing; Martin Luther King Day, we always had a big turn out and we'd have speeches and other related activities. The classes were fun, because you take all this training, learning how to do interaction, interactive stuff with people in the training classes. I guess my favorite one was showing a train car, trolley train or whatever, with people sitting there with their bags of groceries or a suitcase and their suit and tie and guys with coveralls. You always had at least one black guy in the picture. He was either in coveralls or a suit and tie with a briefcase. A white guy would be sitting with a knife and you'd show it to one guy--well, you send a couple guys out of the room--and you show it to one guy. When he felt he got it, you take the picture down, bring one guy in. He explains to the next guy what he saw. Then, that guy now explains it to the next guy you bring in the room. By the third or fourth guy, the knife always changes the hands from the white guy to the black guy, and so on. [laughter] So, I always found that interesting, because we had a lot of long discussions on biases, what we think and how it impacts how we see things. Like any job, I didn't want it, but you kind of throw yourself into it once you get it. There's nothing worse than being miserable and hating your job and it just makes life miserable. So, you learned to take the good with the bad. There were some very interesting investigations. I remember going with my civilian counterpart down to Sunny Point, North Carolina, where they have a big ammunition depot; we went down because there was a black female who was complaining that she was overlooked for a job and blah, blah, blah. She had the same qualifications as the other person who got the job and it was the "old boy network" taking care of this person. So, it was resolved in her favor. It was a legitimate complaint, we found substantiation of the complaint. She got some back pay, and so on. I remember, shortly thereafter, she actually got a job higher than the one she wanted. The next complaint came from one of her underlings, charging her with the same [thing]; we went down there [for], [laughter] that. So, it was a lesson learned that, sometimes, we look at things and there's a race bias, but, sometimes, it's just a management bias, doesn't matter who has the job. So, it was, like I say, you learn things in every job. This was the time that that third reduction in force started cranking up and I ended up getting caught up in that reduction in force. So, my assignment there ended with me actually getting off of active duty.

SI: How much time elapsed between when you got off active duty and when you joined the Reserve unit?

RS: Five or six months.

SI: Okay, not that long.

RS: Yes.

SI: Did you get a job or did you look into going back to school? What was your next move after active duty?

RS: I did three major things. Well, I got a job as a supervisor at a warehouse for Bamberger's over in Bloomfield, but I had filed applications at several other places. I was in Bloomfield at the warehouse for three weeks when another job came through that paid more and [was] a job I

wanted. So, I went in, I remember seeing the guy that was in charge of that portion of the warehouse. I remember him because he was also in the Reserves and we ended up being in the same unit together, a couple years later. [laughter] I left there after just a few weeks and I took a job with BASF, which is an international chemical company, and became the plant traffic manager for their facility in Kearny, New Jersey. So, I did that. I became a Cub Scoutmaster, because I didn't like the programs and the guy that was running it and my son was interested in going to Scouts. So, I became a Cub Scoutmaster. Now, at the same time, I was just finishing up a divorce. So, that was interesting, because, now, I had a wife that no longer was involved, except for our interaction with my son, and I had to interact with all these women who were den mothers in my Cub Scout pack, who felt they had the right to come to my apartment for a meeting, and then, tell me how to rearrange my apartment. [laughter] So, I guess women sometimes will be what they are; I'll be in a lot of trouble for that comment. The other thing is, I decided to finish my education. While I was on active duty, I had taken classes at the College of William and Mary, the University of Maryland, I took some correspondence courses from Indiana. So, I was compiling all these credits from these different schools over time, but nothing collectively. When I was getting off active duty, the office I had to go to to do my paperwork and get out was at Fort Hamilton, New York. While I was there, the woman that was in charge encouraged me to take some CLEP [College-Level Examination Program] exams. So, I took all I could. So, between the CLEP exams, that I passed, and the other credits that I had gotten, I put all that on the paperwork and filed an application with Rutgers. I was surprised; I didn't think they were going to take much, but they took more than I anticipated, laid out a program and I started going to school at the Newark Campus. So, working all day, and then, taking classes at night and, in-between that, the Cub Scout pack and my son on odd weekends, that kind of took my time for a while. Then, of course, I joined the Reserves, which was kind of interesting in the sense that, one summer, I was trying to take summer courses, too, which are, what, a month?

SI: Yes.

RS: So, in two weeks, you get your midterm, and then, you get your final. I went in to see this one professor and said, "Look, I'm in the Active Reserves. We're scheduled to go away in two weeks." So, he said to me, he says, "Well, I guess that means you get your midterm at the end of the first week and your final at the end of the second week." I mean, that's all the sympathy I got from the guy, [laughter] but it was one of those areas--it was geology, rocks and all that stuff. At that time, we didn't have computers and iPads and all that stuff. So, you read *National Geographic* and you looked at books and shows like that. So, you had some idea what some of that was about. So, I ended up getting a "B" out of the course. So, for a two-week class, I thought I did pretty good, but that was the biggest constraint. The other fun part about it was that there was a pub on campus. All us military guys going there at night school, we found our way into the pub, collectively, on occasion. So, we had a little camaraderie that way and chatting with each other, and we never really talked about war experiences. We just enjoyed our life on campus, talked about girls and stuff like that. What can I tell you, us old, grown men?

SI: Would you say there were a lot of veterans on campus then, that you knew?

RS: It was about ten, that I recall, that were on campus. I met them, and then, of course, in the classes I was taking, I met guys that were, like, salesmen for Miller Beer, a couple guys that

worked for Maersk Steamship Line, which was in line with the business I was in, in transportation, and so on. So, we ended up, with some of the guys that were military guys and the guy from Schaefer Beer and the guy from Miller and the guy from Maersk and others, we would all, somehow, just get together in June and we'd go up to Port Jervis, somewhere up in that region. We'd rent kayaks and we'd just come down the Delaware and camp overnight on the side of a shore. We always camped somewhere where you walk up the hill and there was a bar. So, we did that for a few years, and then, the group just kind of [disbanded]. I guess guys graduated and everybody went off to their different jobs and we just no longer saw each other, but, besides classes and the pub and the guys, that was it, because, otherwise, you were off to your job or with your family.

SI: Do any of the professors or courses stand out in your memory?

RS: Oh, yes. There's a guy I like to sometimes present when I'm doing a talk, depending on what the nature of the subject was--Dr. (Fenrock?) was one of the management guys and he was great. I always remember, when he was talking about certain things, his analogy was, "A bulldog without teeth," [laughter] about some of the managers. He quoted, really tried to sell us on the fact that, a lot of times, no matter what we see in policies, and so on, management thinks they run what's going on, but, actually, it's the labor that actually sets a lot of standards in what happens and how it's [business] run. I had a couple of life experiences that substantiated that in a big way. So, him, and I guess he's retired now, after all these years, because he was old then, but Professor Blake, I had two courses with him. His courses basically were, everybody got an assignment. One of them was in transportation, management in transportation, I forget, another one, management of something or other. Anyway, you come in--the first couple days, he'd get his roster set--everybody gets an assignment. Your job was to take that one thing, study it, write a paper on it and turn the paper in. That was your course, beyond being able to get up on a given night and do an oral presentation on your paper. Other than that, you were expected to show up for class and listen to the other students do their presentation. In-between classes, he would leave the campus, go down a block to McGovern's Tavern, have a couple of pops. [laughter] So, if you really needed to see the Professor about something, like couldn't make a class or this and that, catch him at McGovern's, buy him a drink, everything was copasetic. [laughter] You laugh and I laugh, too, I said, "This guy ain't doing nothing," but you know what? You really had to work your backside off to get a decent paper, because you had to do the research to write the paper, and then, you had to write it in a manner that it was acceptable. You couldn't just write any old thing on the paper and you had to get up and present it. So, sometimes, that may have been a lot better than sitting there and rote testing of students, like they do in a lot of classes. So, at the time, I thought, "Oh, this is an easy class," but it really wasn't. I guess the subject matter was of my liking, so [that] I didn't mind doing the studying, and so on. Of course, in the Army, man, they beat the hell out of you with these studies you have to do and get up and do briefings. Anyway, I enjoyed the campus. The only bad thing about it--no, I shouldn't say that on there, too, because I'll be in big trouble--is, of course, now, I'd been divorced for a number of years and I saw this lady walking across campus one night. She stopped to talk to me, kind of nice-looking, and we got to chatting, and so on. So, she and I have now been married for thirty years. [laughter]

SI: Did she also go to Rutgers?

RS: She went to Rutgers. We graduated on the same day, down in the gymnasium down there. Then, she went to Seton Hall and got a master's degree in public health administration. So, she had been working for the Cathedral Health Care System in Newark, at Saint Michael's, and then, Saint James'. Then, she was given the job as a VP of Ancillary Services at Saint Mary's in Orange. So, she did that, got a licensure to run nursing homes, which she never really exercised, until she retired.

SI: Did you continue to work at BASF?

RS: I worked there for fourteen years, and then, one day, they brought us all into a big room and explained to us [what was happening], because we all knew the products we made were called plasticizers and a lot of companies made them. There was about six to eight major chemical companies that made them, because we were always finding price adjustments on what we could sell it for, which ended up giving us a three-and-a-half-year wage freeze for everybody, management as well as the hourly guys. So, you worked for three years at the same rate, but the job was in Kearny, it was right across the river from Newark, which facilitated what I was going through in life at the time. So, even though it was [frozen], I just stayed with the same wage, salary, for the same period of time. At that fourteen-year period, they called us all in the room. They said that they felt they could no longer be competitive with the plasticizer, so, the decision was to shut the plant down. I remember exactly, this was in June, a few days from my birthday, and I said, "Man, this is a great birthday present." What they had already done was identify everybody in the plant, because, of course, they weren't going to immediately shutdown production, but, as they started shutting things down and retrenching, to the very last day, the very last day, all the furniture in the building's going to be gone, they said, "It's going to be bare minimum," as far as that place was concerned. It'd be just empty railroad tracks, empty loading bays, no equipment, furniture, anything in any of the buildings. They actually knocked the buildings down. They couldn't get rid of the property. Because the property had been so contaminated over the years that the cost of digging up all that dirt and cleaning it up [was too high], they just decided not to do it. So, they knocked the buildings down, which lowered the ratable that the town could charge you without the buildings. Anyway, so, they gave us all a date in which we were going to be terminated. My date was the last day the plant was going to be up in December, because I was running all the transportation. So, they would have somebody there to control everything that had to go out, how to document it and that sort of thing, but that was it. I'd be out of a job. So, I mean, obviously, any thinking person, I started writing resumes and looking at [job ads], went to a couple agencies. After about maybe three months, I started getting inquiries to come for interviews. One of the resumes I'd sent out I had sent to Mobil Chemical. I sent two. Mobil Chemical had two facilities, side-by-side, in Edison. So, I sent one to one side, because they had announced a job, and one to the other side, because they had announced a job. When they called me up, I arranged for the interviews to be on the same day, two hours apart. So, I had to go down, do that interview, come out, wait, and then, go do the other one. The one side, the guy that was interviewing me was an ex-Army Transportation officer. So, I figured I had a good chance in there; maybe, maybe not. The other side, the guy, I remember telling him, I said, "I sent the application with my resume in so long ago," I said, "I just thought it was scrapped or something." So, the guy said, "No, no," he says, "we collect them for a while, and then, we stack them up according to the date they come in." He said, "Then, I

was out for a while." He said, "So, it'd been on my desk." He said, "So, I'm just now getting around to them." He says, "You're number two in the stack." So, I had got mine in early. So, that's how I got an early, quick interview over here. So, I went in, I did the interview, went next door, did the other interview. The one with the Transportation officer guy, ex-Transportation officer guy, politely, didn't want to give me the job because they had a very heavy reliance on freight trucking, not bulk trucking. He just felt that my background, even though I had tremendous background, the freight trucking aspect of it was too thin. I couldn't argue that. The other guy, on the other side, their pitch was that they needed someone that really knew the DOT [Department of Transportation] hazardous material regulations and the international regulations. Well, those I knew, because my job at BASF, beyond just being the plant traffic guy, I had all the hazardous material responsibility and I was the captain of the Northeast Emergency Response Team for BASF. So, I had all this background in that. So, anyway, I did a second interview with a guy at their Somerset facility. I remember this as being a great interview, because the guy had me in the office there for, like, fifty-five, fifty, a little over about fifty-five minutes for an interview. I thought it was exceedingly long. This guy was shooting questions at me about hazmat, back and forth, and there was another guy sitting in the room, just sitting there. So, when this guy gets done questioning me, he gets up, goes out of the room and tells the other guy, he says, "Talk to him for a while. I'll be back." So, the other guy, who ended up being the boss for my group, he says, "I have no idea what you two were talking about," he said. [laughter] "So," he says, "what else have you done in life?" So, it was just general. So, the guy comes back in, in about ten minutes, he says, "We'd like to offer you the job. Here's what it pays," blah, blah, blah. So, he says, "Any questions?" I said, "Yes, sir." I said, "Coming from a job now where I get a month's vacation, I'd really like to maintain a month's vacation," and I told him the reasons why and he asked some questions and this and that. So, I figured, "Maybe I'm making headway." After about fifteen minutes, he says, "Well, that sounds good," he says, "but we don't negotiate vacation." I mean, why drag me on? So, anyway, I started back at two weeks' vacation and, eventually, pretty quickly, I worked my way up to a month. So, anyway, the interviews went pretty quick and I ended up in the job. I basically was the hazardous material guy for Mobil, and then, Exxon-Mobil when the companies combined. Who was it? Theodore Roosevelt, who broke up the unions and the big Standard Oil, and so on, into all these little parts. That's how Esso came into being and others, and so on. It almost reminds me of the second or third *Terminator*, where they had the silver guy. You break him apart, but they all meld back together. Well, the company came back together, [laughter] but the stock prices stayed good. [Editor's Note: Standard Oil Trust, formed by John D. Rockefeller in 1870, was broken up by the federal government in 1911 because it was a monopoly. Several companies formed from Standard Oil, such as Exxon, Mobil and Chevron. Exxon and Mobil merged in 1999 to form Exxon-Mobil.]

SI: You have been in the hazardous waste field for a long time. What have been the biggest changes over the course of your career?

RS: Well, not waste specifically?

SI: Transportation.

RS: But, transportation; waste only because certain wastes have to be treated as hazardous material shipments. I guess the regulations, how they evolved over the years--the International Water regulations used to be a series of four books. Now, it's down to two basic books. That was a big change, because it restructured how the regulations were written and how you used them. When you looked at tables to select hazardous material information, the tables were radically different, but they became more in line with the kinds of tables you found in the US Regulations. There was a lot of disconnect between what was in the US tables as far as hazmat and what was in the International Water regulations and from the International Air Reg's, because all these different regulatory bodies were looking at their world differently to some extent. Now, obviously, there's going to be certain things that are going to always be considered in every regulation, like acetone or hydrochloric acid or something like that, but, when it got down to other things, especially chemicals that were developed by companies, where they had to decide based on certain physical and chemical properties, "Was it hazardous or not?" according to certain definitions in the regulations, the definitions varied. Initially, a flammable liquid in the US was a hundred degrees Fahrenheit and down. Anything over a hundred, up to two hundred, was considered combustible. Nobody else had a combustible category, only the US. In fact, the US has still got it and nobody else has it. When you went international, a certain part of the combustible range that the US had actually became flammable, because they use a different flashpoint cutoff. So, you always had to remember all these different things and whether you're shipping domestically or internationally. US DOT allows you to use these international regs, where they differ from the US, providing everything that the US wants you to do is still properly accounted for. So, you always had big disconnects that way. I can't remember exactly what year this really started generating, but the UN had a committee that formed a subcommittee called the hazardous material or dangerous good experts for the world. It's, like, twenty-five countries send representatives to be on this committee and they study the regulatory rules for hazardous materials and, every two years, they publish a standard, which is now what we now call the model regulation. So, once they publish this, that now goes out and the information in there now downloads to the International Water regulation, the International Air regulation and the US DOT. Unfortunately, the international ones pick them up, the new stuff, immediately. DOT, there's a time lag before it becomes part-and-parcel to our regulation. So, you've got to always play that off, but at least it gives all these regulations much more harmony, because it's coming from a central source, but they all still have their little differences. Some of it's because of the mode that they're dealing with. On water, you're not worried about whether the container or jars or cans can withstand a lot of pressure differentiation, but, when it goes up in the air, because of the atmospheric differences, that's a big piece of the packaging rules you have to deal with. So, you have these variations, obviously for good reasons. Now, lately, we had another regulation called the Globally Harmonized System. The UN committee that formed these transportation experts formed another committee and these are guys that deal with the Globally Harmonized System. The rules that they look at and the standards that they look at and that they publish touch on transportation, worker right-to-know, consumer right-to-know, I mean the whole broad spectrum of materials that may have some harmful effect, in all realms, not just transportation. So, those that have impact on the transportation, now from the Globally Harmonized System, is another feed into this model regulation. So, that's a whole new realm. Where it's a problem is, like, there's a category of materials called marine pollutants. They've really changed the definition of what's considered a marine pollutant and the transport regulations have yet to pick up those same standards. They've picked it up a little bit, but not a lot and the US regulation

hasn't picked up any of it. So, it makes for an interesting time when you're trying to classify something for transportation for hazmat rules, but, if it wasn't for that, there wouldn't be jobs for people. It's not like with Ford, where they've got a good portion of robots doing what men used to do.

SI: Did you retire from them and start your own consulting business? What was the sequence?

RS: Well, after BASF, I went to Exxon-Mobil. I was there for twenty-one years, and then, I retired from them and I just started a little part-time business to do some consulting work, but, in this particular area, I'm not finding a lot of consulting activities. All the inquiries I get usually are really out West, some down South, and a great number of them are really looking for someone full-time. I don't really want to relocate or take on another full-time job at this point in time. So, basically, I've been hired out by different companies, local, to do training classes for their employees. Training is a legal, mandatory regulatory requirement. Now, if you've got guys doing any type of activity that impacts on rules and regulations, you have to train them and document the training. So, that's giving me a little chance to go out. I'm not really looking to earn money from it. The money I've earned is just to take care of whatever little expenses I have with just doing the training classes. Unfortunately, I've shown a loss for the last three years. So, it's helped me out tax-wise, but my accountant, a guy from Rutgers, [laughter] is telling me, he says, "You can't show a loss for so many years before they question it." So, I figure this year, I'd better show a little profit.

SI: You were in the Reserves for fifteen years. That would be around 1990 when you retired.

RS: Right.

SI: That was before Desert Shield. [Editor's Note: On August 2, 1990, Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, invaded neighboring Kuwait to secure its oil fields and key location on the Persian Gulf. Operation DESERT SHIELD began on August 7, 1990, when the first US forces arrived in Saudi Arabia, at the request of its leader, King Fahd, who feared an invasion by Iraq. Operation DESERT STORM, the US-led, UN-sanctioned coalition force assault on Iraqi-held territory, began on January 17, 1991, and concluded with a cease-fire negotiated on March 1, 1991.]

RS: Right, just before. In fact, just before I retired, the annual training for the unit was going to be down South and they were going to actually have some transportation companies that they had to run missions with. That was going to be the training class. One of the units was a petroleum truck company which was located at Caven Point in Jersey City. So, I went over to talk to the Commander over there and that was the most disorganized piece of "S" stuff I've ever seen in my life. The officers were unmotivated. They didn't seem to know very much. The troops wandered in when they were ready. Some of the enlisted guys were showing up well before the officers showed up. I didn't make myself very well liked anyway, because I showed up about five-thirty in the morning, well before they started, and, inappropriately, climbed the fence to their motor pool. I did a technical inspection on several pieces of their equipment, so that when the Commander came in, I had a better idea. If they're not taking care of that equipment, then, they're not doing their job during the normal drill. I found a lot of problems.

So, anyway, I read the riot act to this guy, even though I wasn't his commander. I went back and prepared a full military, by the book, by the paragraph, presentation on the mission for that summer. I mean, I had charts, I had graphs. Every officer had to sit there, they had to walk in, in the military fashion, sit down. They couldn't leave until I dismissed them. I mean, I really ran-- it was like Colin Powell calling all his underlings in. I really put a lot into it. The Commander walked out and just said, "There's stuff you talked about that we had no idea how that [worked]." So, that one presentation really impacted this guy. Anyway, I retired. So, when they went to summer [camp], they were supposed to go to summer camp with the unit, they didn't. They actually got activated and they participated in Desert Storm and went to Saudi Arabia. They actually ran fuel missions into Kuwait. So, one day, I got a call from the Assistant Division Commander of the 78th Division, which was headquartered here in New Jersey. All the units here were basically, Reserve units, under the 78th. That, of course, has been disbanded, moved now, but the guy called me up because your name stays on these old rosters, and so on. He says, the Commander, the guy, I forget his name, he says, "That guy," blah, blah, blah, "you trained his unit, although a short time, at Caven Point." I said, "Oh, yes, I remember doing that," and that's when I found out that they had actually been activated and sent to the war. He said, "That guy came back here and, as an after-action presentation to the commanding general, he mentioned where they were this day and where they were when you got done with them." He said, "If it wasn't for that, he said he would not have been able to get that unit through over there, Desert Storm, to perform the missions that they did." So, he said, "We're just calling you up to tell you that you were mentioned big time in the after-action presentation." He said, "And the Commander wants us to extend an invitation to come back to your old unit on a Sunday morning for coffee with the unit." So, it was a good experience. I always felt good when I could pass something off from my experience to someone else and they can profit by it. I mean, I got a little bit of that from some guys, not enough, from senior guys, from their experience, but the ones that did were, I found, extremely helpful. I mean, you take new guys in, you've got to [help them]. They know the theory. They went to school. They studied that. Now, you've got to give them the practical part and be able to have them transition theory to the practicality of the job, and then, that's what senior officers should do, that's what senior NCOs should do for younger charges when they come in. So, that makes you feel good, that at least something, at one point in your life, you did something right.

SI: Are there any other memories from your time in the Reserves that stand out?

RS: Well, we had some really good experiences. I was amazed at the ability of my unit to do the things we did. You go away for two weeks during every year for your annual training. We actually did live hauling missions at an exercise at Twentynine Palms, which is the desert training facility out in California, an old Marine Corps base, [the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center]. So, we had to take all of our equipment, all our people, leave here and get out to Twentynine Palms, which meant shipping stuff by vessel, picking it up at the port, convoying up, out to the desert, setting up a resupply run with the truck companies that were assigned to you. We did absolutely [fine]. I was amazed how well that all came off. I mean, you always have little *faux pas* here and there. The only big thing that came out of that mission was that we were blowing a lot of tires on the trucks, because a lot of the areas where they were having guys parachute in and guys going out for their part of the training mission were old impact ranges for artillery. So, you had all these big hunks of metal out there. So, when trucks go out, they were

tearing up tires. The resupply depot was 150 miles from where we were. So, you send ten trucks out to the resupply depot to pick up whatever items we had to pick up, whatever was on the manifest. It got to a point where we taking either one whole truck or half a truck just to put new tires on it to come back to replace the ones we're tearing up. So, when we had to do a briefing for some of the muckety-mucks who wrote the training exercise, when it came to my portion of the presentation, I said, "Everything went well," blah, blah, blah, "it's just that we experienced, collectively, this amount of cargo capability was decreased because of all these tires we had to keep picking up and that it would've been better if the drop zones could've been somewhere else, other than the old impact area." The Commander that we were briefing to looked at me and said, "That was my plan." So, I felt about that, about a half-inch tall at that point, [laughter] but he was still wrong, as far as I'm concerned, because not only that, you could've easily injured guys landing on different pieces of metal out there. Anyway, we did that. One year, we actually packed a whole unit up and went to Korea for two weeks.

SI: Wow.

RS: And did a joint training exercise with the Korean Army and the American Army that was there full-time. They even assigned me a car company, which I thought the Army had gotten rid of all their car companies. These are guys that go around and you assign them to go to an office building to pick up some muckety-muck and drive them here and there, but I had a car company. They were from Galax, Virginia, I always remember it because, if you take Route 81, going down to North Carolina, when you get off into the mountain ranges, beyond, south of Charlottesville, up in the mountain, (Galax) a little, small town sitting out there. [laughter] So, when I travel South, I always look off to the mountains, "Yes, there it is" ok. We did training exercises down at Fort Benning. We went to Bragg one year. We did an actual full mobilization exercise one year, where it's just like a war came and they activated all the units. You had to pack up everything according to your plans and move to your mobilization station. Ours was in Pennsylvania, at Fort Indiantown Gap. We had a supply unit that was also coming out of Camden that was supposed to come out there. They did a good job, except that they had ordered two lowboys to come in and take their forklifts. They had six-thousand-pound what's called rough-terrain forklifts. These are huge forklifts, high silhouettes, not like the things you see in warehouses. These are really big ones. So, you order the lowboys to bring them in; that way, you could clear all your overheads. Well, one showed up, one didn't. So, the lieutenant that was in charge of that section said, "I've got to get out there, mission first." So, they lifted this thing up and put it on a regular flatbed, so [that] the silhouette's much higher. Now, he should've done two things--the cage on the top, take it off, knock out about fifty percent of the air in the tires, lowers the profile down, right--forgot all that, loaded it up, shackled it down, off they went; out on 295 somewhere and the driver hears, "Crunch." He looks back, the whole top of the forklift ripped off on the bridge abutment. So, when they showed up to Fort Indiantown Gap, that was more of a transportation [issue], but a supply function, now, to replace this thing and repair it. So, I sent my supply officer over to take care of that with the company. At the time, he was in charge of the Internal Affairs Department for the Camden Police Department. That was his full-time job. So, he goes in, he reads the riot act to this lieutenant and how much he's going to have to pay to fix this thing out of his personal pocket, blah, blah, blah. He actually brought the guy to tears. [laughter] Then, he started smiling, he said, "No, don't worry about it. We'll get it fixed." [laughter] Now, so, he was trying to impress upon him, "You did a good thing by

figuring out you've got to still fulfill the mission, but, then, you have to figure out, 'Are there situations that are things I have to do differently to do it?'" So, that was interesting, but, so, those are the kind of things we did during our annual training. I took the whole battalion to the field, usually going out to bivouac at Fort Dix, once a quarter. Division standard was twice a year, we went once a quarter, because I felt the guys needed that type of training. You're not sitting in an office all the time. So, that was my Reserve career.

SI: Did you have any issues in terms of getting back to civilian life, either facing prejudice from people about having served in Vietnam or having been in the service? I hear that from a lot of veterans. Some of them do not bring up the fact that they were in the service, although it seems like, with your job, that would have been a selling point.

RS: Yes, I mean, I always put it down. I was forthcoming with it, but I was also forthcoming with my experiences, because I'm working in transportation and that involves supply as well as just pure transportation. I knew hazmat rules. So, whether I was in a warehouse or out in an active chemical plant, a lot of it had to do with your management style and how you managed. Like, in the warehouse, I walked down an aisle, as the supervisor, I'm not supposed to lift a box. If I see a box sitting in the aisleway and I pick it up, union guys are over there saying I'm knocking a guy off a job, right. So, I'd pick the box up and put it on the shelf. A guy says, "Hey, you're not allowed to pick up the box." I said, "That was a safety hazard, overrides you." There were times where I got on the forklift and actually loaded a truck. Of course, then, the shop steward and everybody and their brother was over there waiting for me to get done, so [that] they could put in a complaint, because the guy I knocked off, he had to stand around there. I said, "Two things--one, he's still getting his pay and he's doing nothing for it." I said, "It's almost the same as putting him on the forklift, because where most of you guys are taking thirty-five minutes on average to load," I keep records on everything.

SI: Yes.

RS: "Thirty-five minutes to load a truck, he's taking forty-five to fifty. So, over X number of trucks a week, he's costing me so many trucks. [laughter] I just wanted to see if there was anything wrong with his truck, number one, and, number two, since I don't do it all the time, I wanted to see what a person who doesn't routinely do it, how long it takes." I said, "I match pretty well what the rest of these guys are doing," "So, we have a problem with this guy and he's going to need more training or he's going to have to take a different job in this facility." Well, his time got down, he got his pay and there were no more complaints from the union, but that's the way you've got to be sometimes. That was my management style. It seems to have worked. It seems that they respected my point of view and I tried to respect theirs. So, in future times when I had to go to the [union], I'd go right to the shop steward and say, "Look, this is an unusual situation. I've got to do this, this and this. It's not normal, but I already cleared it with the safety manager." He looked at me, said, "All right, but I want one of my guys there to observe." "No problem, bring him in." They didn't give me a hard time about a lot of stuff. So, you've got to be fair, you've got to be firm. You work for the company, but you've also got to look out for the guys and you've also got to look out--they had standards and recordkeeping, all that stuff helps you analyze that. So, that's the way I tended to work.

SI: Did you have any long-term effects from your time in the service, specifically Vietnam, like Agent Orange exposure or nightmares, that sort of thing? [Editor's Note: Agent Orange, an equal mix of the chemicals 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D, was used extensively in Vietnam as a defoliant between 1962 and 1971. Under Operation RANCH HAND, US Air Force C-123s dispersed the majority of Agent Orange deployed in-country. It has been linked to a number of health problems among those exposed, including heart defects, cancers and blood disorders.]

RS: Agent Orange is something I remember very distinctly, because, while you could never hear the aircraft spraying, you would feel it. You'd feel, like, a mist hitting your arm. Then, you look at your arm and there are little blotches all over your arm and your hands and it'd be on your face. If you weren't quick enough to get a wet rag and wipe around your mouth, you got this real bitter taste in your mouth from the Agent Orange. So, I remember lots of exposures to that because of all the spraying that was going on. Obviously, the VA only had one or two items on their list that they attributed to exposure to Agent Orange, but, now, it's much greater. Over the years, they've really added to the list, prostate cancer being one of them. I was so concerned about that and I take an annual physical, so, I always make sure my prostate gets checked. So, I never had prostate cancer, but I got colon cancer, which was not one of them. Then, like now, I'm being treated for bladder cancer, which is not one of them. I told my wife, I said, "Agent Orange did everything to all these veterans, except for me. [laughter] I get everything else, except for what's accountable for it." I've had a lot of exposure to it, but, at this time, nothing has manifested itself physically that I can go back to the VA on; as far as nightmares, no, not really. When I first came home from Vietnam, I was living in East Orange. The street I was on was next to the Parkway. The Parkway had these wooden barriers in the center. So, occasionally, someone would run into one of those barriers and that big board, that wood, it would snap with a big crack, "Pow." Instinctively, I rolled out of bed onto the floor. I've done that a couple of times. You hear a crack or a noise, it's like gunfire, wake you up in the middle of the night, kind of jumped a few times when you hear backfire in the street, but, after about six, seven months, that just kind of went away. I do get a picture in my head of a guy burning up in a helicopter that happened, a crash that happened right in front of me, only because I really made an effort to try to break the window to get the guy out and I just couldn't. The flames were too big, and so on, and I saw this guy. I could see him when he was burning. It was almost like burning one of those wicks they used to give you at the drive-in movies. You're probably too young for that, a little mosquito thing, was a curly thing you put on your dashboard, a little stand, and it curled back and forth as it burned. You could just see his body--it just reminded me of that when he was burning. So, every once in a while, I get a vision of that, but nothing to the effect that it's impacted my ability to function normally. I mean, I've had guys come to me at different veterans' gatherings and association meetings, and so on, and advise me to go to Newark or go to this place and ask for this guy or that guy, because they do the PTSD testing. I just don't think, while, I mean, I have memories, oh, I've got memories of my grandmother and my grandfather, too, and I have memories of car accidents I've seen, but nothing to the point that it's pushed me to some kind of emotional imbalance, at least the way I feel. Now, I may be the last person to decide whether I'm well or not, [laughter] like a lawyer defending themselves or a doctor doing his own diagnosis. If I felt that there were issues, certainly, I'd avail myself of that, but I just don't see that.

SI: You mentioned you were a Scout leader. Did you continue in the Scouting movement?

RS: No. I had wished my son wanted to be in the Scouts more. After he got near the end of his Cub Scouting career, he just, all of a sudden, really had no interest in it. I will help and encourage the kid as much as you can, but I won't push him into things that they don't want to go into. So, when he started showing interest in other things, I just let his career in Scouting end at the end of Cub Scouts. Now, there was six boys and one girl in my family group and all of us were in Scouting, including my sister. My mother was a highly active part of it. She was a den mother. She was my first den mother and my brother and my brother after him and my brother after him. [laughter] So, we all had the same den mother. Of course, all the kids in our neighborhood that were in the Scouts who were in our den all came to our house for den meetings, as small as the house was. In scouting, I went to Life [Rank], which was right below being an Eagle. My brother next to me became an Eagle Scout. Two of my other brothers became Star, which was one more rank down, and that was it. I had two younger brothers. The youngest of the boys worked with a Scout troop in the church that they go to now. My youngest brother was big in it, but, when he left that church, he just stopped being a Scout leader, but my other brother's still active in it, at the same church. They now have, I want to say twenty-nine or thirty-two, something like that, kids at that one Scout troop who've become Eagle Scouts. They really work a lot with those kids. So, being that our VFW post is in the same town, my brother always calls me when he's got a kid or a couple kids getting their Eagle badges, and so on, because they have a big ceremony for that. Usually, the VFW has a real nice embossed certificate that you can buy from their VFW store and they get them embossed with the kid's name on them. So, we usually get one for any kid that makes Eagle Scout. We give them that with maybe a twenty-five-dollar gift certificate. They also receive from other people other recognition and rewards. The last couple of boys who went through, Obama, the Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Education, HUD, several secretaries, all send these kids letters, who are making Eagle Scout. Then, other organizations are giving them things. So, they get a lot of recognition, but I like to point out that if you take all the kids that were in Scouts from the time we had Scouting in this country, which is like 1910, 1908 or whatever, to today, you're talking millions and millions and millions of kids and less than one percent of those ever make Eagle Scout. Yes, it's amazing. I also point out, as scared as a soldier can be, he can go out being scared but perform one heroic act, he'll get a medal. I said, "You guys have to earn twenty-five or thirty merit badges. It means you have to go out and do a program with each and every thing to earn that badge and you've got to earn so many of those just to make this Eagle Scout." I said, "So, sometimes, what you do is a lot more than what one guy does on one day on one event that may last less than an hour to earn a medal of some valor." In fact, we just got one for one of our VFW members. He was given paperwork for a Bronze Star with a V-device for Valor for one day--he was a medic--for one day's operation of trying to go in the bunkers that got shelled by the Chinese and collapsed on guys. He was in there helping dig them out and performing first aid at the same time while they were still taking shells, but, anyway, I guess heroics come in all different kinds. I don't mean to diminish the soldiers' activities at all. I'm just pointing out, sometimes, there are things that people do that garner a lot more work and a lot more effort than what you may do to get a medal for valor.

SI: You have been pretty active in veterans' groups.

RS: I belong to the New York-New Jersey Chapter of the First Cavalry Association. I'm also a life member of the VFW, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Then, while I don't belong, I make contributions to the Vietnam Veterans of America, the USO and the Army Emergency Relief. I like the good works that they do, and so, I try to do that year in, year out. The remnants of this still exists, but it is much different in a lot of areas. A lot of it has to do with geography, but, after World War II, when they started really coming on with the VFW posts in different towns, you had--a lot of towns, like East Orange was a very mixed town between white and black, but after the war, many of the young whites left town and blacks returned. So, the post that was developed there really was basically all black veterans that were in that post. There's two posts I'm aware of in Newark. One is predominantly white, one is predominantly black. There's a lot of blacks who would not join any of these after World War II, because their experience was that bad. I worked with a guy who was an engineer and helped build runways in England during the war. He said, he says--the words he used, I won't repeat. They gave him a rifle, but they never gave him any ammunition. So, what good was the rifle? He says, when the Germans, the few times they came over and they were strafing their runways, he said, "The best I could do is put the blade of the dozer up and hide under it." He said, "I was treated poorly. I was treated badly in the service." He said, "When I got out, why would I join an organization that tends to have some of the same things going on as far as the hierarchy's concerned and the way people treat each other?" I've heard a lot of World War II blacks say that, but my grandfather, who was a World War I vet, really was the one that got the charter for the post in East Orange. Of course, my dad and others, his sons who were in the war, they all joined it. Now, they didn't have money to build a post home, so, they basically worked out of people's houses or a couple of guys owned stores, so, they met at the store or worked out of the store. It was that patriotism that I saw by their participation, my dad and my grandfather, balanced against many of the guys I talked to who had this extreme negative view and the fact that some of these posts would not allow black veterans in. So, where they had a desire to join, they were not allowed in. So, that was another sticking point. So, I said to myself--after Vietnam, I didn't regularly join any of them--I said, "There's enough guys that [do that]." It's like voting. There's enough people in the past that pushed, fought and died so that everybody has equal opportunity to vote that meets the basic citizenship in this country that you should exercise that right. I said, "As a veteran, I guess I should exercise the right to participate in some of these organizations." I did not find the pushback that some of the people I've personally talked to found after World War II when they decided to join. Of course, there may've been others that maybe had a desire that didn't because they talked to these same people and were turned off about it. So, I joined and, like now, we just had a First Cavalry chapter meeting, among the group that was there, there were two Hispanics and two blacks, okay, among the whole group. Occasionally, there may be three or four blacks. So, I'm glad to see more participation in it. The preponderance of veterans' organizations are still membered by white veterans, and not female veterans. You're starting to see more and more female veterans, which is good. So, I don't encourage anybody to join a veterans' group, but I will let them know that it's there and what the standards of the group are. If you so desire to join, I will help get you get a membership, but that's about the extent of it. I think it's good for everybody to see everybody who participated in the military, because you get a better perspective of it. I worked with a lady who basically told me, and others who were standing there, that no blacks ever were in the Army or fought in World War II. I asked her, "How does she know this?" Because her father was in the Army, or father-in-law was in the Army, he fought in Italy, I think it was. Of course, he was on a segregated base. Well, that's all they had

then. They didn't train together. So, he may not have ever seen a black soldier. Most of the time, they went and, especially if you were a combat type of person, you probably didn't see other black [soldiers], because not many of them were not in front line combat. Those who were combat trained, many times, were given other jobs to do instead, as opposed to combat. My grandfather was combat trained, infantry, and, when he got to France, they took their rifles from them and marched them down to the pier. They wanted them to be stevedores, unload the ships. I remember, the guys that had carpentry skills, they had them building facilities for the white soldiers when they came over, so [that] they'd have housing, barracks, and so on. The only reason he ended up actually going into combat and his unit having such a great record [was] because the French needed bodies. The French had been in the war a lot longer than the Americans and they'd lost a lot of people. So, they needed bodies. So, reluctantly, I say, General Pershing allowed some of the units to go under French command, because he didn't want them anyway. [laughter] A guy like me has to balance all that into the day's environment. I like to be able to mention things without offending people, but, sometimes, people are quite offended because they don't want to be tagged with being racist or having ancestral racism in their family, like Ben Affleck did with this recent thing he was in [the PBS TV show *Finding Your Roots*]. Life in our history is what it is. I want the truth; I don't want cover up. So, whatever the truth is, that's what should come out, but we should balance that in light of the day's times. I saw a guy, a kid, a soldier, he was in the Ninth Cavalry. I said, "Oh, Buffalo Soldier." He looked at me and I said, "You know the history of the Ninth Cavalry?" He looks at me. I said, "The first black cavalry, all-black cavalry, was the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry on the Western Plains." I said, "Membership for whites was strictly left to being officers in those units." I said, "Nowadays, they're just the same as any other unit, you see, but that's their history, be proud of it, of what it is."

SI: Yes.

RS: It's tough. Now, one of the guys that comes to the First Cavalry chapter is a World War II veteran of the First Cavalry. He was in when they actually had the horses. So, I love this guy, man, we talk, we talk and talk, because, to me, that was the old cavalry you pictured in your head when you grew up, not helicopters and trucks and tanks and stuff. I always tease him. I said, "Jesus, you've got more hair on your head than I got." [laughter] He's a spry-looking little guy, but it's that [kind of camaraderie]. Now, here I am, conversing with and having a fun, good time with a guy who's right from the old horse cavalry, who was in the Army when it was segregated. So, he didn't really see any blacks in his training. Here, the two of us are standing there talking like we're long-lost buddies when we're at the chapter meeting. His wife always looks for me, because she likes to make sure I stay on the straight and narrow. [laughter] So, that's the kind of bridging; I say our history is what it is, but we need to take that in light of the day's times, but don't shy away from what it was. So, for me, that's been a big benefit in being in some of these organizations, veterans' organizations.

SI: Great. Thank you very much, I appreciate all your time over these two sessions.

RS: Okay.

SI: Thank you for your service.

RS: Okay.

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